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**Visions of the Islam in Europe: European attitudes
towards Muslim Asians**

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Abstract

This essay argues that the public discourse surrounding Muslim Asian immigrants in Europe frequently presents them as enemies to stability, democracy and human rights in Europe. Beginning with early-modern descriptions of Muslims by Alexis de Tocqueville, and his perception of Muslims as “deadly”, this essay argues that although his language may seem antiquated today, his principle idea retains acceptance in discussions on Islam in Europe today. In particular, the public reactions to the 7 July 2005 London bombings, the 2004 assassination of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, the Jyllands-Posten cartoons scandal and the potential ascension of Turkey to the EU have spurred political speeches, voting patterns and newspaper reporting expressing the notion that Islam and Muslims were dangerous to Europe. This essay concludes that not only do these events undermine European senses of security, they also subject Muslims to continuing suspicion and prejudice in Europe.

SECTION I

In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Palestinian-American writer Edward Saïd memorably described European attitudes towards the Orient, writing that “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences”.² Consequently, when the Commission of the European Union released its communication *Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships* in 2001, and posited the existence of

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² E. W. Saïd, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p. 1.

an ongoing stereotype in Europe that cast Asia as “distant and exotic”³ this statement seemed neither new nor novel. However, Saïd’s theory of Orientalism goes beyond European exoticizing of the Orient, arguing that the depiction of the East in Western thought is marked by “the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and culture”.⁴ With this in mind, the European Commission’s belief that Asia remains exotic and mysterious in European minds implicitly suggests that Asia and the Orient represent something akin to the Belgian Congo in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: one of the “blank spaces on the earth...a place of darkness”.⁵

A major thread in this argument, Saïd argues, is “the history of anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the West”.⁶ This history includes Enlightenment-era rationalist critics of Islam, such as Alexis de Tocqueville, the famed French historian and political theorist, who offered his critique of Islam in an 1840 essay:

Mohammed preached his religion to uneducated people, nomads and warriors; this religion had war as its purpose; hence the small number of rites and the simplicity of worship. A complicated and ritualistic cult requires temples, a sedentary population, and relatively peaceful habits.⁷

Tocqueville identifies war as Islam’s most significant purpose, and in his rationale applies to the Middle East, homeland of Mohammed, the image of a war-like people easily led. Consequently, the idea emerges that Islam is a religion soaked in barbarism. Indeed, Tocqueville would later write in 1843 to his correspondent Arthur de Gobineau:

I studied the Koran a great deal, mainly because of our position vis-à-vis the Muslim population of Algeria and throughout the Near East. I must tell you that I came away from that study with the conviction that by and large, there have been few religions in the world as deadly to men as that of Mohammed.⁸

Tocqueville had already expressed his belief that Islam was inherently violent in his earlier *Notes on the Koran* from 1838, in which he writes of the “encouragement, commandments for holy war” and “The violence of Muhammad’s language principally directed against idolaters and Jews”.⁹ This point leads by extrapolation to the idea that Islam, and by extension the Middle East and Islamic Asia, is inextricably linked to images and associations of violence and barbarism. The Middle East, together with Islamic Asia, thus becomes a region that is “distant” not only physically but also philosophically, a dangerous land governed by a religion “deadly to men”.

³ European Commission, *Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhancing Partnerships*, Communication from the Commission, Brussels, 4 September 2001a, p. 14.

⁴ E. W. Saïd, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p. 7.

⁵ J. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1999 (2nd Edition), p. 73.

⁶ E. W. Saïd, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p. 26.

⁷ A. de Tocqueville, “Tocqueville Notes Before his First Trip to Algeria, 1840”, in O. Zunz and A. S. Kahan (eds), *The Tocqueville Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002b, p. 227.

⁸ A. de Tocqueville, “Letter to Arthur de Gobineau, October 22, 1843”, in O. Zunz and A. S. Kahan (eds), *The Tocqueville Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002a, p. 229.

⁹ A. de Tocqueville, “Notes on the Koran (March 1838)”, in J. Pitts (ed), *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, p. 27.

