A Brief History of Islam in Europe

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CHAPTER FOUR

Powerful Europe
(1700–1950 CE)
I. Setting the Stage

The period between 1700 and 1950 witnessed the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the formal ending of this last Muslim stronghold in Europe in 1923. Communities of Muslims continued to live in the former Ottoman provinces in Europe and beyond, however. The same European powers that had actively engaged in bringing the Ottoman Empire down had also expanded their own territories beyond Europe, and through these colonial projects acquired new subjects, many of whom were Muslims. So while the European continent for the first time was devoid of Muslim rulers and the Muslim population in Europe had reached an all-time low through migration and killings during the second half of the nineteenth century, European powers ruled foreign lands with vast Muslim populations.

European military, economic and political prowess, together with the successes of European imperialism all added up to a position of superiority and condescension vis-à-vis Islam and Muslims. At the same time, two new concepts gained popularity that were to prove a powerful source of dissent and even revolt among the Muslim communities both inside and outside Europe: nationalism and minorities. In the case of the Ottoman Empire, they played an important role in inciting non-Muslim communities to rebel against their Muslim overlords. The resulting break-up of the centuries-old Ottoman social, political and legal structures that were based on religion was to be very violent and brutal, and the volatile combination of ethnic, national and religious identities made the conflicts all the more complex.

1. Colonialism and Imperialism

The eighteenth century was the heyday of European colonialism: Spain, France, England, and the Dutch Republic established chains of trading posts on the shores of the American, Asian and African continents. Colonialism evolved during the nineteenth century into imperialism when the European countries also imposed their rule on these territories and their hinterlands and, as a final step, incorporated these realms into their sovereign domains. Consequently, the states with the largest Muslim populations in the world were not the Ottoman Empire or Iran, but the Netherlands (which ruled the Indonesian archipelago) and Great Britain (which ruled what are now India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). The nineteenth century witnessed the combination of exploration of unknown territories (for profit, but often also as part of
genuine scientific interest) and frantic competition among the imperialist states to expand their empires with these territories outside Europe.

Muslim lands and peoples were completely overtaken by this European hunger for conquest and knowledge. The three great Muslim empires at the time were the Ottomans in the Mediterranean and Middle East, the Safavids in Iran and the Moghuls in what is now Pakistan and northern India. They could not withstand the military prowess of the Europeans – in particular the British, Dutch, French and Russians – and had to succumb, as the smaller Muslim sultanates and emirates in other parts of the world had already done. Resistance to the European powers was scanty and unity among Muslims almost entirely lacking. Even the Ottoman sultan, who was officially the caliph and hence the sole spiritual leader of all Muslims, did not function as a rallying point of resistance to European imperialism, nor did he act as such – perhaps because the Ottoman Empire was itself an imperialist power.

Between 1700 and 1950 CE Europeans did not speak of the Islamic world or Muslims, as is common nowadays, but mostly referred to the generic terms ‘Orient’ and ‘Mohammedans’. The term Near Orient was often reserved for the region stretching from Morocco to Iran, while the ‘Far Orient’ referred exclusively to the region of East Asia. This terminology reflects the worldview of the nineteenth century European of a division between the civilized Christian West and the exotic but backward East. By the early twentieth century nearly all territories in the Orient inhabited by Muslims were either subjected to European rule or made part of an alliance that was dominated by the European partner.

Interestingly, the imperial endeavours of the European nations did not radiate outward, but rather from the outside inward. The first colonies were in far away places, and the territories close to Europe became of interest only at a later stage. By the time Napoleon made the first inroad of European imperialism into the Arab Mediterranean region by invading Egypt in 1798 CE, the Dutch had already established themselves in Indonesia and the British in India. Napoleon’s military action has attained mythological properties in European history, but from a military and imperialistic point of view it was an utter disaster [Napoleon eventually abandoned his disease-ridden army in Egypt to return to France and embark on the conquest of Europe]. It took another century before France and England acquired an imperialistic taste for North Africa and the Middle East: France because it considered North Africa part of its backyard and realized that it was one of the last territories left to secure during the late nineteenth century colonial scramble for land; England because the Middle East – especially after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 CE – was considered important in protecting its lifeline to British India. Oil, which was found
at the time in Iran and in the Caspian Sea, became of importance only in the early twentieth century, especially when the British navy in 1910 CE switched from coal to oil (the Arab Gulf oilfields were discovered in the late 1930s and became of geo-strategic importance after the Second World War).

The period under discussion here, from 1700 to 1950, sets our topic of ‘Islam in Europe’ in a peculiar light, because almost all territories in the world inhabited by Muslims became part of European colonial domains. But, apart from the Ottoman Empire, none of these territories were located in Europe. And Europeans in this period encountered more Muslims than in the previous centuries, and Islam was never studied as much now as in the preceding epochs, but Islam and Muslims had never been so far removed from the European continent as in this period. With the gradual loss by the Ottoman Empire of its domains in the Balkans, the early twentieth century was the first period in European history since the advent of Islam in which no Muslim power had a foothold on that continent, and so few Muslims resided there. By the early twentieth century, Muslims and Islam were therefore no longer an issue of proximate danger, or of neighbourly relations, but had become the exclusive domain of colonial and foreign politics.

2. The Demise of the Ottoman Empire

The demise of the Ottoman Empire set in with the turn of the eighteenth century, and was reflected in a collapse of its military power, economic prosperity and social order.

Militarily, the Empire never recovered from its defeat at the walls of Vienna in 1683 CE, and it was the Empire’s luck that the Habsburgs did not press their advantage to the full but settled for peace. The resulting Ottoman-Habsburg treaty of Karlowitz in 1699 CE marked a turning point. From then on, any battle fought by the Ottomans – mostly against the Habsburg Empire and tsarist Russia – would cause them only to lose territory, and other European powers like Prussia, France and Great Britain quickly moved in to share the spoils and to tip the balance in their favour. The Ottomans tried to recover, but the eradication of the insubordinate Janissaries in 1826 CE and a modernizing overhaul of its army in the late nineteenth century with the help of German and French instructors, came too late and was of little avail. The shortcomings of the military showed not only in the loss of territory, but also in the inability to maintain internal order. The uprisings of the nineteenth century in the Balkans could not be stemmed, resulting in an internal fragmentation of the Empire.
The economic situation was also worsening in this period, for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, the Empire had no industries and was not a trading nation, but relied almost entirely on its domestic agriculture. For its import and export it depended on its Armenian, Greek and Jewish inhabitants, but even they hardly moved outside the Ottoman realm. The transport of goods from and into the Empire was therefore dominated by European merchants who became increasingly intrusive, as we will see below. The Ottoman lack of interest in (and even disdain for) trade also made the Empire literally miss the boat in a rapidly developing global economy. By the early nineteenth century, the Empire was debt-ridden and engulfed in a major financial crisis. Its solutions were short-sighted and insufficient to solve the problems the Empire was facing: the issuance of promissory notes to raise cash added to inflation, and taking out foreign loans to pay off debts increased both the national debt and dependence on foreign powers.

And finally, the social order collapsed. This is perhaps the most complicated development of this period because a number of factors interacted. One was the breakdown of the millet system. This special religious system of the Ottoman Empire that had successfully existed for centuries had become dysfunctional. Another factor was the declining fealty of Ottoman landlords and governors in the provinces to the rulers in the far-away Porte. These two factors merged with the new sentiment of the nineteenth century, namely nationalism, and this proved a volatile cocktail that created series of uprisings by Ottoman subjects. And to complicate matters, Russia, Austria, France, England and other foreign powers exploited these uprisings to pursue their own interests vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire.

These military, economic and social developments had their impact on the presence of Muslims and Muslim rule in the south-eastern part of the European continent, which became known as the Balkans. Ottoman rule rapidly receded from this region, its European provinces becoming independent or acquired by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The wars and many insurgencies in the Balkan region during the nineteenth century led to an unprecedented flow of migrants, settlers, refugees and forced expulsions of communities of all nationalities, ethnicities and religions, causing a dramatic shift in population composition in the Balkans. In 1923 CE, the territory of the Ottoman Empire on continental Europe was reduced to the furthest south-eastern tip of the continent, round the city of Edirne.

The Ottoman Empire finally left the European stage with one last and dramatic action: it entered the First World War by choosing to side with the German axis. The choice would prove disastrous, but was not illogical at the time. The Allied axis of Great Britain, France and Russia represented everything that the Ottomans
had come to resent as European imperialism in the past century. The Prussian and German empires, on the other hand, were much admired by the Ottomans for their organizational and military skills (and probably also for the manner in which these empires defied the Ottoman arch-enemy, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy). In its modernization efforts during the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had maintained close relations with them, and Prussian military advisors had come to restructure and train the Ottoman army according to the newest techniques.

