

# Reporting the Muslim World in the Western Media

**Francis Ghilès.** Senior Fellow at the European Institute of the Mediterranean, Barcelona

How can we find a balance between criticism and empathy when analysing societies distant from us? It is clear that the perception of the “other” is determined by our own values and in this sense the author regards as paternalistic those postures that, in order to avoid racist labels, seek to show compliance with the ideals and culture of non-European peoples. This would impede them, in his words, from distinguishing between good and evil. Reality is therefore subjective by definition and we rely on the opinion and the personal experience of the journalist.

What people read in the press and watch on television is, in a broad sense, very much part of their education. My thoughts are born of thirty-five years experience of reporting on Western Mediterranean Affairs, for the *Financial Times* and the BBC, working as a consultant to Western companies and organising seminars on the region. They also owe a lot to my long standing personal interest in history which, in the early 1970s, led me to write a thesis on the early years of French colonial rule in Algeria. Recent political upheavals in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Algeria have encouraged me to question, even more than hitherto, a number of previously held assumptions.

The image of the “other” is deeply rooted in every culture. That is reflected in the various languages we speak: *no hay moros en la costa*, in other words, “there is no danger”, is but one Spanish colloquial expression whose roots and meaning lie deep in history. The stereotypes and clichés so beloved of the media are one popular expression of the image of the “other” that is part of our education. The Western media frequently resort to them as

do the media in Southern rim Mediterranean countries.

Journalism can be defended as the production of general knowledge, the rapid assimilation of facts and ideas. The adjective “rapid” is the key to understanding what is expected of a journalist. He does not have the time to be an expert in the academic sense. His essential qualification is to produce the right number of words, in television jargon the right “footage”, at the right time. His ability to say some things in an intelligible and entertaining fashion is another essential qualification. Only then can he be judged by the relation between “objective” reality and what he writes. The advent of Internet and of blogging has added a further element to what was already a complex subject.

Reality is, by definition, subjective, a composite of hundreds of individual experiences, none of which will be shared by the reader or the viewer, however perfect the transmission is. From there, you could well ask, since conveying reality precisely is not possible, why bother? If what is expected of you is a good story, let it be. What is truth anyway? Well, truth is your

own experience, your own opinion, conveyed as intelligently as possible. The reader has no right to expect you to become someone else.

My family roots lie in Christianity, Islam and Judaism, my cultural roots in all three, shaped by a French and British education. All these factors shape the view I have of the Mediterranean. I am not a believer but I respect religious beliefs. Yet I hesitated to give the radical Islamic movements, whose importance I perceived in the late 1970s thanks to an in-depth briefing about an emergent fundamentalism network in provincial Tunisia, the importance they deserved because many people I respected dismissed my views as preposterous. In the early 1980s, I sought to convince my then employer to give me Arabic lessons – I had learnt to write Arabic when I was an adolescent. This request was dismissed on the grounds that a journalist covering Arab speaking countries did not need to speak the language. Where North Africa was concerned, French was quite sufficient. I thus never shared the view which arbitrarily consigned millions of fellow human beings to an artificial category, the “Orient”, in which the ordinary laws of human nature are thought to be superseded by special laws of oriental nature, many of them embodied in a mysterious, menacing entity called Islam. I am always surprised by the number of “experts” who feel free to comment on North African and Middle Eastern societies without speaking a word of Arabic, let alone Berber.

Stereotypes quickly lose their meaning when you speak to ordinary people. The aspirations of people in North Africa and, more broadly, the Arab world are no different from elsewhere. Common sense and shrewd political judgment, not simply of their domestic affairs, are to be found as often on the factory floor and in the fields as in the offices of many senior officials. This, however, is in danger of being lost on Western public opinion – clichés about terrorism and Islam could encourage a cast of

mind which apprehends the world in terms of a clash of civilisations.

If we refrain from analysing Muslim societies in the light of our own values, we are in fact showing not respect but condescension. I would go further and say how distressing it is to see the way in which some Western liberals avoid saying anything which could be construed as “racist”. This has left them unable to distinguish between right and wrong and reduced them to very patronising attitudes towards non-European peoples and their cultures, for whom every possible excuse is made, in a way that effectively degrades and infantilises them.