However, in the Europe of today, Islam itself cannot be seen as physically “distant” from Europe. Jan Rath *et al.* estimate there to be five to six million Muslims living in Western Europe now, the result of significant post-World War Two migration.¹⁰ They argue further that European Muslims see Islam as a normative system, or rather:

...a series of norms and values giving direction to everyday life. According to this view, wherever Muslims may be, both in the Muslim world and in the diaspora, they will constantly strive to arrange their lives as much as possible in accordance with this normative system, because that is the way of Islam.¹¹

Yet at the same time as Islam provides European Muslims with a set of normative values, the European Commission defines its own understanding of normative European values. In a Communication to the Council of Ministers and European Parliament dated 8 May 2001, the Commission stated:

Uniquely amongst international actors, all fifteen Member States of the Union are democracies espousing the same Treaty-based principles in their internal and external policies. This gives the EU substantial political and moral weight. Furthermore, as an economic and political player with global diplomatic reach, and with a substantial budget for external assistance, the EU has both influence and leverage, which it can deploy on behalf of democratization and human rights.¹²

As the EU lays out its own normative values here, espousing democratization and human rights, there emerges a dialectic comparing this vision of Europe to the European conception of the Middle East and Islamic Asia, in which the aforementioned European tradition of thought sees its values as incompatible with those of Islam. Indeed, Jocelyne Cesari¹³ argues for the continued relevance of Saïd’s approach, stating that contemporary attitudes to Islam in Europe “would seem very familiar to any eighteenth-century gentleman or *honnête homme*”. Yet it is most significant to note, as illustrated by Rath *et al.*, that European Muslims may subscribe more to the normative values of Islam than to those of the European Commission. Thus, the European idea of Islamic Asia also becomes a European idea of Islamic Asians and their descendants living in Europe.

This situation brings to mind Ahmed Gurnah’s idea of “Elvis in Zanzibar”. Gurnah¹⁴ explores the global exchange and competition of cultures, giving as example his own childhood in Zanzibar in the 1950s, when he listened to American jazz and pop music, which to him never appeared “foreign”. Gurnah

¹⁰ J. Rath, R. Penninx, K. Groenendik and A. Meyer, *Western Europe and its Islam*, Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2001, p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹² European Commission, *The European Union’s Role in Promoting Human Rights and Democratization in Third Countries*, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Brussels, 8 May 2001b, pp. 3-4.

¹³ J. Cesari, “Muslim Identities in Europe: The Snare of Exceptionalism”, in A. Al-Azmeh and E. Fokas (eds), *Islam in Europe: Diversity, Identity and Influence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 53.

¹⁴ A. Gurnah, “Elvis in Zanzibar”, in A. Scott (ed), *The Limits of Globalization: Cases and Arguments*, London/New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 118.

sees this global exchange of culture as predominantly positive, arguing that “engagement with ‘foreign’ culture introduced us to arguments and literature that we later used to explore further and defend those distinctive and valuable aspects of our organic culture”.¹⁵ He then concludes:

Culture is globalized and it is not entirely or even mainly a negative experience. When Zanzibaris sing rock and roll or South Americans laugh at a Chaplin film we should be glad, particularly when we notice English people are eating curries and reading African and Indian writers. This connotes a widening of human experiences and wisdom.¹⁶

However, at the same time Gurnah acknowledges the ability of “foreign” cultures to affirm previously held connotations close at hand: “Watching *Dallas*, Arabs confirmed rather than abandoned their conventional views”.¹⁷ Exposure to other cultures may come not only through the international diffusion of Elvis Presley or *Dallas*, but also through the large-scale migration of peoples. The arrival of Muslim Asians in Europe brings Islam to Europe’s immediate environment, and thus the question arises whether this reaffirms or challenges the existing pattern of Western thought on the Middle East and Islamic Asia.