The German defeat in 1918 CE signalled the final destruction of the Ottoman Empire by the victors in the Versailles talks of 1919–1920. The remnants of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East were parcelled out among the French and English, and discussion was under way on what to do with the Ottoman rump state in Anatolia (present day Turkey). The Greeks, however, were not willing to wait for the outcome of these protracted negotiations and decided to put their idea of a Greater Greece (known as the Megali Idea) into practice: Greek forces invaded the western Turkish shores in 1919 and moved inland to repossess those areas that were ostensibly part of the historical Greek heritage. They were finally repelled in 1922 CE by the Turkish nationalist army under Ataturk. In 1923 CE, the Ottoman Empire officially ended and was replaced by the Republic of Turkey. A year later, the last remnant of this last Islamic Empire was cleared away with the abolition of the caliphate.
II. Physical Islam

1. Living with the Unbeliever

Estimates of the population of the Ottoman provinces in Europe during the eighteenth century are not available, but at the outset of the nineteenth century these provinces held the major part of the population of the entire Empire with about 10 million people, of whom approximately one third were Muslim and two thirds non-Muslim.\(^1\) With the increasing territorial losses during the nineteenth century, compounded by the relocation of Muslim refugees into the shrinking Ottoman territory, the number of Muslims in Europe rapidly declined, but the percentage of Muslims in the remaining Ottoman provinces gradually rose to 48 per cent by the end of the century.\(^2\)

These estimates, however, give only an impression of the population composition within the entire Ottoman Empire. We, on the other hand, are interested in the Empire’s provinces in Europe. These figures are hard to come by, but one estimate is that the Muslim population in the Balkans had reduced from 2.3 million in 1911 CE to an estimated 1 million in 1923 CE, predominantly living in Bosnia, Bulgaria and Albania (the last being the only Muslim-majority country in the region and in the whole of Europe, for that matter).\(^3\) The one place that during these decades of religious and ethnic turmoil remained a place of continued Muslim-Christian coexistence was Istanbul: during the entire nineteenth century its population remained, on average, half Muslim and half non-Muslim, and only by 1914 CE was the number of non-Muslims slightly reduced.\(^4\)

What was it, then, that caused this sudden and violent break-up of the Ottoman society that had lived in relative harmony for centuries? As mentioned, the causes were a combination of loss of power by the Porte, economic crises and changes, a dysfunctional millet system, declining fealty of local lords, emerging nationalism and the increasing influence of foreign powers. We will discuss these factors in more detail below.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the social order of Ottoman society consisted of a legal and political classification of the population based on religion (the millet system), while an informal classification existed on the basis of one's social-economic situation. We have also seen that the Muslims primarily inhabited the urban areas of the European provinces of the Empire. Muslims and non-Muslims
often lived separately, but not segregated. The often held view of “Ottoman subjects living in sharply divided, mutually impenetrable, religious communities called millets ... is incorrect.”

But with the beginning of the eighteenth century we can discern the developments that were later identified as factors contributing to the fracturing of the social order. One of these developments was the emergence of a political autonomy in the provinces. Muslim landlords started to act more independently, their loyalty shifting from the Porte in Istanbul to their own lands in the remote places of the Empire. These landlords were of two kinds: descendants of officials who were appointed by the Porte and over time had become rooted in the area, and families of local notables whose status and power had been recognized by the Ottoman Porte, as was the case in Bosnia. Both kinds of local rulers were usually Muslim by religion, but not always Turkish by ethnicity. By the end of the eighteenth century, the central state had started to re-establish its power over these local elites and to claim its right to collect taxes directly from them, but after strong opposition had to settle for a compromise: the local notables recognized the political supremacy of the Porte but retained substantial power and wealth.

The local, mostly Christian, population in the European provinces was also changing during this period, showing signs of a gradually emerging civil society. The middle class, in particular merchants and craftsmen, organized themselves into guilds. Empowerment of these guilds and organizations came from an unexpected source: the Janissaries. The boy levy had been abolished in 1703 CE and the ban on soldiers marrying had not been enforced for a while, so that this elite infantry had become hereditary. Moreover, the lack of annual campaigns meant that the Janissaries found other sources of income. Since their garrisons were in the towns, they became part of urban economic life, either as mafia-style chieftains or as members of the business community. They maintained their position of political power, enabling them to make and unmake rulers. In that capacity they became the new urban elite that acted as the voice and the sword of the local population, often defending it against local rulers. The power of the Janissaries became such, however, that in 1826 CE the sultan thought it necessary to have them annihilated. One of the results of the removal of the Janissaries from Ottoman society was that with them also disappeared the larger part of the Muslim merchant elite that had monopolized commerce, resulting in a new phase of economic liberalism from which the emerging non-Muslim business elite in particular profited.

The non-Muslim merchant class was by then already profiting from economic change that created new wealth and possibilities and this, in turn, spurred on the
non-Muslims’ social mobility that was increasingly defined by wealth rather than social origins. This merchant class expanded its already existing commercial contacts with European countries, importing not only Western commercial interests but also Western ideas of liberty, equality and political representation. These ideas were received with apprehension by the Muslims, however, since they were considered a threat to the traditional social order wherein non-Muslims were supposed to know their place. The response was similar to those of earlier times: a barrage of old regulations on behavioural and dress codes was being re-invoked to restore the old order, including the prohibition on non-Muslim merchants wearing fur or yellow shoes. These were local initiatives: when the sultan in 1799 CE issued a liberal decree permitting Christians to carry arms, including the yatagan, the long, curved traditional Turkish knife, the Muslim population protested; in particular the Janissaries, who had always exhibited brutal behaviour towards local peasants, were now faced with the possibility of armed opposition from Christian peasants. Surprisingly, these peasants received support from their Muslim landlords who resented the Janissaries’ ruthlessness as undermining the landlords’ authority as well as their estates’ income. Rather than caving in to mounting opposition among the Muslim population of the Empire against the rules abolishing the discrimination of non-Muslims, the sultan pressed ahead with his equality programme. In 1829 CE, the sultan overnight abolished all laws on dress codes, but also prohibited all turbans and robes of honour worn by Muslims and imposed a uniform – the fez and frock coat – for all state officials. In doing so, the sultan reversed a centuries-old practice of using clothing regulations to create or maintain social differences, and replaced it with visual uniformity.

We will discuss the effects of this revolutionary move by the sultan against the wishes of most of his Muslim subjects in more detail below, but must now continue with our discussion of the factors that were at the root of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. In addition to the military, social and economic factors mentioned above, there was also the novel phenomenon of the local population of the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire increasingly asserting itself in terms of religious and ethnic identity. This may sound self-evident in a society that was already structured on the basis of millets dividing Ottoman society into the four religious communities of Muslims, Orthodox, Jews and Armenians. Two of these communities, however, the Muslim and the Orthodox, started to fracture from within along ethnic and linguistic fault lines. This situation demands a closer look into these ethnic, religious and linguistic differences to understand the complexity of the conflicts that were to erupt in the nineteenth century between – and within! – the privileged minority of
Muslims and the second-class majority of non-Muslims, who were predominantly Orthodox Christians.13

The Muslim millet included several ethnic and linguistic communities like Turks, who originated from Anatolia, and those who identified themselves as indigenous Muslims from the European provinces, such as Albanians, Bosniaks and Pomaks (Bulgarian speakers), but also small minorities of Muslim Greeks and even Muslim Jews (who identified ethnically as Jews but religiously as Muslims). Many of the Greeks on Crete were Muslims, for instance, as was a distinct group of Jews in Saloniki.14 As such they belonged to the Muslim millet, although it depended on the local context whether their religious affiliation was more determining than their ethnic, or vice versa. By the same token, many Albanians, Bosnians and Bulgarians belonged to one of the Christian millets, in particular the Orthodox. We must therefore realize that religion and ethnicity were not always conflated.

Ethnic and linguistic commonalities often provided sources of cohesion that were as strong as, if not stronger than, religious commonalities, since most ethnic communities maintained and increasingly cherished their own specificities.15 The Greeks, for instance, were a seafaring nation, dominating Ottoman trade as private entrepreneurs and comprising most of the Ottoman merchant and military navy personnel. Many tradesmen knew several languages, and as a community they were probably also the best-educated of Ottoman subjects, with Greek schools and books proliferating across the Ottoman Empire. The Serbs, on the other hand, were mostly peasants and relatively poor, but cherished a strongly celebrated cultural heritage. Other prominent communities in the Ottoman Balkans were those of the Albanians and Jews. Most Albanians were Muslim, and since they had been the main target of the boy levy many Albanians were part of the Ottoman establishment. The majority of Jews in the Empire were descendants of the Sephardim who had fled fifteenth-century Spain. They spoke their own language, Ladino, and remained aloof from the other millets. Many were deported to remote areas in the Empire to stimulate the local economy. A true ‘Jewish’ town was Saloniki (later Thessaloniki) where the Jews had for centuries constituted a majority, and formed the centre of an economic hub dominated by Jewish trade in the region.16

We are, therefore, looking at communities that were not clearly divided into Muslims and non-Muslims, since these communities themselves were fractured into ethnic and linguistic communities. To add to this complex situation, we must now introduce the foreigners and the role they played in the Ottoman Empire.
2. The Combustible Mix of Capitulations, Millets and Nationalism

In its contacts with non-Muslims, the Ottoman Empire made use of two different systems: the so-called capitulations to deal with foreigners, on the one hand, and the millets to deal with non-Muslim Ottoman subjects, on the other hand. To a modern observer, the two systems may seem entirely different. With regard to the capitulations, their subject-matter was foreign nationals, their goal was to grant privileges connected to commerce and the contracting parties were the Ottoman and foreign states. The millet system, on the other hand, had the Ottoman national as its subject; its goal was to establish a social–legal status and the contracting parties were the Ottoman state and its indigenous communities. More importantly, the determining factor identifying the parties in the case of the capitulations was nationality, while in the millet system it was religion.

From an Ottoman perspective, however, the two systems were merely two sides of the same coin. Both provided institutional means for dealing with non-Muslims, as they were adaptations of the system developed by Islamic law: the dhimmi status for non-Muslims residing within the realm of Islam (which allowed religious freedom and a restricted form of autonomy, but a second-class legal and social status) and the so-called musta’min status for non-Muslim outsiders who were visiting the realm of Islam (granting them temporary entry and a status of relative immunity). In both systems the non-Muslim was assumed to belong to another community or ‘nation’, whether this was indigenous (the Greek subjects of the Ottoman Empire were referred to as ‘Rum’ or Romans, derived from the Eastern Roman empire) or foreign (Western Europeans were often referred to as ‘Franks’).