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Academic works have always been an inspiration for me but, in recent years I have puzzled over why academics so despise journalists for giving priority to speed over precision, for their tendency to sensationalise, trivialise and oversimplify. Journalists are accused of crude but striking generalisations, of sticking their necks out and making sweeping judgments, of being involved in the drama of events. Indeed, academics sometimes seem to be jealous of the sheer size of the audience which journalists command. I have no regrets on any of those counts. I do not regret sticking my neck out, even when I got it wrong. I do not regret being caught in the drama of events. Anyone who has not been caught in this way is unlikely to understand the extraordinary tangle of contradictions and deep passion which is called Algeria; other observers have gone through similar experiences in Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine. I must say that I am dumbfounded at the liberties some academics take when they themselves stoop to journalism. My worst fears have been borne out as I watched those very academics,



In the early eighties, speaking Arabic was not required for journalists covering North Africa.

whose explanation of the Algerian system of government over two decades has proved to be fatally flawed by recent events, continue to offer their version of the Truth. Morocco offers some interesting lessons too. How often has the monarchy been dismissed as tottering on the brink? While others argue that the monarchy will perforce usher in democracy, I remain an agnostic on this point.

I am happy for journalists to be blamed for giving an over simplistic and alarmist picture of Islam but is this not the very steer they get from academics who should know better? A patronising view of Islam could well, if un-

checked, turn into a clash of civilisations. Such theories are all the more dangerous as hostility to the Muslim world is being rekindled by the violent conflicts which are buffeting Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries. The fall out of these conflicts ripple over into the lives of millions of Muslims who live in Europe, many of whom hail from the Maghreb. Terrorism has become a mantra which prevents many Europeans from lucid thinking. Many political leaders and media barons in France, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and the US bear responsibility for sensationalising issues rather than explaining them. Their counterparts in the South have hardly been helpful.

There is little doubt but that national and confessional loyalties are much more closely related, not to say entangled, in North Africa and the Middle East than in most Western countries and that we are wrong to assume that Muslim countries will follow along behind the West on a linear route of “modernisation”. Matters are more complicated.

The ideology of all the progressive movements of medieval and early modern Europe, including that which created English-speaking America, was expressed in religious terms. What is not in doubt is that Islam today remains closer to a total system affecting all forms of humanity than Christianity and Judaism have been for many centuries. Enlightened Western man can decide whether to have a faith or not, whether to accept or reject his religious heritage. Islam does not understand or grant this possibility more than Christendom did in the days when it too put to death heretics and atheists and blasphemers. The Western tradition of scepticism has its own central value, which is to examine and if necessary attack all existing values. Having made that broad generalisation, let me hasten to qualify it. The general mores, but not the political mores, of modern Tunisia are probably closer to those of Southern Europe than they are to those of Saudi Arabia. Many

Palestinians share the same values as Israelis while countries such as Morocco are the result of a complex and idiosyncratic mix which defies simplistic labelling.

For the Muslim world, more particularly the Arab region of it, modern history has been cruel. It has greatly weakened, when it has not destroyed, the political myths, which, for centuries, sustained its elites and its people. However popular their ideas might be today, I very much doubt whether the explanation of the problems which confront the Arab world offered by proponents of fundamentalist Islam will stand the test of time better than the ideology of pan-Arabism so popular in the 1950s and 1960s or the theory, so much in vogue after the increase in the price of oil in 1973 and according to which Arab states had common interests which transcended ties each one of them might wish to build with his neighbours, be they Arab or European.

Three political myths have collapsed in the space of one generation. First, the inevitability of unifying the Arab world. What happened in Germany and Italy in the 19th century was not replicated, as was hoped by many, in the Arab world. Egypt tried and failed, so did Saddam Hussein. The fundamentalist credo will probably fail on this count too.

The second myth which lies in ruins is that of the “artificiality” of Arab frontiers. Here what the future holds for Iraq will be of relevance to other countries in the region.