Tariq Ramadan¹⁸ writes that Muslim immigrants in Europe are faced with the challenge of overcoming the deep impact in shaping European perceptions of Islam left by events such as the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Salman Rushdie affair, the reign of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. However, more recent events within Europe have brought the Islamic European community into a public discourse in which impressions of Islam reminiscent of Tocqueville are frequently introduced, suggesting that Islamic Asians and their descendants in Europe continue to be seen, much like Islamic Asia itself, in a “distant and exotic” light. One such event was the July 2005 London Bombings, an event perpetrated by British-born Muslims of Pakistani origin, which led, as stated in a report by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, to a public debate on issues of integration and the radicalization of British Muslims.¹⁹ A BBC public poll from August 2005 cites 27% of British nationals as agreeing that Islam is incompatible with values of British democracy, with less than half disagreeing outright with this statement.²⁰ A further significant event in this context is the 2004 assassination of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, responsible for the 2001 film *Submission*, highly critical of Islam, by Muslim extremist Mohammed Bouyeri, described by Anglo-Dutch historian Ian Buruma²¹ as having “exposed dangerous fractures that run through all European nations”. According to

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 141.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁸ T. Ramadan, “Islam and Muslims in Europe: A Silent Revolution towards Rediscovery”, in Y. Yazbeck Haddad (ed), *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 158-159.

¹⁹ European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, *The Impact of 7 July 2005 London Bomb Attacks on Muslim Communities in the EU*, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2006, p. 25.

²⁰ “BBC Multiculturalism Poll: Final Results”, London, BBC, 10 August 2005, p. 4.

²¹ I. Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance*, New York: Penguin Press, 2006, p. 35.

Buruma, French social scientist Olivier Roy is correct in his assessment that Islam is now a European religion, and “How Europeans, Muslims as well as non-Muslims, cope with this is the question that will decide our future”.²² The van Gogh assassination is mirrored by the Jyllands-Posten cartoon controversy in Denmark, during which Flemming Rose, the cultural editor of the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten who had decided to publish controversial cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed, wrote an op-ed piece for *The Washington Post*, stating:

When I visit a mosque, I show my respect by taking off my shoes. I follow the customs, just as I do in a church, synagogue or other holy place. But if a believer demands that I, as a nonbeliever, observe his taboos in the public domain, he is not asking for my respect, but for my submission. And that is incompatible with a secular democracy.²³

These events present instances in which the old Enlightenment critiques of Islam are given the opportunity to reenter the public discourse. As such, the non-Muslim European perspectives of Islam have shifted from being seen as “distant” physically, yet the perception remains within European society that Islam is “distant” philosophically.

This essay will argue that the European image of Asia as a “distant and exotic” place is maintained in the scholarly and public discourse regarding European citizens of Asian descent, specifically referring to attitudes towards Islam. The ongoing presence in the European discourse of the idea that Islam, as it springs from the Middle East and Asia, is an ideology fundamentally opposed to the values of post-Enlightenment Europe, and that Muslim Europeans of Asian descent continue to exist outside the realm of the secular democratic European system, denotes that Islam may still symbolize the “Other” who is as “exotic” as he is violent or barbaric. Thus, as Asia is seen as “distant and exotic”, so too are Muslim ethnic Asians, even those who live or are born in Europe. To this end, this essay will first discuss the image of Muslims as inherently violent, with reference to the public discourse following the 7 July 2005 London bombing; secondly, it will examine the image of Muslims as essentially opposed to free speech and human rights, with reference to the discourses surrounding the assassination of Theo van Gogh and the Jyllands-Posten cartoon controversy. Finally, this essay will consider the public and scholarly discourse on Turkey’s ambitions for EU membership, with a view to establishing the notion that Islamic Asians, like Asia itself, may be viewed by non-Muslim Europeans as the barbaric “Other”, founded in the Enlightenment visions of Islamic Asia and Asians.

²² Ibid.

²³ F. Rose, “Why I Published Those Cartoons,” *The Washington Post*, 19 February 2006, p. B01.

SECTION II

According to Humayun Ansari,²⁴ the early phases of post-War economic strategy Britain “called for a large number of migrant workers from ‘less-developed’ countries, many of them Muslim”. Accordingly, a Muslim community developed in Britain, largely of Pakistani origin; Ansari suggests that there were over 600,000 Muslims of Pakistani origin living in Britain in the late 1990s.²⁵ At the same time, there were also significant Muslim communities of over 100,000 in the UK of Bangladeshi, Indian and Turkish descent.²⁶ Taken together, these figures indicate the existence in Britain of a significant Muslim community of Asian origin, thereby bringing the “Other” into the British homeland. The British Muslim community came into focus after February 1989, when Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* against British-Indian author Salman Rushdie for blaspheming Islam in his novel *The Satanic Verses*. According to Steven Vertovec,²⁷ this event

...created or bolstered an image of a Muslim population that was homogenous in its antimodern values and dangerous in its passions, posing a challenge both to nationalist ideologies of “Britishness” and to liberal notions about freedom and human rights.