From this perspective, it was not uncommon for foreign states to intervene on behalf of religious communities in other states. Already in the sixteenth century, the Ottomans had made diplomatic interventions in Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to protest – sometimes successfully – against alleged ill treatment of the Muslim minorities in these realms. Conversely, French diplomats would do the same on behalf of the Catholics in the Ottoman Empire, and Russians on behalf of the Russian Orthodox. Intervention by a state on behalf of the religious communities was perhaps not appreciated by the state where these communities resided, but it was not interpreted as an infringement of national sovereignty. Communities with a religion different from that of the state were conceived as a foreign body by that state; and while their political allegiance was to be with their sovereign, it was considered natural that their religious allegiance lay elsewhere.
Here we see a distinct difference between the Ottoman and European approaches: whereas the Ottoman Empire was strict in its condition of political allegiance but accommodated a religious allegiance out of state, the European countries conflated the two and deemed any religion other than the state religion a potential source of disloyalty or treason. The European position had led to devastating religious wars aimed at creating religious homogeneity. Since religious cleansing could not be achieved in full, the European states ultimately settled for modalities of religious tolerance (which, as we saw in the Introduction, is a pragmatic rather than principled tolerance).

In the religiously pluralist Ottoman Empire the state, as a matter of Islamic law, had entrusted itself with the protection of its indigenous non-Muslim subjects. Protection in this respect meant that these non-Muslims should be able to practise their faith. But since the religious leadership of some of these religious communities was located outside the Ottoman realm, the Porte allowed these subjects also to be ‘protected’ by foreign powers. Such protection was often confirmed in treaties, such as the treaty of 1637 CE that recognized France as the sole protector of Catholics in the Ottoman realm, and the treaty of 1774 CE that recognized Russia as the sole protector of Orthodox Christians in the Empire.

While the Ottoman Empire might consider its dealings with its non-Muslim subjects and non-Muslim foreigners to follow a certain logic that, to the Empire’s mind, had created a fair and just system that had lasted for centuries, the two communities developed their own dynamics. The millet and capitulations systems served their purposes independently of each other, but by the late eighteenth century they became more and more intertwined and turned out to be one of the nails in the Ottoman Empire’s coffin.

Capitulations as a Political Tool

The capitulations developed from mere commercial privileges like tax exemptions and diplomatic status for the local consul and his assistant to a fully fledged legal immunity for an ever-increasing community of foreigners that included their families and local staff. That such large communities could reside within Ottoman territory with legal impunity, as if they were living in a bubble, was increasingly considered a violation of Ottoman sovereignty. This issue became prominent when the millets became involved by means of the so-called dragomans. The dragoman (‘translator’) was an Ottoman local hired by the foreign consulate as an intermediary between the commercial outpost and the Ottoman merchants and authorities. The dragoman
was mostly recruited from one of the Christian millets, mainly because the mercantile families in these millets could provide a commercial network within and outside the Empire, but also because a Christian was considered more trustworthy to the European employer than a Muslim.

Under the capitulations that were re-negotiated during the nineteenth century, the immunity granted to foreigners was expanded to their dragomans. They could now also claim immunity from the Ottoman legal system in a number of situations. This privilege (the so-called berat, or exemption) became a source of criticism among the Ottomans, because it had the effect of granting foreign nationality to an Ottoman subject. Even worse was that berat’s were handed out as if they were passports, and themselves became objects of trade.19

From the Ottoman perspective foreigners were increasingly abusing their privileges under the capitulation agreements, and expanding them at the expense of Ottoman sovereignty. But why, then, would the Ottomans extend these privileges in the first place? In answering this question we must realize that capitulations had been granted since the sixteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire was at the height of its power, and had been re-negotiated with every extension since then. In the early stages of the capitulations, the Ottomans were not so concerned with the commercial incursions of foreign merchants because the goal of the Porte was to establish political rather than commercial contacts. Also, in the Islamic legal terminology of the capitulations, the Ottomans viewed the merchants as musta’mins who, if they were to reside in Ottoman territory for longer than one (or more) year, would come under Ottoman jurisdiction as dhimmis.20 But practice was different and that had to do mostly with a shift in power in the late seventeenth century: since then, the Ottoman Empire had lost its military edge and was increasingly dependent on financial arrangements with Europeans through trade and loans. This gave Europeans the leverage to re-negotiate the capitulations to their own advantage. And so they did, to the full.

The drawing of the Ottoman millets into a foreign sphere of influence cannot be exclusively blamed on European strategies in this respect. The Ottomans themselves also contributed to this development. For instance, they considered their non-Muslim subjects more as foreigners than as nationals – it is telling in this respect that the Ottoman millets in the nineteenth century came under the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs, just like foreigners.21 This was partly a result of the millet system, which had created a parallel infrastructure with the state representing the Muslim millet while all non-Muslim millets, although residing under the ultimate sovereignty of the state, retained a degree of autonomy.
The elements of the millet system that had obtained so much praise in the past from Europeans – relative religious freedom, autonomy, no interference from the state – were now becoming a source of criticism from the same Europeans because they lacked equal rights and complete freedom of religion. When the Porte tried to remedy this by abolishing the millet system and instituting Ottoman citizenship in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was already too late: the centuries-old division between a state by and for Muslims, on the one hand, and its non-Muslim subjects who only needed to pay tax and know their place but were otherwise to manage their own affairs, on the other hand, was not to be repaired by a single constitutional reform.

Nationalism

The notion of nationalism, that became so popular throughout Europe and beyond in the nineteenth century, provided the growing social and economic unrest in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire with a direction. It must be remembered that much of the social and economic unrest was at first internal and not intended to discredit or challenge the authority of the Porte. On the contrary: the Porte was often implored by the Christian communities to step in and solve their social and economic conflicts with Muslim landlords, local authorities or the Janissaries. But the complex mixture of events, sentiments and situations was channelled into a nationalistic idiom, leading to national revolts and a gradual break-up of the Ottoman Empire. We will discuss these revolts in more detail below in the paragraph on wars and insurgencies.

Nationalism was not embraced exclusively by the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Muslims also became infected by the bug of nationalism. In the latter case we need to distinguish between Muslims who were living within the Ottoman Empire and those who used to be Ottoman subjects but came under non-Muslim rule when the lands where they lived were conquered from the Ottoman Empire. The Bosnian Muslims (‘Bosniaks’) are a typical example. The formation of the Bosnian Muslim identity was unlike that of other nationalist revivals in the Balkans. Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs and Albanians had their own histories and folklore that they could refer to, and their nationalist revival was preceded – if not prompted – by large-scale social and economic changes. Moreover, the Orthodox and Catholic populations could rely on the centuries-old organizational infrastructure of their churches. The Muslims in Bosnia had none of these and so, when the Ottoman rule of which they had been part for four centuries was re-

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placed by that of the Austro-Hungarian double monarchy in 1878 CE, they were at a loss. The disappearance of Istanbul as a point of authoritative orientation and the lack of will to refocus on Vienna forced the Bosniaks for the first time to develop their own, separate identity. They did so by primarily focusing on religion, Islam. Austria facilitated this by allowing religious freedom for Muslims: they retained their own religious institutions, such as courts, schools and mosques, and were autonomous in their religious affairs (an inverted dhimmi situation that we have seen repeatedly being applied by Christian European powers in the past). One exception was conversion: the case of a Bosnian Muslim woman converting to Christianity caused a confrontation between Bosnian local authorities arresting her for apostasy and Austrian authorities releasing her with the argument that she was free to choose her religion. These confrontations over conversion continued in Bosnia even after a settlement was reached with the Austrian Conversion Ordinance of 1891 CE.

We must realize that the Muslims in Bosnia did not view their predicament as eternal: they considered themselves Ottoman subjects under Austrian occupation, which was expected to be temporary. This situation changed, however, with the Austrian annexation of Bosnia in 1908 CE. The new Austrian province of Bosnia-Hercegovina was granted autonomy, and its constitution of 1910 CE mentioned Serbs, Croats and Muslims as native peoples. These three communities were also politically organized, for each had its representative political party in the Bosnian parliament. Whereas Bosniaks had been lords and authorities under Ottoman rule, they were now a constitutionally recognized minority in an autonomous province under the Austro-Hungarian double monarchy.

With regard to the Muslims within the Ottoman Empire nationalism came late. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, Muslim intellectuals in Istanbul and other urban centres of the Empire were very much engaging in new and exciting concepts like westernization, secularism, and centralization. Nationalism – that is, Turkish nationalism – joined the ranks only by the end of the nineteenth century. Until that time, the elites and especially the Porte itself tried very hard to introduce the modern ideas of secularism and equality in order to unite all subjects of the Empire. But the legal, economic and political reforms initiated by the Porte, known as the Tanzimat, were too late or not rigorous enough to stem the tide of religious, ethnic and national fragmentation of the Empire.
Reforms (Tanzimat)

We have already seen that the sultan was willing to introduce forms of equality among his subjects when in 1829 CE he abolished all laws on dress codes for non-Muslims and prohibited all turbans and robes of honour being worn by Muslims. This decree turned out to be a prelude to the more radical reforms of 1839 CE and, when confronted with a general refusal by local Muslim landlords to implement the decree, a repetition of the reforms by the decree of 1856 CE. The reforms concerned a number of issues, but those that are of interest to us here are the ones related to the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire. These were primarily aimed at establishing equal citizenship. The decrees abolished the separate (dhimmi) status of the non-Muslim and the special poll tax to be paid by every non-Muslim, and introduced the concept of Ottoman citizenship. Consequently, non-Muslims were allowed to assume positions in the Ottoman government. However, non-Muslims were not eager to enter the military, neither were they readily admitted to the foreign ministry, but their presence “became most pronounced” in the civil bureaucracy.

The reforms were met with a lot of opposition from the Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire. The establishment of equality between Muslims and non-Muslims was perceived by many as disruptive to the social fabric of society that had been in place for centuries. There was strong opposition and even vandalism against churches that were newly built in Ottoman provinces like Bosnia after building restrictions were lifted by the Tanzimat reforms. But the opposition was also motivated by practical considerations: the abolition of the poll tax caused a serious loss of income for the tax-farmers who lived off collecting the tax. It was the main reason for the uprising of Bosnian Muslim landlords in 1830 CE. Many of these tax farmers therefore quickly devised ways to impose other forms of tax that replaced the abrogated poll tax, which in turn caused opposition from their non-Muslim tax-payers who appealed to the Porte for help.