A third myth which lies in ruins is that of the “common interests” which bind Arab countries. Those emigrant Arab workers, be they Palestinian, Yemeni, Tunisian or Egyptian, who have laboured in Saudi Arabia and Libya have experienced first hand the depth of brotherly love they can expect from fellow Arabs and Muslims. When many secular Arab states contemplate books offering a very conservative interpretation of the Koran which, for a generation and because they were gener-

ously subsidised thanks to Saudi largesse, have flooded their countries, they ask themselves what the nature is of the common interests which tie them to the guardians of Mecca and Medina. Arab leaders face very complex challenges today.

To this collapse in political myths must be added the need to implement major economic reforms in order to speed up the rate of economic growth, to restrain the rate at which the population is increasing and encourage a higher degree of literacy, all of which must be undertaken at a time when the mass of their population has access to an image of Western Europe, through television pictures, but not to its physical reality.

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I remain an agnostic on the question of whether a process of fast political democratisation is a precondition to solving such problems. I am less of an agnostic on the question of freedom of expression. If Arab intellectuals are unable to speak out freely or prevented from doing so, they will be in no position to challenge the ideas propagated by those who use Islam to challenge the existing order. By the same token, that order will deny itself a powerful weapon of self defence and legitimisation. The paucity of new books published in the Arab world, heavy censorship of press and television, and the often low level of education do not bode well for the future, all the more when China and India are rising fast.

The contempt in which most fundamentalist leaders hold their brothers who are free thinking and have received a Western education in medicine, literature and the social sciences was tragically illustrated by the string

of murders in Algeria in the 1990s. Leading fundamentalists such as the Tunisian Rachid Ghannouchi dismiss such people as “secularists... Pharaoh’s witches educated men who put their talent at the service of an oppressive regime,” people who must “bear the responsibility of their choice.” Such words call for and condone murder but they find a ready echo in countries where intellectuals have, for centuries, been servants of the crown, seldom its critics. A great responsibility also rests on Arab historians who must dare to study their respective countries’ history and report it with greater objectivity than hitherto, to change the deeply ingrained practice of presenting past and present events in a manner which systematically suits the leader of the day.

History here offers an explanation for this state of affairs, in particular the role which the *ulamas*, the doctors of the law, have traditionally played. The historian Emmanuel Sivan paints a vivid portrait of this role in *Mythes politiques arabes*.<sup>1</sup> Because they were traumatised by the bitter internecine conflicts which followed the death of the Prophet Mohammed, the *ulamas* reached the conclusion that obedience to the ruler of the day, so long as he was a Muslim and irrespective of how tyrannical or impious he might be, was preferable to anarchy. The result was not encouraging then, nor is it today. As the historian Hassan Hanafi noted in 1978: “The dependence of intellectuals on power is an old custom in our region. Similar to that of the Middle Ages, Arab contemporary thought only inspires the despots when it is completely subject to them... The sultan orders and the *ulamas* give their blessing. The emir makes the law and the *cadi* judges in consequence. This servility is not only the result of external constraints but rather it is interiorised

in the faith and the opinions. Thus, it engenders a feeling of impotence, an absence of will or of intellectual initiative, along with an absence of original comments on reality, independently of the order instituted by the dictators.”<sup>2</sup>

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Fundamentalist thinkers do not share this pessimism but anyone familiar with their writings can only conclude that four principles seem to guide them. First of all, the state must be strong and intervene at every level of public life; second, they welcome the use of modern technology but as they are keen to fight what they see as corrupt Western values they would keep tight control of television, education and leisure activities; third, they reject democracy which they see as being built on human laws as against the divine laws which inspire them; they pay lip service to democracy essentially in order to denounce existing leaders; fourth, the imposition of Sharia law would drastically restrict the public role and rights of women.

A generation ago, the historian Antoine Maqdisi wrote: “As an Arab intellectual who acts in the current context, if my objective is to found socialism, I must base myself on Marx rather than on Avicenna. If I want to debate the relationship between scientific rationalism and scientific method, I must read Descartes rather than the works of a 9th century philosopher such as al-Kindi. But if I would like to work on the relationship between reason and Holy Scriptures, or on the links between faith and science, then seeking inspiration and direction

1. Emmanuel Sivan, *Mythes politiques arabes*, Paris, Fayard, 1995.

2. Hasan Hanafi, “Arab National Thought in the Balance”, *Disarat ‘Arabiyya*, Beirut, March-April 1978.

in the theology of medieval Islam would have meaning.”<sup>3</sup> From which I conclude that Arabs should direct their efforts at studying cultures other than their own. A quarter of a century later, however, we are witnessing, in the words of the Algerian psychoanalyst Mahfoud Boucebsi, who was murdered in 1993, an attempt “to set aside science in the name of Islam.”