Events like the Rushdie affair, Vertovec argues, have led to an increasingly derogatory image of Islam and Muslims in Britain, termed “Islamophobia” by the left-leaning British newspaper *The Guardian*.²⁸ In 1996, the Runnymede Trust, an independent trust which researches social policy on race and ethnicity, established the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. In 1997 the Trust published its report, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, which stated that “anti-Muslim prejudice has grown so considerably and so rapidly in recent years that a new item in the vocabulary is needed so that it can be identified and acted against”.²⁹ Hence the term “Islamophobia”. However, though the term itself is new, the phenomenon it denotes is not, for Vertovec’s description of an “antimodern” and “dangerous” group threatening the “British” notions of human rights and freedom fits with earlier critiques of Islam such as that of Tocqueville. And while events like the Rushdie Affair brought the image of the barbaric and potentially murderous Muslim into the spotlight, it was the 7 July 2005 London bombings which provided the watershed moment for this concept to the younger generations of non-Muslim Britons.

The London bombings of 7 July 2005, according to the UK-government sponsored *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th*

²⁴ H. Ansari, *The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain Since 1800*, London: Hurst & Company, 2004, p. 145.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ S. Vertovec, “Islamophobia and Muslim Recognition in Britain”, in Y. Yazbeck Haddad (ed), *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁹ The Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, London, Runnymede Trust, 1997, p. 1.

July 2005,³⁰ involved four bombs detonated on three London underground trains and a double-decker bus by Mohammed Sidique Khan, Shehzad Tanweer, Jermaine Lindsay and Hasib Hussain, all young British Muslims, of whom three (Khan, Tanweer and Hussain) were of Pakistani descent. Jorgen Nielson³¹ points out that the immediate response from leading British politicians was that the bombers “neither represented nor had the support of the vast majority of the Muslim community”. However, Nielson also notes:

Despite this, pressure was very soon put on the Muslim community as a whole to re-emphasize their commitment to being British in ways which implied that their opposition to some aspects of government policy, in particular UK involvement in the war in Iraq, was potentially tantamount to treason. The effect in both instances has been to re-enforce traditional Western views of a monolithic, threatening Islam.³²

The effects of 7 July 2005 in Britain were therefore to strengthen the traditional “Othering” of Islam and Muslim Asians as dark, barbaric and thus threatening to British democracy and freedom. Interestingly, the bombings and their aftermath also triggered subsequent attempts by other Britons of Asian extraction to distance themselves from Muslims; Shivani Nagarajah³³ notes that British Sikhs wore t-shirts with the slogan “Don’t freak, I’m a Sikh” on London’s public transport system. Nagarajah argues that Sikh and Hindu Britons, believing that Muslims have lumbered from one controversy to the other following the Salman Rushdie affair, have consequently sought to distance themselves from Muslims so that the prevailing concept that Islam is incompatible with traditional British values does not “spill over” onto them. This concept is underlined by the August 2005 BBC poll, which found that 69% of Britons felt that Britain’s national identity was essentially Christian, while a further 27% found Islam incompatible with British democracy.³⁴ The London bombings thus appear to have further crystallized a public opinion that British Muslims of Asian extraction are set apart from non-Muslim Britons, philosophically “distant” from British values of freedom and democracy, and “exotic” as deadly barbarians akin to the saber-wielding Turks seen in Eugène Delacroix’s epic tableau *Le Massacre de Scio* (The Massacre at Chios).

The effects of the London bombings on British perceptions of Asian Muslims were not short term, and can thus be seen to continue in the years following the attacks. One example of such effects is evidenced by recent attitudes to the creation in Britain of Muslim spaces. Barbara D. Metcalf³⁵ suggests that the

³⁰ “Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005”, London, The Stationary Office, 2006, p. 13.