Not only Muslims were dismayed by these reforms; many non-Muslims opposed them as well, for various reasons. The non-Muslims who worked closely with foreign consulates, or who had obtained a berait, correctly assumed that the institution of Ottoman citizenship was meant to bring them back under Ottoman suzerainty. Others who cherished their millet autonomy feared that their courts would be taken away from them, just as the millet authorities were anxious that they would lose power over their communities. These fears were unfounded, however, because the Tanzimat abolished the dhimmi position and its poll tax, but not the millet system itself. The communities maintained their infrastructure and the right to live in accor-
dance with their own family laws to be applied by their own millet courts. Moreover, and quite paradoxically, the Empire not only maintained the structure of the millet system, but by 1914 CE had increased the number of millets from three (Orthodox, Jewish, Armenian) to thirteen: Greek-Orthodox, Catholic, Syrian Catholic, Chaldean Catholic, Syrian Jacobites, Armenian Gregorians, Armenian Catholics, Protestants, Melkites, Jews, Bulgarian Catholics, Maronites, Nestorians.

The millet system as an institution that for centuries had functioned as the go-between between the Ottoman state and its non-Muslim communities was now formally replaced by the institution of citizenship that positioned the individual in a direct relation with the state, without millet intermediary. But the millet remained intact as the rallying point for communal interests of the individuals, for had not the millet over the centuries preserved the community’s culture, heritage, language, religion and laws? And since the Ottoman state was increasingly incapable or unwilling to safeguard these communal interests and differences, all millets made sure that they were under the protection of one of the great powers, France for Catholics, Great Britain for the Protestants and Russia for the Orthodox.

But, as we saw above, religious identities rapidly fractured along ethnic and linguistic fault lines. The Orthodox Greeks, Serbs, Albanians, Bulgars – to name but a few – re-discovered their cultural identity and their own language and felt empowered by their economic freedom to assert that identity. This development took a dangerous turn when these communities became dissatisfied with the fact that they had no territory of their own – that they were ‘nations’ without ‘states’. The fulfilment of this need resulted in atrocious episodes of ethnic and religious cleansing, which we will discuss in more detail below.

The process of identity and loyalty did not end with the establishment of nation-states, however. Once the ethnic-linguistic communities had broken away from their larger religious communities to establish their own states, it was religion that appeared to determine national loyalty. For instance, the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (Pomaks) would feel more allegiance to Turkey than Bulgaria, Greek-speaking Muslim Turks from Crete felt little affiliation with the Greeks on the mainland and preferred to settle in Turkey, while the Turkish-speaking Orthodox Greeks were loyal to the newly established state of Greece. And since none of the new states with Orthodox communities was prepared to acknowledge the Orthodox Church as a supra-nationalist religious authority, they all established their own Orthodox state churches: Serbia (1832), Greece (1833), Bulgaria (1860), Rumania (1885) and Albania (1929). An exception was Catholic-majority Croatia which remained loyal to the Church in Rome.
3. Wars and Insurgencies

The loss of territory in its European provinces through wars and insurgencies was a major blow to the Ottoman Empire, more so than the loss of its dominions in the Middle East, because the European provinces had always constituted the heartland of the Ottoman Empire. The wars and insurgencies that were waged upon and within the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were many and present a kaleidoscopic image of events. At the risk of simplifying two centuries of armed struggle, we will first distinguish between inter-state conflicts on the one hand and domestic armed conflicts, on the other, and then continue by discussing the role of religion in these conflicts.

Inter-State Conflicts

The inter-state conflicts can be divided into two categories. On the one hand there were the conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and its direct neighbours, the Habsburgs (from 1804 CE onwards known as the Austrian Empire, and from 1867 until 1918 CE as the ‘Austro-Hungarian Double Monarchy’) and the Russian tsarist empire. On the other hand there were the conflicts with far-away countries like France and Great Britain. The Ottomans fought several wars with the Austrians and Russians, while the conflicts with Great Britain and France in the Balkan region were mostly by proxy, with the two European powers occasionally siding with the local insurgencies and revolts in the Ottoman realm. They were instrumental, for instance, in bringing the Greek revolt of 1821 CE to its successful end in an independent Greek state in 1830 CE.

Ever since the Ottoman defeat at the walls of Vienna in 1683 CE, Austria had pushed the Ottomans back and gradually conquered parts of neighbouring Ottoman territory: Hungary finally became part of the Austrian Empire which, in its pursuit of the Ottomans, took Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia. Russia also wanted its share and, with the justification of protecting its Orthodox co-religionists, engaged in several wars with the Ottoman Empire, acquiring Moldavia and the territories north and east of the Black Sea. Such was the Russian encroachment into Ottoman territory that for once the French and British sided with the Ottomans against the Russian advance in the Crimean War (1853–1856 CE). The British nurse Florence Nightingale became known during this war for her efforts to raise hygiene standards in English lazars and Ottoman hospitals.

In terms of territorial appetite, however, France and Great Britain were more interested in the Arab dominions of the Ottoman Empire, most of which had already
acquired a semi-autonomous status. This region, comprising North Africa, the Middle East and the Arab Peninsula, was once the cradle of the great Roman, Byzantine and Islamic civilizations, but by the sixteenth century it had lost its splendour and prosperity, having slumped back into poverty and backwardness. Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 CE was therefore merely a military and romantic adventure with no political, economic or strategic gains. Perhaps the only impact of this adventure was that it ended the two and a half centuries-old French-Ottoman military pact, and triggered the European romantic and religious interest that became known as Orientalism, of which we will speak below.

Imperial interest by European powers in this region came only a century after Napoleon’s adventure: the western Ottoman domains, Algeria and Tunisia, were taken by France in 1830 and 1881 CE, respectively, while Egypt was occupied by Great Britain in 1882 CE. Great Britain’s interest in Egypt and several Gulf emirates was purely strategic at first, for it was only meant to safeguard free passage to its imperial domains in British India through the recently opened Suez canal. In 1911 CE, Italy invaded the Ottoman province of Libya. When the Ottoman Empire sided with the German axis in the First World War (1914–1918) and subsequently lost, its remaining provinces in the Middle East and Gulf were divided between the British and French powers: France gained Syria and Lebanon, while Great Britain took Jordan, Palestine and Iraq.

Internal Conflicts

The Serbian revolt of 1804 CE was the first in a series of insurgencies of non-Muslim Ottoman subjects who identified themselves on national-religious grounds. This, and subsequent rebellious acts were considered the ultimate disruption of the Ottoman social order in which non-Muslims were supposed to know and keep their place, and the Ottoman response was extremely harsh, with punishments like impalement, stoning to death, rape and prisoners being roasted alive. The Ottomans were not alone in so gruesomely restoring order: the Serbs who had participated in the same revolt on the Habsburg side of the border faced mass executions, concentration camps and deportation of their elites by the Habsburgs. These atrocities were to set the tone – on all sides – for the following revolts. The Greek uprising (1821–1830 CE) was the next revolt of non-Muslim Ottoman subjects who identified themselves as Greeks, that is a singular religious and ethnic nation united by language. Bosnians, Bulgarians, Albanians, Macedonians and others followed suit and, mostly with the aid of European powers, were able to obtain varying degrees of autonomy.
In 1878 CE, after the Ottoman defeat in its last war with Russia, the European powers came together in the Berlin Congress to reach a final solution for the Balkans by dividing the former Ottoman territories thus: Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Montenegro and Serbia were granted independence; Albania, northern Greece and Macedonia remained part of the Ottoman Empire; Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia (including Herzegovina) were incorporated into the Austro-Hungary double monarchy. But by now the genie of national and religious sentiments was out of the bottle and could not be pushed back in by granting independence and re-drawing national boundaries. The problem that remained after the division of territories in 1878 CE was that the peoples (‘nations’) and their territorial home (‘state’) did not always coincide, because lands were often still shared by mixed populations.

The Role of Religion in Internal and Inter-State Conflicts

The uprisings in the Ottoman European domains were not always non-Muslim subjects rising against Islamic rule. Often other factors were involved. Many revolts by (mostly Christian) peasantry against their (mostly Muslim) overlords were prompted by economic oppression, the Christian rebels often emphatically proclaiming their loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, and even implored the Porte for assistance against the local Muslim overlord. And when help was given, this could then cause the local Muslim elite to rise against the Porte, as was the case with the Bosniak revolt in 1850 CE. Bosniaks were the ruling Muslim elite in Bosnia who by religion and fealty owed allegiance to the Ottoman Porte, but who for centuries had lived in Bosnia and spoke Serbo-Croat as opposed to Ottoman Turkish. When the Ottoman Porte introduced the first set of Tanzimat in 1839 CE that included the alleviation of fiscal hardship of the Christian subjects, the local Muslim elite protested and refused to implement these regulations. Their disobedience was answered by the Porte with military force, which in turn caused the Bosniak revolt. The indiscriminate punitive actions by the Ottoman military against the local Bosnian population that was both Christian and Muslim led to the devastation of Bosnia and left the Christian peasantry in more misery than they were already in and turned their original loyalty towards the Porte into antipathy or hatred.33

While the causes of the many uprisings in the Ottoman Balkans were complex and need to be considered in their local contexts, we may make the general observation that these uprisings were at first prompted by social and economic reasons – poverty and oppression being the main causes – but increasingly became struggles for autonomy and independence. This development was typical of all Europe at that
time. In 1848 CE, popular revolts swept through Europe like wildfire, either toppling existing powers or forcing them to make concessions for more political participation by the populace. This development did not leave the Balkans untouched, and made the ethnic, national, linguistic and religious patchwork even more complicated to comprehend as revolts and wars broke out among peoples that for centuries had lived in relative political and economic stability.