Whatever the faults of Europe over the centuries, the Islamic world had a place in the field of Western scholarship and myth. In the 19th and 20th centuries knowledge of Islam, true and false, was in part an armature of colonial power: that in itself does not make the works it produced necessarily invalid.

In the last century or so, a variety of Western concepts and institutions identified as crucial to the modern outlook were adopted in Islamic countries. Much of the unrest in the region today results from a failure to find ways of domesticating such essentially secular concepts as democracy, liberalism and socialism. The broad underlying question is whether a culture can become modern without internalising the genealogy of modernity, that is, without living through the epistemological revolution out of which Western science grew. The Mexican writer Octavio Paz makes a comparable diagnosis of the woes of Latin America democracies which continue to falter because they have adopted democratic forms without the “critical and modern intellectual current” out of which Western democracy grew.

It would, of course, have been helpful had not some observers in Europe argued, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, that in the revolutions in Eastern Europe, Christianity had found its own resurgence. Christian culture was thus seen as a unifying European theme. If Europe defines itself in terms not perhaps of Christian belief but certainly of Christian heritage, the

temptation to emphasise as sharply as possible the frontier between itself and the world of Islam may be unavoidable. Such a definition may be useful in defining Europe’s broad political project but the implications of such a choice bear examination. Many Europeans will draw the conclusion that Islam is alien to Western Judeo-Christian values and will be tempted to see every Muslim state as an enemy. Even more worrying is the price we Europeans risk paying, that of making every Muslim resident in Europe feel that he or she is at best a tolerated alien. Recent events in France and Britain suggest such fears are not without foundation. The debate on whether Turkey might one day be accepted in the European Union has brought out stupidity, ignorance of history and prejudice among many Europeans in equal measure.

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The growing influence of Islamic fundamentalist movements and the spread of their activities to Europe have, in the absence of serious political and economic reforms in many Arab countries, increased the danger that a resentful, backward-looking Islam could become the 21st century’s man out. Nor has it helped that Europe so often preaches democracy only to forget its brave words when its perceived interests are at stake. Duplicity might be another name for much diplomatic activity but the sheer hypocrisy of certain attitudes does not augur well for the future of rational debate.

3. Antoine Maqdisi, “On the Significance of the Heritage”, *Mawafiq*, Beirut, September-October 1970.



Freedom, a means to find ways of dialoguing with the West.

European understanding of the Muslim lands around the Mediterranean is not helped by the near absence, Turkey apart, of a single example of successful pluralism. The peoples in these countries watch as many of their governments embezzle state property, show scant respect for the rule of law and basic human rights, and often display a remarkable degree of economic incompetence. They watch with anger the succession of humiliations suffered by fellow Muslims, not only, until recently, in Palestine, but in Iraq, Bosnia and Azerbaijan. That is not the whole story, however, as we seldom read articles in the West on economic and social achievements in Muslim countries.

Meanwhile, reporting in Western media from the South is all too often prone to clichés. The incapacity of many observers to distance themselves from events and check facts, the ease with which they pass moral judgement is very “reductive” of a complex reality. Demonising is easy, so is condemning violence. Serious analysis is a more arduous task.

Why do the Arabs so often express rage vis-à-vis the West? We could do worse than to remind ourselves first of all that the idea that religion and politics should be separated is relatively new. It dates back to Spinoza, Locke and Jefferson. The idea that they are distinct, however, dates back to the beginnings of Chris-

tianity. Today, secularism has, by and large, won the day, at least in Western Europe. The practice of Islam has not known this distinction and we should be wary of formulating the problems posed by the relation between religion and politics through what arises from Christian and not universal principles and experience.