³¹ J. Nielson, “The Question of Euro-Islam: Restriction or Opportunity?”, in A. Al-Azmeh, and E. Fokas (eds), *Islam in Europe: Diversity, Identity and Influence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 44.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

³³ S. Nagarajah, “Mistaken Identity”, *Guardian*, 5 September 2005, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/sep/05/religion.july7>>, accessed 3 June 2008.

³⁴ “BBC Multiculturalism Poll: Final Results”, London, BBC, 10 August 2005, p. 4.

³⁵ B. Daly Metcalf, “Sacred Words, Sanctioned Practice, New Communities”, in B. Daly Metcalf (ed), *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California

“cultural space” where Muslims react with one another and with the larger community can be crystallized by a “physical space”, or residences and community buildings which mark the urban environment. In a CNN 2007 piece on British Muslims entitled “The War Within”,³⁶ British Muslims complained that a plan to construct a new mosque in East London, close to the future site of the 2012 Olympic Games, was being blocked by English counselors due to a general mistrust of Islam. Islamic, or Islamic-inspired, architecture would not seem wholly out of place in the UK, for as Gulzar Haider³⁷ argues, the West has often incorporated elements of Islamic architectural styles into its own architecture to lend it an air of exotic luxury. Perhaps the most famous British example is the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, completed in 1815 for the Prince Regent by architect Josh Nash, which features Mogul-inspired domes and minarets.³⁸ The phenomenon is in fact pan-European; perhaps most interestingly, Islamic influences can also be seen in Alupka Palace in the Crimea, Ukraine, which features minaret-like spires and an open half-dome recalling a mosque’s mihrab, which points the direction to Mecca.³⁹ Arabic text, approximately reading “no victory exists but through Allah”, decorates the dome’s interior.⁴⁰ The issue is thus not limited to the aesthetics of Islamic architecture: rather, Islamic architecture appears less palatable to the European aesthetic when it is seen as a public space for Muslims themselves. In 2007, *The New York Times* noted a public petition of 250,000 against the East London mosque; the petitioners reportedly believed that “a large mosque had no right to exist in such a prominent place in a Christian country”.⁴¹ There thus appears to be a continued sense of discomfort with Muslims in Britain, which here manifests itself as hostility to the construction of what would be a prominent symbol of Muslim presence. British Muslims of Asian descent are therefore still burdened with the perception that they are incompatible with European ideals of freedom and human rights, and are therefore part of the European image of Asia and Asians as the exotic “Other”.

SECTION III

The 2004 assassination of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh provides further evidence of a European perception of Islam as incompatible with European democratic values. Van Gogh was responsible for the short-film *Submission: Part 1* (2004),⁴² written by Dutch-Somali politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, which

Press,
pp. 2-3.

1996,

³⁶ C. Amanpour, “The War Within”, first aired 17 January 2007 on CNN, transcript available online at: <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/070117/i_ins.01.html>, accessed 3 June 2008.

³⁷ G. Haider, “Muslim Space and the Practice of Architecture”, in B. Daly Metcalf (ed), *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996, p. 33.

³⁸ I. Davidson Kalmar, “Moorish Style: Orientalism, the Jews, and Synagogue Architecture”, *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Spring/Summer 2001, p. 74.

³⁹ J. Mayfield, “Ukrainian Summer Palace of Czar Nicholas II”, <<http://www.euroheritage.net/ukraine/gallery.shtml>>, accessed 3 June 2008.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ J. Perlez, “A Battle Rages in London Over a Mega-Mosque Plan”, *The New York Times*, 4 November 2007, p. 8.

⁴² *Submission: Part 1*, dir. T. van Gogh. Film. VPRO Television, 2004.

features a woman in a transparent chador, her body painted with texts from the Koran, recounting four stories of Muslim women abused by their relatives and husbands. Van Gogh was assassinated by a Dutch citizen of Moroccan descent, Mohammed Bouyeri, in the centre of Amsterdam, who then pinned a note to van Gogh's chest, written in Dutch and Arabic, calling for a holy war against non-believers.⁴³ As Bouyeri, like Hirsi Ali, was of African descent, one might be tempted to dismiss the van Gogh affair as an "African" problem. However, this would be to oversimplify the matter; Ian Buruma⁴⁴ notes that although Islamic terrorism is more readily associated in Holland with Dutch-Moroccans, after van Gogh's murder the image extended to the Dutch-Turkish community, with racial slurs directed at the Turkish-Dutch transforming from "filthy Turk" to "filthy Muslim".