The Greeks may serve as an example. They had been living in the eastern part of the Mediterranean for centuries and continued to do so as subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Their commonality was therefore language and religion, not territory. Their revolt against Ottoman rule in the nineteenth century was precipitated by the actions of the Friendly Society (Philiki Etaireia), a Greek secret society established in 1814 CE throughout the Empire, with the aim to ‘liberate the Motherland’ although the geographical contours of this motherland were unclear. A flurry of incidents, bolstered by the uprising of a local Ottoman lord against the Porte, culminated in a nationwide Greek uprising that became known as their independence war (1821–1830 CE). Most parts of the Ottoman Empire with Greek communities experienced eruptions of violence and massacres of the local population by both the Ottoman military and Greek insurgents. It is hard to make clear-cut divides between the sides that were killing each other: in Crete and the Peloponnesian peninsula, for instance, the majority of the population was Greek-speaking, but Greek minority communities were also Muslim, and that characteristic made them fall victim to the Greek Orthodox mobs.

Religion was therefore not a cause of these conflicts, but a factor with varying importance. Religion was also an instrument used by the European powers, either out of conviction or for political purposes. Wars and diplomatic meddling were at first mostly territorial and power-related, but gradually became religious, in that European powers asserted ecclesiastical sovereignty over Ottoman subjects: Russians over the Orthodox, English over Protestants, French over Catholics. We have seen that such religious ‘protectorates’ by a foreign nation were not uncommon and that they were regularly confirmed in treaties. For some European states this was out of genuine concern for the plight of specific Christian communities with whom intensive contacts had been established through the capitulations system. For others it was just another way to get a foothold in the Empire.

The Empire at that same time was struggling with the role of Islam, which was traditionally an intrinsic part of the Ottoman Empire. During the nineteenth century, many Turkish intellectuals and state officials debated whether the solution to the many problems of the Empire had to be found in less Islam, hence secularism,
or more Islam. The state had opted for the first solution, but many of the secular reforms imposed by the state were considered too radical and failed to have their intended effect. With the continuing disintegration of the Empire and with the threat, whether perceived or real, from indigenous and foreign forces that identified themselves as Christian, Islam became the only remaining unifying and legitimizing factor. This reaction among the Ottoman elites coincided with – or was it prompted by? – the notion of so-called pan-Islam that became popular throughout the Muslim world during that period.

It is in this light that the call for a jihad by the Ottoman sultan in 1914 CE against the European enemies of Germany stirred the anxiety of these European allies; they were worried that this call might be taken up by the Muslims in European colonies across the globe to rise up against their colonial powers. Moreover, it was assumed that this holy war was concocted by, or otherwise ‘made in’, Germany, with which the Ottomans had sided in the First World War. With hindsight we may say that too much was made of this call for jihad. Just as in previous centuries, the Ottoman rulers often reserved the term ‘jihad’ for war against an enemy that was non-Muslim. Between 1768 and 1922 CE, six official Ottoman jihad declarations were identified, in addition to numerous references that were made to jihad. The call for jihad in 1914 CE followed a similar procedure to these other jihads: the sultan would ask the highest Muslim cleric, the sheyk-ul-islam for a legal opinion (fatwa, or ‘fetve’ in Ottoman) on the religious validity of the intended war, and would then formally declare the war when an affirmative ruling was given. What was of great concern to the Allied forces, however, was that the fatwa also implicitly called upon all Muslims in the European colonies to rise in jihad. The Europeans were anxious that the position of the Ottoman sultan as caliph, that is ruler of all Muslims, might prompt the Muslims in European colonies to rise. The concern among the colonial powers was unwarranted, however, because the Islamic call to arms went completely unanswered among Muslims worldwide. They ostensibly saw the Ottoman involvement in the war as an exclusively Ottoman affair.

Religious-Ethnic Cleansing

In the previous section we saw that religion, whether Islam or Christianity, was merely one of the factors contributing to the emerging sense of national identity among the Ottoman subjects during the nineteenth century. From the 1870s onwards, however, the conflicts acquired nationalistic overtones in which religion was subsumed with nationality. The Ottoman state first tried to give in to the national-
ist aspirations by granting the various communities autonomy within the Ottoman realm. The expansion of the number of millets was one of the ways of doing this. However, one of the characteristics of the millet is that it is not defined territorially. And this was precisely what the emerging religious-ethnic nationalism aspired to: the communities wanted their own territory or state. In the mixed population of the Balkan region where so many people for centuries had migrated, settled and mixed, this seemed impossible. If one were to achieve that dream, drastic measures were needed. And that is what happened from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards.

What became known as the ‘process of nation-building’ in the Balkans started with all parties using various methods to create a homogeneous national population in a newly established state with its own territory. Ethnic and religious ‘homogeneity’ is the key word in this endeavour, and there were no nice ways to reach that goal. Massacres and expulsion were one way to achieve homogeneity, forced conversion another. But they all achieved the same end: a religiously and ethnically cleansed homeland. In 1914, the independent commission established by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace that had investigated the causes and conduct of the Balkan wars, stated: "The Turks were fleeing before the Christians, the Bulgarians before the Greeks and the Turks, the Greeks and the Turks before the Bulgarians, the Albanians before the Serbians. ... The means employed by the Greek against the Bulgarian, by the Turk against the Slav, by the Serbian against the Albanian, is no longer extermination or emigration; it is an indirect method which must, however, lead to the same end, that of conversion and assimilation." 40

The Commission also observed that the worst atrocities were not committed by soldiers or the armed gangs known as bashi bazouk, but by the populations themselves, who were “mutually slaughtered and pursued with a ferocity heightened by mutual knowledge and the old hatred and resentments they cherished.” 41 The contemporary Europeans watched in horror, but tended to highlight the atrocities committed by the Muslims. As an observer wrote in 1905, “When a Christian kills a Muslim, it is a righteous act; when a Christian kills a Christian it is an error of judgment better not talked about; it is only when a Muslim kills a Christian that we arrive at a full-blown atrocity.” 42

The cleansing did not pertain just to people: religious monuments and buildings were torn down and houses and entire villages were destroyed to eradicate traces of another life or culture. The massive scale on which this took place was unique, but not the destruction itself. A century earlier, Habsburg armies upon their conquest of Hungary and Croatia burned down many mosques, Islamic buildings like tombs,
bathhouses and schools, as well as the houses of Muslims: in Sarajevo alone, the Habsburgs destroyed 60,000 houses and 160 mosques, and in Beograd left only one of the 30 mosques intact.\(^{43}\)

But even when the ultimate goal of a cleansed homeland was reached, its appeal was still limited. The creation of independent Greece and Serbia did not prompt the Greeks and Serbs who were still residing in the Ottoman Empire to migrate to these new states: most remained subjects of the Sultan by choice, and some even migrated out of these states back to the Empire to avoid the tax demands and poor economic prospects of the newly established states. In the case of Greece, an estimated 800,000 inhabited the new kingdom, while 2 million Greeks remained Ottoman subjects.\(^{44}\)

Several scholars have undertaken the task of attaching numbers to the people massacred, deported, converted, fleeing or migrating.\(^{45}\) Suffice it here to say that these numbers are all in the hundreds of thousands and sometimes even millions for each ethnic or religious people, which merely illustrates the staggering scale of events. Every person in the Balkans at one time or another was affected by horror and atrocities.

Under these circumstances the situation of mixed populations within the states and newly established autonomous areas became so untenable that countries opted to exchange each other’s populations. Such organized exchanges of populations were proposed as early as 1826 CE between Turks and Greeks in the Greek peninsula, and in 1878 CE between Turks and Bulgarians, but became common only in the twentieth century.\(^{46}\) The most notorious of these exchanges was between Turks and Greeks in 1923 CE. The situation was that the Greeks had invaded Turkey after the Ottoman defeat in the First World War, but were repulsed. Both parties then sat down in Lausanne to negotiate a solution to their conflict. This was done in the tumultuous aftermath of the war with millions of Russian, Armenian, Turkish and Greek refugees in need of repatriation, diplomats discussing ways to establish national homogeneity in the Balkan region in order to prevent future conflict, and American president Wilson proclaiming that ‘nations’ – in its meaning as peoples – had the right to self-determination. Perhaps these circumstances and considerations were the reason that the Lausanne treaty of 1923 was considered a diplomatic and practical success at the time, although it would be unimaginable in a post-World War II Europe. The treaty decreed a huge population swap: all the ‘Turkish nationals of Greek-Orthodox religion’ in Turkey (except those in Istanbul) were to move to Greece, and all ‘Greek nationals of Muslim religion’ in Greece (except those in the province of Thrace) were to move to Turkey. An estimated 1.5 million Greeks were forced to leave Turkey (or, as refugees from the Turko-Greek war, were not allowed to return), and an estimated
half million Turks were forced to leave Greece. As a result the percentage of non-Muslims in Turkey plummeted from roughly 20 per cent to less than 2 per cent. The nationalistic-historical idea of the need for people to be restored to their native soil had complete disregard for the human misery of people being uprooted from a land and society where they had lived for generations, sometimes for many centuries.