There are many religious traditions, other than the ones familiar to Western Europe and North America, in which religion and politics are differently perceived; in which, therefore, the problems and possible solutions could well be different from those we know. Most of these traditions are limited to one region, or one culture or one people. There is one, however, which, in its worldwide distribution, its continuing vitality, its universalist aspirations, can be compared to Christianity, and that is Islam.

Historically, Islam is one of the world’s great religions. It has brought comfort to hundreds of millions of people, it has taught people of different races and creeds to live side by side in reasonable tolerance, it has inspired a great civilisation. But tolerance is not a uniquely Islamic virtue. Nor has tolerance always been a feature of Islam, notably vis-à-vis black people. Despite this, it remains true that a glance at the bulk of the Western media and, for that matter, the Arab media, would not lead the reader to appreciate the richness and diversity of the contribution of Islam to the history of Western civilisation.

But we should not exaggerate the extent of Muslim rage. The Muslim world is not unanimous in its rejection of the West nor have Muslim regions in the Third World been the most passionate and extreme in their hostility. There are still significant numbers of Muslims with whom we share certain basic cultural and moral, and social and political, beliefs and aspirations.

The struggle between the rival systems, Christian and Muslim, has lasted some four-

teen centuries. Attacks, counterattacks, jihads, crusades, conquests and reconquests, the list is endless. Conflicts have not stopped cultural and trade linked exchanges of which there have been many: from Cordoba and Toledo one thousand years ago, to Istanbul and Tunis in the 16th and 17th centuries, from Alexandria at the turn of this century to modern day Casablanca, such exchanges have born rich and diverse fruit.

Contrary to what is offered by modern Western historiography, the complexity of these relations seldom comes across in books written by Arab historians. The crusades themselves are viewed as a defining moment in the relations between the Muslim and Christian worlds, which they are not. Emmanuel Sivan describes only too well how, for generations, Arab historians favoured an interpretation of the crusades which explained them as simple forerunners of French and British occupation of Algeria and Egypt in the 19th century. Whatever the mix of reasons offered for the crusaders' actions, these custodians of Arab history never attributed to those who carried the message of Islam as far as Poitiers or Samarcand anything but the noblest motives. Christianity is demonised, Islam sanctified. Whatever predominant motive such historians offer of Christian actions, Muslim ones are always pure. The conflict is presented in asymmetrical terms. The Islamic camp is always on the defensive.

Such rendering of history is a deeply pessimistic one. It is worth pointing out the sheer fixation on the crusades many Arab historians have had as if this was really the issue which mattered most in the history of the Arab world and its relations with the West. I should add that only recently have North African intellectuals of my acquaintance begun paying serious attention to the Ottoman Empire's role in the early modern period, and not simply dismiss the Porte as a forebear of the 19th century European colonisers of North Africa and the Middle East.

Where the serious study of the crusades is concerned, one can only take note of the fact that most modern Arab historians seem to have simply picked up what was being said at the time by Arab politicians. It is here we come across one of the keys to the perennial nature of myths in the modern Arab world. Intellectuals too often sing the praise of those who hold power when they are not subservient to it. Whether this long standing and widespread *trahison des clercs* continues will decide, in part, how the Arab world shapes up and what image it projects abroad in future years.

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There has been, for a long time now, in Muslim lands, a rising tide against Western paramouncy, a desire to reassert Muslim values and Muslim greatness. The Muslim has suffered successive stages of defeat. The first was his loss of domination in the world to the advancing power of Russia, France and Britain. The second was the undermining of his authority in his own country through an invasion of foreign laws and ideas and ways of life and even foreign rulers or settlers. The third, as some Muslims like to present it, is the challenge to mastery in his own house from emancipated women, though the treatment afforded to women remains a wretched one in many Muslim lands. Some would argue that it is in the field of sexuality that the main battle will be fought in the years ahead.

But there is little uniformity in reaction to the challenges thrown up by modernisation. To take but four examples, Turkey, Morocco, Egypt

and Algeria have very different histories: their economies are at very different stages of development, attitudes to women differ considerably as do these countries' foreign policies. But, the argument still runs, all the aforementioned setbacks were too much to endure. Well, the only sensible conclusion is that some societies appear to have overcome them more successfully than others.