Buruma further argues that anti-Islamic sentiment is substantially grounded in the Dutch national identity, such as in attitudes to the Dutch post-colonial period, when the Dutch promised the predominantly Christian Moluccans of Indonesia an independent homeland.⁴⁵ Though this project was unsuccessful, it appeared to indicate a Dutch imperative to save Christians from the predominantly Muslim Indonesians after the Dutch departure from South-East Asia. Maarten P. Vink⁴⁶ traces anti-Islamic sentiment in the Netherlands to 1991, when Frits Bolkestein, then leader (1990-8) of the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy), questioned the compatibility between Islamic and Western values, which Vink sees as reflective of the popularity of Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory. The entry of Muslims into the Netherlands was seen to undermine Dutch social and political organization, built on the "three pillars" model - Dutch Protestants, Catholics and Socialists - which, according to Thijl Sunier and Mira van Kuijeren,⁴⁷ determined to a large extent political and social relations in the Netherlands. Muslims are outsiders to this model, and their very presence in the Netherlands undermines it; Buruma notes the jarring effect of conversing with a Muslim

...who spoke Dutch with the strong southern lilt of Limburg, near the Belgian border. It is an accent that normally can mean only one thing to a Dutch person: that the speaker's family is Catholic. This is no longer the case, of course.⁴⁸

If Dutch-Muslims were already seen as undermining the social fabric of the Netherlands, then an event like the assassination of a public figure by an Islamic fundamentalist would only highlight the idea that Muslims were the "Other", not part of any traditional "pillar" of Dutch society, and therefore outsiders in the realm of Dutch democracy.

⁴³ I. Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance*, New York: Penguin Press, 2006, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁶ M. P. Vink, "Dutch 'Multiculturalism' Beyond the Pillarisation Myth", *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 5, 2007, p. 338.

⁴⁷ T. Sunier and M. van Kuijeren, "Islam in the Netherlands", in Y. Yazbeck Haddad, (ed), *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 145.

⁴⁸ I. Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance*, New York: Penguin Press, 2006, p. 119.

The van Gogh assassination provoked a Europe-wide debate on the place of Muslims in European society. Perhaps the most polemical opinion was provided by French academic Pascal Brückner, who admonished those who deemed van Gogh and Hirsi Ali “deliberately provocative”, writing:

This vicious mechanism is well known. Those who revolt against barbarism are themselves accused of being barbarians. In politics as in philosophy, the equals sign is always an abdication. If thinking involves weighing one's words to name the world well, drawing comparisons in other words, then leveling distinctions testifies to intellectual bankruptcy. Shouting CRS = SS as in May '68, making Bush = Bin Laden or equating Voltaire to Savonarola is giving cheap satisfaction to questionable approximations. Similarly, the Enlightenment is often depicted as nothing but another religion, as mad and intransigent as the Catholicism of the Inquisition or radical Islam...In an abominable dialectic, the dawn of reason gave birth to nothing but monsters.⁴⁹

This outspoken criticism of those whom Brückner sees as betraying the ideals of Enlightenment reflects the belief that Muslims and the Enlightenment are incompatible. Brückner appears to argue that a defense of Islam in light of van Gogh's assassination equates to a betrayal of the Enlightenment, and thus the foundations of European civilization and its values of freedom and human rights. Again, the Muslim becomes the “Other”, and European citizens of Asian-Muslim descent continue to be portrayed in public discourse as removed and distant from European norms and values.