With this dramatic episode, Ottoman (Muslim) sovereignty over the southeastern parts of the European continent had formally ended (with the exception of the region around Edirne) and the Ottoman Empire was subsumed by the secular republic of Turkey. Between 1822 and 1922 CE an estimated 5 million Muslims were driven from their lands in the Ottoman Balkans and the Black Sea region, and an estimated 5 million were killed during that period. However, an estimated 1 million still remained in the Balkan region, especially in Bosnia, Kosovo and Albania, and in the eastern Greek province of Thrace. What also remained was the Islamic infrastructure, insofar as it had not been destroyed in the wars, such as mosques, religious courts, educational institutions and institutionalized leadership such as imams, ʿulama and muftis. The millet system was somehow retained, albeit in a much more restricted form: as citizens the Muslims of the Balkan states enjoyed equal rights like all nationals, but were allowed autonomy in religious matters, such as religious education and family law. Even the millet structure was left intact: the central government would communicate with the religious communities through their representative bodies. We will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

4. Diplomatic Relations and Trade

After all this violence it seems a little peculiar to speak of diplomacy and trade. But these, also, were important aspects of this period. The space in this chapter spent on discussing the hostile encounters between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects in the Ottoman Empire, and between Ottoman and European states, should not be interpreted as being representative of all interaction that took place during this period. The emergence of trade and diplomatic relations in this period, especially the eighteenth century, was unprecedented in its scope and new developments.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the rise of modern states and the increase in political and commercial trans-border activities required a new approach to diplomacy. The personal envoys sent on behalf of the ruler did not suffice and were replaced by diplomatic services that were an integrated part of the governmental administration. The European powers had established permanent embassies at
the Porte as early as in the sixteenth century, starting with the French ambassador who was sent in 1535 CE upon conclusion of the French-Ottoman alliance. The Ottomans, on the other hand, did not feel the need to reciprocate until the late 1790s when they established permanent embassies in London (1793), Vienna (1794), Berlin (1795) and Paris (1796). These embassies and the many reconnaissance envoys that preceded them throughout the eighteenth century provided the Ottomans for the first time with the opportunity to come into contact with Europe, causing a “drastic change in Ottoman perceptions of the West.”

The late Ottoman entry into European diplomacy was not without reason. By the eighteenth century the power balances in Europe had shifted and the Ottomans had lost the upper hand. They were bypassed by European powers that had become much stronger economically as well as militarily. Politically, the Ottoman Empire now had to rely on diplomacy and allies to secure its position. Militarily and economically, it started to imitate the developments and technologies that were modernizing Europe and bringing it such power and prosperity. The turning point was the Habsburg-Ottoman peace of 1699 CE that ended the series of Ottoman defeats it had suffered after being routed before the walls of Vienna, and allowed diplomatic and commercial relations between the two realms to improve and increase. The Ottomans did not rely entirely on the newly established relations with the Austrians, however, and also rekindled the dormant treaty with France by intensifying their commercial and diplomatic relations with the newly established French Republic. One of the aims of Ottoman diplomatic engagement with France, and later with Prussia, was to bring in French and Prussian military advisors to restructure the Ottoman army.

But it was too late, and the Ottoman Empire was not to regain its previous prowess. The European shift in power was permanent, as could also be seen in the languages used in European diplomacy. French became the European language for political affairs, Italian for commercial affairs, but very few diplomats had knowledge of Ottoman politics, commerce or language. The apparent lack of need for this knowledge is illustrative of the position of the Ottoman Empire and the relative indifference of Europe towards this state that they had once feared and admired. The Habsburgs were the only ones who felt the need to know their neighbour, and in 1754 CE established the Academy of Oriental Languages of Vienna with the explicit purpose of training young diplomats in the language, customs and political and commercial peculiarities of the Ottoman Empire.

Just as the Ottomans found no need to establish permanent diplomatic contacts with European powers at first, they did not venture into Europe to engage in commercial
activities. It is unclear whether this was a continuation of a centuries-old lack of interest by Ottoman merchants. But even if the Ottoman merchants themselves had been interested, they might have been deterred by the lack of support from their government in the Porte that made little effort to claim protection and privileges on behalf of its Ottoman subjects in treaties with European powers. There were also practical obstacles. In the Mediterranean sea trade of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was the permanent menace of Christian corsairs – who outnumbered the Muslim corsairs, even in the eastern parts of the Mediterranean – so that Ottoman trading houses had their trade carried by foreign, especially French ships. Trade overland into the European mainland also used to be no option because it had to pass through the unsafe frontier zones between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires.

This situation was to change drastically once these frontier zones were taken and secured by the Habsburgs between 1683 and 1699 CE. The Habsburg-Ottoman treaty of 1739 CE, which included numerous privileges granted to Ottoman merchants, spurred tens of thousands of them to resettle in the former frontier areas and set up shop in Habsburg cities in Hungary, but also as far away as Vienna, Lvov (western Ukraine, near Poland) and Leipzig (eastern Germany). These Ottomans were never Muslims, however, but Orthodox Serbs, Bulgars, Greeks and Macedonians (Jews and Armenians tended to go to Italy). When three decades later many of the trading privileges were revoked by the Habsburgs, most of these Ottoman merchants preferred to be naturalized and stay.

These Ottoman Christian mercantile initiatives into Europe were an exception, however. In general it was European merchants who travelled into the Ottoman Empire rather than the other way round. Under the protection of the capitulations, Western European traders established themselves throughout the Ottoman Empire: in its European domains there was a strong Western European commercial presence in the cities of Edirne, Saloniki and Istanbul, but more so in the city of Izmir (west coast of Turkey), and in Syria and Egypt. In the eighteenth century, the Austrians were second to the French as the main trading partners of the Ottoman Empire, with the Dutch taking third place and the English fourth. An important part of the Austrian trade was the transport of African slaves to the Ottoman Empire.

From the European perspective, however, the importance of the Ottoman Empire for European trade quickly lessened. Western European powers had much greater economic interests in their colonies, and during the nineteenth century the global economy expanded so rapidly that by the end of that century the Ottoman economy was reduced to that of any other ‘Third World’ country in the world at that time.
5. Muslim Sojourners: Students, Nationalists and Conscripts

We have seen that during the history of Islam in Europe few, if any, Muslims ventured into Christian Europe, whether as merchants, travellers or diplomats. An exception is perhaps the many Muslim slaves, but that was limited to the Mediterranean basin and against their will. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, this reluctance on the part of Muslims altered. Students and intellectuals came to Europe from the Muslim lands that were colonized by European powers, followed by nationalists and political activists (or sometimes the two qualities of student and activist were combined in one person). And finally, the largest but mostly forgotten segment of Muslims venturing into Europe by the early twentieth century was the conscripts and auxiliary forces in the European wars.

Many of the Muslim sojourners came as students to the universities of their colonial overlords as part of training programmes to return and take positions as local administrators: Muslims from Indonesia, British India and North Africa flocked to the universities of Leiden, Oxford and Paris. Several of them travelled extensively in Europe, thrilled by the new ideas they encountered and even more excited about the prospect of putting those ideas to use in their native countries to modernize them and perhaps even to gain their independence. These young men were few in number, but their intellectual impact on their home countries was often significant. In effect, we might observe a reverse intellectual impact compared to several centuries earlier: while Christian Europeans in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries made grateful use of Arab Muslim intellectual achievements, Muslims from the Arab and Ottoman world six to seven centuries later came to Europe to get a taste of the latest Western intellectual fruits. They eagerly studied newly developed concepts like people’s representation, rule of law, freedom and equality, and took home with them the ideas of modern institutions like a parliament, constitution and division of powers.

European ideas also had their impact on Muslims’ reformist thinking about Islam. Two scholars from one the most influential centres of Islamic theology, the Al-Azhar in Egypt, may serve as an example. Rifa’a al-Tahtawi studied for five years in Paris (1826–1831 CE) and we know his impressions from the journal he kept. He praises the sciences, cleanliness, efficiency of transportation and postal system he witnesses in France, as well as the benefits of newspapers to educate the people, and is enthralled by the rationalist approach to science, but is completely mystified by those who through “extreme rationalist” reasoning come to atheism. Tahtawi’s countryman Muhammed Abduh, one of the great reformers of Islam, also spent four years in Paris (1884–1888 CE), but as an exile from the British who had occupied Egypt
in 1882. Just like Tahtawi, Abduh was impressed by the notions of freedom of opinion and rationalist thinking, and by the importance of education. He went so far as to equate the European achievements with what Islam should stand for, as shown in his succinct remark: “I went to the West and saw Islam, but no Muslims; I got back to the East and saw Muslims, but not Islam.”

Later, in the inter-bellum period of the 1920s and 1930s, Europe became the destiny for political adventurers and nationalist intellectuals from Muslim lands. They travelled throughout the continent, and met in Istanbul, Zurich, Berlin, London, Paris, Vienna where they discussed politics and the future of their colonized homelands. Here, also, they were few in number, but quite influential in impact as they functioned as lynchpins between Europe, where they tried to advocate their ideas of Islamic nationalism and independence, and their home countries, where they introduced the European ideas and ideologies of liberalism, socialism, nationalism and fascism.

The pious among these Muslims were often the ones who established the first Islamic mosques and study circles in Western European countries. The governments of the main European powers were not unwilling to accommodate them, but felt the need more to make overtures towards their Muslim subjects abroad or – as was the case in Germany – to the Ottomans, by establishing mosques in their European capitals: London in 1904, Berlin in 1924 and Paris in 1922 CE. Before that, however, smaller mosques had been built to accommodate sailors (the 1860 mosque in Cardiff for Yemeni and Somali sailors) or soldiers (the 1887 mosque in Vienna for Muslim military personnel in the Austrian army), and in Germany for Muslim prisoners of war (Senegalese, Moroccans, Algerians, Indians, Tatars) taken during the First World War. Compared to these initiatives it is quite conspicuous that the Netherlands, as colonizer of Indonesia, until 1949 the European country with the largest colonial Muslim population after Great Britain, did not build any mosque at all.