Maybe it was only too natural that this rage should be directed primarily against the millennial enemy and should draw its strength from ancient beliefs and loyalties. That this rage took the form of anti-Americanism even more than anti-Westernism should not surprise us. A negative view of America sprung in particular from the German school of thought which included Rainer Maria Rilke, Martin Heidegger and Ernst Junger, for whom America was the ultimate example of civilisation without culture. It was viewed as rich and comfortable, materially advanced yet soulless and artificial, technologically complex yet lacking in the spirituality and vitality of the German and other "authentic" people.

The soviet version of Marxism which held such sway among Arab intellectuals for a generation after 1945 reinforced such views. The mystique of third worldism propagated by the likes of Gamal Abdel Nasser and Houari Boumediene did the rest. These imported philosophies may have helped provide intellectual expression for anti-Westernism or anti-Americanism but they did not cause it. They fail to explain the widespread anti-Westernism that made so many people in the Middle East and Islamic world receptive to such ideas.

They also fail to explain the more pragmatic views and far greater achievements of a leader such as Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, or those of Tunisia's first president, Habib Bourguiba, both of whom enjoyed support of the broad mass of their countrymen. Maybe the explanation lies with

the extremely mediocre quality of leadership in the Arab world this past half century. Western civilisation was undoubtedly imperialist but I doubt whether in the expansion of Western Europe there was a quality of moral delinquency lacking in earlier expansions such as those of the Arabs, the Mongols or the Ottomans. The Arab record vis-à-vis many black Africans is no better than the European one. Maybe some Arab countries would have preferred the Czars of Muscovy. One wonders what Arab leaders think of the immense environmental catastrophe which blights Muslim lands around the Caspian sea; of the endless bloodshed which has been killing and maiming millions of their brethren on and off since 1917 in the countries which lie on Russia's southern rim; of the fate which befell Afghanistan after 1979 and against which they did little to protest; the current fate of Chechenia.

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What seems to me to be one of the root causes of this hostility is that Western capitalism and democracy, with all their faults, provide an authentic and attractive alternative to traditional ways of thought and life. Fundamentalist leaders are certainly not mistaken in seeing Western civilisation as the greatest challenge to the way of life they wish to retain or claim they wish to restore for their people. It is no accident that the Tunisian leaders should appear to overreact to the perceived threat of a radical Islamic movement by resorting to harsh measures. Having plotted, as they see it, a course of near Europeanisation and wishing to lay claim to a full place in what they hope will be an expanded European economic space, having granted their womenfolk more rights

than elsewhere in the Muslim world, they are well acquainted with what they stand to lose. By the same token, their overreaction could spell trouble in the years ahead.

The respect and admiration for Western civilisation shown since the mid-19th century by Muslim elites has, in recent years, given way to fear as the disparity which first became apparent on the battlefield spread to science, technology and forms of government. The growing awareness among the heirs of a proud and old civilisation of having been overtaken, overborne, overwhelmed by those it regarded as inferiors is taking its toll. The introduction of Western commercial, financial and industrial methods brought great wealth but that wealth accrued, all too often, to members of Westernised minorities or colonial settlers. Transplanted political institutions were judged not by their originals but by their local imitations. The oil wealth which accrued to the few after 1973 has wrought considerable damage, all the more as some of the countries it accrued to most had, over the centuries, made very little contribution to the brilliant civilisation of the lands of Islam. Oil wealth, here as elsewhere in the world, is a force which saps the energy and creativity of society.

Those who seek to tar the name of any intellectual or scientist in their midst who seeks to reconcile modern ideas with the key tenets of Islam as a betrayer of the true faith are following a well-trodden path: Moscow, Berlin and Rome before 1945; Madrid after General Franco's victory – a victory for the cross achieved thanks to the ardour of fierce tribesmen from the Rif mountains of Northern Morocco; Prague and Pretoria a little later; not to mention a few important Arab capitals today. The consequences are unlikely to be any different tomorrow from what they were yesterday.

The instinct of the Muslim masses may not be wrong in locating the ultimate source of the

cataclysmic changes they have to confront in the West but does that make a clash of civilisations inevitable? In order to avoid such an outcome, it is important that we in the West should not be provoked into an equally historical but irrational reaction against the "rival". This battle is being fought in the West but too many of those who engage with the Muslim world remain condescending of the "other" in ways which they are not always aware of.