The view that Islam runs contrary to European ideas of freedom reached what was perhaps its zenith in early 2006, when controversy erupted over cartoons published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* and depicting the prophet Mohammed, including one in which he dons a bomb-shaped turban. The cartoons were accompanied by a text from Flemming Rose, cultural editor of *Jyllands-Posten*, which read:

They demand a special position, insisting on special consideration of their own religious feelings. It is incompatible with contemporary democracy and freedom of speech, where you must be ready to put up with insults, mockery and ridicule. It is certainly not always attractive and nice to look at, and it does not mean that religious feelings should be made fun of at any price, but that is of minor importance in the present context.⁵⁰

The resulting violent protests from offended Muslims prompted an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* addressed to the Muslim world, which stated, “Many of us in the West were reminded of how vast the chasm is between you and us”.⁵¹ In Europe, the growing consensus that Islam was deleterious to the secular democratic system was intensified when, shortly after the *Jyllands-Posten* saga, the Deutsche Oper company in Berlin temporarily canceled its production of Mozart's opera *Idomeneo*, fearing that its portrayal of the

⁴⁹ P. Brückner, “Enlightenment Fundamentalism or Racism of the Anti-Racists?”, 24 January 2007, <<http://www.signandsight.com/features/1146.html>>, accessed 4 June 2008.

⁵⁰ Cited in B. Goldstone, “Violence and the Profane: Islam, Liberal Democracy, and the Limits of Secular Discipline”, *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 80, No. 1, 2007, p. 221.

⁵¹ D. Brooks, “Drafting Hitler”, *The New York Times*, 9 February 2006, p. A07.

severed head of Mohammed might re-ignite Muslim protests. The cancellation led to accusations that Islamic fundamentalists were destroying free speech in Europe.⁵² Brian Goldstone⁵³ sees reactions to this controversy as characterized by a presented contrast between Islam and the defining characteristics of democracy, namely freedom, reason and pluralism. As with the Dutch case, the implication was thereby made that Muslims were far removed from the European secular democratic system.

As with the case in the Netherlands after van Gogh's assassination, the *Jyllands-Posten* saga appears to have been the catalyst that brought to the fore sentiments already present in non-Muslim European society. Jorgen Nielson⁵⁴ notes a 2002 article published by a group of senior journalists in the Danish daily newspaper *Politiken* which argued that the 2001 Danish parliamentary elections were marked by broad sections of the political dialogue being focused on suspicion of Islam and Muslims. Pernille Ammitzboll and Lorenzo Vidino⁵⁵ observe that the 2001 parliamentary elections marked a turning-point in Denmark, giving victory to the right-wing *Venstre Danmarks Liberale Parti* (Venstre Liberal Party of Denmark) under Anders Fogh Rasmussen, which formed a coalition government with the nationalist *Dansk Folkeparti* (Danish People's Party), resulting in restrictive new Danish citizenship laws and a decrease in state benefits available to immigrants. They further note an increase in Danish newspapers on reports critical of the Islamic community, ranging from honour killings of Danish-Muslim women to young Muslims forming criminal gangs; particularly inflammatory to the Danish press was the statement of one radical Copenhagen imam that Danish women who do not wear a veil are "asking for rape".⁵⁶ This representation of Muslims already suggests the idea that they do not respect European concepts of freedom. The *Jyllands-Posten* saga could only serve to crystallize this idea, adding to the image of Muslims in Europe as the people of a dark, distant and decidedly different continent.

SECTION IV

The aspirations of Turkey to join the European Union, and the reactions amongst non-Muslim Europeans, although highly complex, offer further views on prevailing European views of Islamic Asia. A brief examination of this situation is therefore useful in gauging the prevalence of the idea in Europe that Islamic Asia and Asians are inherently different from Europe and non-Muslim Europeans. Eminent political and religious leaders in Europe have suggested that Turkey is not European, perhaps most notably Pope Benedict

⁵² "Fury as Berlin Opera Cancels Performance", *Der Spiegel*, 26 September 2006, <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,439393,00.html>>, accessed 7 June 2008.

⁵³ B. Goldstone, "Violence and the Profane: Islam, Liberal Democracy, and the Limits of Secular Discipline", *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 80, No. 1, 2007, p. 208.

⁵⁴ J. Nielson, "The Question of Euro-Islam: Restriction or Opportunity?", in A. Al-Azmeh, and E. Fokas (eds), *Islam in Europe: Diversity, Identity and Influence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 24.