Some of the Muslim nationalist sojourners in Europe established contacts with the European powers that, in turn, would make use of them to their own advantage. Nazi Germany, in particular, made good use of them in its Arabic and Persian propaganda broadcasts from Berlin during the 1930s aimed at inciting the peoples in the colonies of the Allied powers. History would stigmatize these young nationalists for holding Nazi sympathies, while from their perspective they were often merely siding with one European power that was against other European powers that colonized their home countries. Perhaps the most famous – or should we say infamous – of these Muslim nationalists in this respect is Amin Hussain, Mufti of Jerusalem. Palestine was an English Mandate, and the Mufti went to Berlin to seek help from the
Germans. Whether he actually held Nazi sympathies – particularly the antisemitic ideology – is still a matter of debate, but the picture of him sitting amicably with Hitler is to many sufficient proof.\textsuperscript{71}

Of a completely different nature was the presence of hundreds of thousands of Muslim soldiers and armament industry labourers who were recruited to sustain the English and French war efforts. In France, Muslims from Senegal and Morocco were recruited into the army as early as the Crimean War in 1854 CE, and later also in the 1870 war against Germany. An estimated 200,000 Algerians were involved in the First World War, and many stayed afterwards.\textsuperscript{72} About 80,000 Moroccan soldiers had participated in the Spanish Civil War, while 73,000 fought in the Second World War.\textsuperscript{73} Many war cemeteries in France have separate sections where tombstones bear the sickle moon to indicate the Islamic creed of the fallen. Most of these recruits were from North Africa, but many also from Sub-Saharan Africa, India and Bosnia. Although their loyalty was primarily with their colonial master, the defeats suffered by these same masters caused a breach in their image of invincibility.\textsuperscript{74}
III. Virtual Islam

The European perception of Muslims (‘Turks’ or ‘Mohammedans’) and Islam underwent a “drastic change” at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from a period of respect and even admiration for the Islamic civilization and religion to one of contempt. This switch in perspective was not limited to the Ottomans, but also included India and China: the mysterious and fascinating Oriental became the uncivilized non-European. The main cause of this transformation was European colonialism that introduced Europe to the wider Muslim world in Africa and Asia and was accompanied by a strong sense of superiority over other cultures and civilizations. While eighteenth century European historians thought of Islam as a great albeit bygone civilization, the nineteenth century European merchants, travellers, administrators and military in the colonies saw Islam as the main source of the backwardness and poverty of the Muslim societies they encountered. The same perspective was taken on the Ottomans: until the late eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was still a power to be reckoned with culturally, politically and economically, but in the nineteenth century it rapidly unravelled into social and economic turmoil not unlike what Europeans witnessed in the many other Muslim societies in their colonial dominions.

The Ottoman of the eighteenth century still represented the Other, but he was ‘one of us’, the strange but fascinating neighbour at the end of the street. Europeans were perhaps a bit frightened but mainly fascinated about him, his customs, his religion. But while this Ottoman was what we might call the ‘inclusive’ Other, the Ottoman of the nineteenth century became the ‘exclusive’ Other who represented everything that Europeans abhorred. And even if the Europeans for the sake of political expediency allowed the Ottoman to be one of us, he definitely was not anyone like us. By the end of the nineteenth century, when colonial Europe had entrenched itself in most of the Muslim world, the notion of the exclusive Other, who was so unlike the civilized and rational European, was extended to Islam and the Muslim.

This transformation of perspective from the eighteenth into the nineteenth century became clear in the contemporary studies of Islam, as well as in the two successive trends of Turquerie and Orientalism, which we will discuss separately in the following paragraphs.
1. Eighteenth Century: Turquerie and Inclusive Othering

Turquerie

The sixteenth and seventeenth-century fascination for the Turk as both the ‘scourge of God’ and the mysterious Oriental developed into a fashion that became known as Turquerie. Turquerie was the European fashion to imitate aspects of Ottoman culture, ranging from decorative motifs to fashion and coffee. The first forms of Turquerie were observed in Venice which had always been in close contact with the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman influences could be seen in Venetian paintings and fashion. In 1630 CE, the first coffee house was opened in Venice, a novelty in European society, followed by coffee houses in Paris and London, and developing into a very coffee house culture in eighteenth-century Europe. It has been argued that the coffee house where men (not women) could sit together and exchange ideas was one of the characteristics of the eighteenth century that, together with newspapers and clubs, created a public domain in which critical thoughts could be exchanged, thereby laying the ground work for later democracies.

Turquerie is said to have been introduced into France by the doings of the first Ottoman ambassador to Paris, Muteferikka Suleyman Agha. When he was to submit his credentials to King Louis XIV (the ‘Sun King’) in 1669 CE, he had been ordered by the sultan not to show too much deference for a king who, from the Ottoman point of view, was of much lower status than the sultan. The ambassador followed this instruction so well – he appeared in a wool coat, refused to bow to the king and apparently did not pay any attention to all the pomp and magnificence that was brought out to impress the sultan’s envoy – that King Louis in his rage denied him further access to Versailles. In his residence in Paris the ambassador subsequently opened a salon in good Parisian custom, but did so in an Ottoman style with Turkish coffee, tobacco and pipes, draperies and sofas. The salon became very popular, and quite a few prominent Parisian ladies had their portraits painted while reclining on couches in Turkish robes and hair styles.

Turquerie was not the only fashion at the time; it was part of a larger demand for anything exotic from the Orient. We therefore also see in this period a similar interest in the Far East (the so-called ‘Chinoiserie’). This longing for exoticism was a particular feature of the European bourgeoisie that by the late seventeenth century had developed into a very rich and independent middle class that was willing to spend money to show off its wealth and to have itself entertained. This sometimes took excessive forms, as was the case with so-called tulipomania in Holland. The tulip was
imported from Istanbul by a Dutch botanist to the Dutch Republic where it was successfully cultivated in many different varieties. During the prosperous seventeenth century the tulip became a fashion among the rich merchants in Holland who were willing to raise their bids on the onion-like bulbs speculating on the prospects of what flower they might yield. This form of speculation reached grotesque heights when payments amounted to more than a million euro – calculated in present day currency – for a single bulb, causing the collapse of the market in 1637 CE, taking many a merchant’s wealth in its wake.

The Ottoman decorative style – or what was assumed to be so – found its way throughout Europe in tiles, carpets, pottery and the like. These, as well as the Ottoman fashion, were often reproduced in paintings, especially of Biblical scenes, such as those of Rubens and Rembrandt, but also in dresses like those worn by Frans Hals’ Girl with the Pearl Earring or by Rembrandt himself in one of his latest self-portraits. Ottoman themes also featured in plays and operas, such as Molière’s Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme (1670) Rossini’s Il Turco in Italia (1814) and Mozart’s Die Entführung aus dem Serail (1782). Several composers also used the typical Ottoman military marching music in their compositions: Mozart’s Rondo alla Turca and Beethoven’s Turkish March are the well known examples. Even European literature did not escape Turquerie. Goethe wrote twelve poetry collections inspired by Persian poets under the title West-östlicher Divan (West-Eastern Diwan), and Victor Hugo wrote the poem Les Djinns (which was later put to music by Fauré).

Studying Islam

The eighteenth century witnessed widespread interest in Islam as a civilization and as a religion in its own right. The approach taken by European scholars was quite different from that of their predecessors, however. Enlightenment demanded rationality and impartiality, and European explorers took to feverishly collecting all sorts of information and material from the new and exotic worlds in a manner that was to be objective and factual. The example was set by the ‘army’ of scholars that Napoleon had taken with him to Egypt in 1796 CE: they took measurements of pharaonic temples and Islamic mosques, made detailed drawings of the dress people wore as well as flora and fauna, and studied the wildlife and the customs of the people. The results were published in the voluminous Description de l’Égypte, a collection of exceptionally thorough and accurate studies published during the years 1809 to 1822. The study is still a delight to peruse, and is astonishingly relevant to the modern reader.
This approach was also taken to the study of religion. The earlier view of Christianity as the only true religion, reducing all other beliefs to either paganism or heresies, was replaced by a view of religious pluralism, with Christianity being one among other religions. Although many scholars would personally still deem Christianity to be the only and ultimate truth, they employed a secular philosophy in their study of other religions. Consequently, Islam was elevated from its status as an object of polemic discourse to a position of one of the world religions worthy of study. Studies came out that tried to provide objective and accurate descriptions of Islam’s religious rites and dogmas. Some of these studies were even sympathetic to Islam, especially several biographies of Mohammed, possibly as a counterweight to the malicious and derogatory descriptions of the prophet of Islam that were published in previous centuries. The problem with all these studies, however, was that, like their predecessors in previous centuries, they all relied, directly or indirectly, on a limited number of sources in the Arab language. Only with colonial presence in Muslim lands in the nineteenth century did European scholars gain access to the source material needed for the study of Islam.

The newly acquired knowledge encouraged academic and political correctness in terminology. While it was still common to use an ethnic adjective like ‘Saracene’ or ‘Turkish’ in combination with the word ‘faith’ or sometimes even ‘religion,’ scholars gradually started to refer to Islam (the medieval Dominican monk Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, mentioned in chapter Two, who had spend time learning Arabic in Baghdad was perhaps the first to use this term, but also one of the few who did so before the nineteenth century). Nevertheless, even the most impartial academic did not use the name that Muslims call themselves – ‘Muslim’, that is ‘he-who-submits’ (to God) – but referred to ‘Mohammedans’, following the Christian emphasis on the position of Christ and naming his followers after him. Such perspective is an insult – intended or not – to Muslims, however, for their religion emphasizes that they worship God and not His prophet.

With all the shortcomings in the study of Islam and its prophet during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this study was no longer set in the context of Christian polemics. Neither were Muslims perceived as a hostile tribe but as carriers of a great civilization that was retroactively recognized as one of the great world civilizations. Prominent philosophers like Leibniz (1646–1716) and Voltaire (1694–1778) were quite sympathetic towards Islam and its civilization; the historian Edward Gibbon (1737–1794) devotes a large part of his Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire to it, and a scholar like the English historian Ockley (1678–1720) in his History of the Saracens even made the point of favouring the civilization of the Muslim East
over that in the Christian Western world. In short, “the eighteenth century saw the Muslim East through fraternal and understanding eyes.”