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We should remember that long before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the US and British intelligence establishment deafened itself to revolutionary Islam's message that it intended to change the world. Two prevailing narratives, of the West v. Soviet Communism, and of Israel v. the Arab World, overwhelmed understanding of another one in which most of Europe and America, together with the Soviet bloc and the secular intelligentsia of developing countries, were on the same side. The direct struggle between revolutionary, Counter-Enlightenment Islam and the post-Enlightenment world began some time before the cold war ended. Iranian revolutionaries overcame not only the pro-American shah but also their leftist counterparts; the Soviet Union sent troops to Afghanistan to protect its leftist regime against Islamic rebels; and the grand mosque in Mecca was seized by a group of Islamic fundamentalists.

The latter demanded that Saudi Arabia isolate itself from the West, remove the royal family and stop selling oil to the US. Before the battle ended, women among the insurgents

shot the faces off their dead male comrades to stop them being recognised. It was the first fortnight of the new Islamic year, the year 1400, the dawn of Islam's 15th century. The rest of the world was still operating according to a different calendar.

The clash today is not so much between Islam and Christianity and Judaism as within the world of Islam itself. It will be a long and bloody affair but understanding it will not be helped by the ranting of a formerly respected historian. The 90 year old Bernard Lewis speaks of the millennial struggle between Christianity and Islam and argues that Muslims have adopted migration, along with terror, as the latest strategy in their "cosmic struggle for world domination." He also denounces Pope John Paul II's 2000 apology for the crusades as political correctness run amuck.

How ironic to hear a Jewish scholar criticise the Pope for apologising to Muslims for a holy war against Muslims which was also a massacre of the Jews; to witness the theorists of the invasion of Iraq, many of them also Jewish, applauding the notion that the crusades were not so terrible and embracing a time horizon that makes it impossible to judge their war an error.

Muslim leaders, whether they wear a secular or a more religious mask, all too often forget that the tight censorship of the media and the arts which characterises the regimes they run has prevented them from dialoguing with their own people. Their media have for decades sung the praises of Arab nationalism at the expense of ethnic sentiment and culture. Were Arab leaders to allow their poets, playwrights, mystics, painters and musicians more freedom, these artists would find ways of dialoguing with the West. Many of them unfortunately live in exile or isolated in their own country.

The official face Islam presents to the West is often vociferous, seldom spiritual.

Bearing such needs in mind, I turn to Carl G. Jung to provide some concluding remarks. In *Memoirs, Dreams, Reflections*, he had this to say in 1922 of Algeria and Tunisia. "This strip of land, it occurred to me, had already borne the brunt of three civilisations: Carthaginian, Roman and Christian. What the technological age will do with Islam remains to be seen."<sup>4</sup> Turning to Modern European man he continues: "His watch tells him that since the Middle Ages, time and its synonym, progress, have crept up on him and irrevocably taken something from him. With lightened baggage, he continues his journey, with steadily increasing velocity, towards nebulous goals. He compensates for the loss of gravity and the corresponding *sentiment d'incomplétude* by the illusions of his triumphs, such as steamships, railways, aeroplanes and rockets, which rob him of his duration and transport him into another reality of speeds and explosive accelerations." Nearly a century after these words were first written, many in Europe are more confused than they care to admit, which makes it even more difficult for them to dialogue with another civilisation.

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Jung concludes that "the emotional nature of these unreflective people, who are so much closer to life than we are, exerts a strong suggestive influence upon those historical layers in ourselves which we have just overcome and left behind, or which we think we have over-

4. Carl G. Jung, *Memoirs, Dreams, Reflections*, London, Collin and Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963.

come. Indeed, our cult of progress is in danger of imposing on us ever more childish dreams of the future, the harder it presses upon us to escape from the past." Today, Europeans like to think of themselves as rational, too many of them view the "other" as irrational, as they see it, even as they claim to seek dia-

logue. Such behaviour will do little to foster a climate conducive to dialogue between, let alone an alliance of, civilisations and to a better understanding of the forces which are doing battle across the Muslim world as the latter moves slowly, but no doubt inexorably, towards modernity.