⁵⁵ P. Ammitzboll, and L. Vidino, "After the Danish Cartoon Controversy", *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Winter 2007, p. 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

XVI, who in an interview with the right-leaning French newspaper *Le Figaro* in August 2004 stated that Turkey had “always [been] in contrast with Europe”, and should be encouraged to form part of an Arab (and, by extension, Muslim) block.⁵⁷ Similarly, Esra Özyürek⁵⁸ highlights comments by former French President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing (in office 1974-81), who presided over the convention responsible for writing the new EU constitution, that Turkey’s entry to the European Union would be the end of Europe. According to Özyürek,⁵⁹ Giscard d’Estaing’s view that Turkey possessed a “different culture, a different approach, a different way of Life” presented “the Muslim faith of Turkey’s majority as the single most important factor making Turks non-European”. Indeed, Philip Schlesinger and François Foret⁶⁰ argue that the public debate over the place of Christianity in the EU Constitution was in part constructed around the concept that Islam was a “constitutive other”, despite any contributions made by Arab civilization to the European world.

The idea that Turks are not, and can never be, Europeans in the most profound sense is according to Hasan Kösebalaban⁶¹ a primary component in constructing a European identity. He writes:

Throughout history, a common European identity was built upon a variety of external and internal others, of which Muslims are primary. Turks with their military might and physical proximity represented the most serious political and religious challenge to Europe and served as a common source of fear.

Similarly, Talal Asad⁶² suggests that Christian history is evoked in Europe as a foundation of “an ancient identity” that is opposed to, and suspicious of, Muslim Turkey. This viewpoint would suggest a degree of credibility in Europe to Samuel Huntington’s suggestion that “Europe ends where Western Christianity ends and Islam and Orthodoxy begin”.⁶³ Although Turkey might be right at Europe’s doorstep, it is nevertheless susceptible to the image of being “distant and exotic” thanks to the presence in Europe of the image of the Muslim as a barbarian, compared to the rational, enlightened European.

SECTION V

Paul Rich⁶⁴ has written that Europe’s interactions with the Islamic world have done more than anything else to secure an identity for Europe, contrasting it

⁵⁷ Cited in E. Özyürek, “The Politics of Cultural Unification, Secularism, and the Place of Islam in the New Europe”, in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 32, No. 4, November 2005, p. 510.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 510-511.

⁶⁰ P. Schlesinger and F. Foret, “Political Roof and Sacred Canopy? Religion and the EU Constitution”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2006, p. 71.

⁶¹ H. Kösebalaban, “The Permanent Other? Turkey and the Question of European Identity”, *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 2007, p. 97.

⁶² T. Asad, “Muslims and European Identity: Can Europe Represent Islam?”, in A. Pagden, (ed), *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 213.

⁶³ S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996, p. 158.

⁶⁴ P. Rich, “European Identity and the Myth of Islam: A Reassessment”, *Review of International Studies*, No. 25, 1999, p. 436.

with the Islamic “Other”. The vision of the Muslim as a veritable savage who cannot comply with Europe’s norms and values of democracy, freedom and human rights is the cornerstone of this “Othering” of Islam and Muslims. This vision has presented itself repeatedly in the public discourse as events like the London bombings of 7 July 2005, the assassination of Theo van Gogh and the publishing of the Mohammed cartoons in the *Jyllands-Posten* have arisen. This “Othering” of Islam and Muslims is indicative of the European attitude towards Asia, certainly Islamic Asia, that it is, in the words of the European Commission,⁶⁵ “distant and exotic”. The perception of “distant” need not refer to physical space, but rather philosophic being, as Turkey, Europe’s predominantly Muslim neighbour, evokes the same image of the Islamic barbarian as the further reaches of Islamic Asia. Its exoticism, its sense of danger and mystery, are bound up in the idea that Muslims are fundamentally opposite to non-Muslim Europeans, and that they may as well come from the opposite ends of the world, so foreign are they to any prevailing idea of Europe.

⁶⁵ European Commission, *Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhancing Partnerships*, Communication from the Commission, Brussels, 4 September 2001a, p. 14.