2. Nineteenth Century: Orientalism and Exclusive Othering

Vision of the Turk and Orientalism

This perspective of admiration for a great Islamic civilization changed in the nineteenth century, however, and was replaced by a Western sense of superiority over other cultures and civilizations. The Christian superiority of previous centuries, supported by theological studies, was now succeeded by a civilizational superiority supported by scientific study. The evolutionary theory of Darwin was applied by academics to explain why Europeans had evolved to a social, economic, political and cultural status that was deemed so much better and higher than that of all other peoples in the world. One of the sciences that was fashionable at that time was racial studies, which tried to determine the qualities of a race and, consequently, its level on the ladder of civilization. Within these studies the question became pertinent whether the Ottomans or Turks could be considered ‘Europeans.’ The answer was mostly negative, for two reasons: Turks were considered descendants from Asian tribes and were therefore, firstly, racially different and, secondly, invaders who had colonized the Balkans. From this perspective, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was nothing more than the rightful final expulsion of an ‘Asian’ power from Europe.

According to nineteenth century Europeans, it was the Asian character of the Turk that made him prone to barbarism and brutality, and explained the atrocities he allegedly committed during the Balkan wars. And it was the same character that, according to the nineteenth century historian Marriot, explained the “clash” between “the habits, ideas and preconceptions” of the West and East in south eastern Europe as an “immemorial antithesis” that had started with the contest between Persians and Greeks, and in the Middle Ages between “the forces of Islam and Christianity”, and that “reached its climax, for the time being, in the great battle of Tours [Poitiers – MB] (732) and, again, with the battle of Vienna (1683).”

The Ottomans did not hold similar views on their origins, however. On the contrary, not only did they have strong ties with Europe, but they also saw themselves as part of Europe’s legacy. From a ideological perspective, they considered the Ottoman Empire as the heir to and substitute for the Byzantine Empire (which also straddled the lands of south-eastern Europe and Asia Minor). From a pragmatic
perspective, these were the areas that provided the main income of the Empire, as well as most of its functionaries. These functionaries were mostly recruited through the system of dev¸sirme or boy-levy, and of the forty-nine grand vizirs who served the Ottoman sultans between 1453 to 1632 CE, only five were of Turkish origin: eleven were Albanian, eleven Slav, six Greek, one Armenian, one Georgian, one Italian, and the rest were Christian-born of unknown nationality. And finally, from a cultural and institutional perspective, the Ottomans since the fifteenth century had “drifted closer to European standards”, and by the end of the seventeenth century were “as integrated into Europe as [they] would ever be”. In short, the Turks and their predecessors, the Ottomans, had for centuries were oriented westward rather than eastward.

But even if, for whatever reasons, one might consider the Ottoman Empire de facto part of Europe, in practice it was not accepted as such. European states, despite their internal differences, defined themselves as a ‘Christian family of nations,’ a grand narrative that in the nineteenth century had replaced its religious specificity with the notion of a common European civilization and culture that rose high above all the others in the world. The Ottoman Empire was not considered a member of this family. This became manifest in its exclusion from the Congress of Vienna in 1815 CE, where the European countries re-arranged their political and geographical relations after the defeat of Napoleon. Only in 1856 CE, after the Crimean War in which European powers sided with the Ottomans against the Russians, did the victors decide that the independence and integrity of the Ottoman Empire was vital to the ‘Peace of Europe,’ and consequently allowed the Sublime Porte “to participate in the advantages of the Public Law and System of Europe.” In return, the European powers demanded from the Ottomans reforms on property, justice and rights of their Christian subjects, which the Porte granted by decree in that same year. This status was codified at the Hague Conference in 1899 CE, and again in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 CE. Nevertheless, these treaties could not deny that the Ottoman Empire, and its successor the secular Turkish Republic, in the eyes of Europeans remained an outsider, as became apparent when Turkey applied for membership of the European Union. We will come to speak of this in the next chapter.

The idea of Turks as the exclusive Other – as opposed to the civilized European – found its expression in the new trend of Orientalism. While Turquerie was an innocent fashion without preconceptions or judgmental predispositions, Orientalism definitely was not. Orientalism – not to be confused with the academic discipline, of which we come to speak below – was the representation of the image that Europeans
had of the Orient, and in particular the Arab Muslim world. This exotic world appealed to the rising trend of Romanticism. More prominently, however, Orientalism was a European discourse based on stereotypes and prejudices, whereby the Orient was a projection of the Other who embodied all the characteristics and qualities that were considered the opposite of those held by Europeans. The many paintings in the so-called Orientalist style show a whole range of these characteristics and qualities: sensual ladies, often nude and reclining (as opposed to the self-composed and virtuous European), malicious men at female slave auctions (as opposed to a European sense of gender equality), poverty and backwardness (as opposed to European modernity and prosperity), fatalistic believers (as opposed to European Christianity that inspires self-determination and self-development), and fanaticism (as opposed to European self-restraint based on rationalism).

The ideological construct called Orientalism reflected Europe’s sense of cultural hegemony and self-righteousness towards the rest of the world that served as a justification for its colonial policies as a mission to bring civilization. This was mainly a feature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before that, the arrows of Enlightened critics were mostly pointed at Europe itself, and Islam was instrumental in that criticism: Islam’s relative religious tolerance and its lack of a church structure that imposed religious doctrine were used as mirror for the rigidity of European Christianity of that time. By the nineteenth century, however, the Enlightenment was identified with the European mind-set, and was carried along with imperialist adventure into the world. The European vision of Islam acquired new impulses, the images of the well-structured, highly organized and relatively prosperous Ottoman Empire being replaced by the poor and backward societies of Africa and Asia. The critique of Islam that was commonly framed in religious polemics was now reformulated into the newly found secularized narrative framed in the Enlightenment philosophy: Islamic societies were portrayed as closed, rigid and lacking the freedom and the rational thought that would otherwise have brought them progress and prosperity.

Studying Islam

By the nineteenth century, colonies were not mere sources of profitable trade or extortion, but had become vast lands ruled by colonial European powers. Many of the European colonies were Muslim majority countries. The Dutch in Indonesia, the British in India and Egypt, and the French in North Africa were for the first time in their history confronted with Muslim subjects, Islamic institutions like the religious
Orientialist academics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are not to be compared with modern scholars of Islamic or Middle Eastern studies. The Orientalist academics had a background of philology and philosophy. They were often not interested in the daily and contemporary situation of Muslim people, culture, religion and societies, but in disclosing the textual legacies of these cultures, and in theories that situated Islam in larger conceptual frameworks like history of religions or the anthropology of races or the genealogy of civilizations. With the exception of a few, these academics did not feel the need to be in physical contact with the peoples or societies they were studying, but devoted their time to the study of the legacy of their cultures and civilizations as documented in texts.

On the other hand, the policy makers of colonial rule in the European capitals, as well as the diplomats, merchants, travellers, military, administrators living within the colonies had a great interest in factual information about these places and peoples: agriculture, economics, politics, legal systems and customary law, social and cultural characteristics of the societies and peoples. These are what we would nowadays call the academic disciplines of anthropology, sociology, economics and political science – disciplines that were non-existent in the nineteenth century, or at best in their infancy. In the nineteenth century, the gathering and analysis of this kind of information, whether academically sound or not, was mostly instigated for pragmatic reasons, for it was to serve the purposes of colonial rule.

The distinction made here between a philological ivory tower approach and a pragmatic policy-oriented approach does not mean that research undertaken by either was academically unsound or biased. On the contrary, quite a few scholars applied a rigid positivistic discipline in their scholarly activities and were the founders of the encyclopaedias and vast library collections that were to serve as the sources for future research (including research undertaken by modern scholars coming from the Muslim world to study in the West). Also, among the European travellers and explorers in the Muslim world were several scholars who were often recruited by their governments. The English archaeologist and Arabist T.E. Lawrence (1888–1935 CE) is the most famous, and he shared his dismay about what he considered European betrayal of the Arabs (they were not given the lands promised to them by the English in return...
for their revolt against the Ottoman Turk in World War I) with the French scholar Louis Massignon (1882–1962 CE) who had conducted research in Morocco, Algeria and Iraq. Another example is the Dutch scholar Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936 CE), who was renowned for his research in Mecca, and acted as an advisor to the Dutch military command that was in charge of putting down the rebellious Muslim people of the Indonesian province Aceh.

When it came to Islam, the European of the nineteenth century had two approaches. On the one hand, there was a pragmatic approach employed by the colonial rulers who used their knowledge of Islamic clergy and Islamic law to facilitate their colonial administration. For instance, the French and English allowed the local sharia courts to continue their work and maintain their authority, but only insofar as they contributed to the general order of colonial rule. On the other hand, Islam was often conceived as one, if not the main cause for the backwardness of the Muslim countries at that time. This idea was based on several theories that we briefly introduced above and that had become common knowledge for the average nineteenth century European. According to these theories, not only race but also religion was an intrinsic part of each civilization, and each civilization was unique in its own right and developed at its own pace. From this reasoning sprang the idea that European civilization of that time was attributed to Christianity, and that by consequence Islam was to be blamed for the deplorable state of Muslim societies. Why this was the case at this particular juncture (nine centuries earlier the situation between the Muslim and Christian worlds was reversed) was the main question that put many European academics to work. Some would argue that Islamic civilization had had its time, with the golden age of economic and intellectual prosperity in the tenth century, to be only briefly resuscitated by the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century. Others merely declared Christianity to be a religion of progress and Islam a religion of stagnation. And then there were those who shared the conclusion of many Muslim reformists that Islamic doctrine had become stagnant in the course of time and had to be revived if it was to cope with the demands of modern times.

Regardless of the validity of the reasons put forward to explain the difference between the Western and Eastern worlds, the primal focus of attention was Islam. In consequence, the people living in these societies were regarded as homo Islamicus, a person who is shaped and guided by no other factors than his religion of Islam. This concept conflated racial and religious qualities, defining Islam as the only identity to the exclusion of all other identities. In this mindset, the position of women was attributed to Islam rather than to tradition or culture, revolts were the result of
Islamic fanaticism rather than political or economic factors, and anti-imperialism was a characteristic of pan-Islam rather than local social-political opposition. The view of Islam as the single factor and motivation of Muslim lives remained a persistent concept, and enjoyed a second life in the late twentieth century, as we will see in the next chapter.