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From Ernest Renan to Anders Behring Breivik: Continuities in Racial Stereotypes of Muslims and Jews

Halvor Moxnes

The purpose of this essay is to look at continuities in racial stereotypes of Muslims and Jews from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, through two examples, the French philologist and history of religion scholar Ernest Renan (1823–92) and the Norwegian terrorist and mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik (b. 1979), whose attack was carried out on 22 July 2011. I suggest that there is a continuity of stereotypes not only over *time*, but also over the divide of scholarly presentations and popular views.¹ My contention is that racial stereotypes are not only part of popular prejudices, but that they also form the (unconscious?) substructure of scholarly discussions.² Therefore I will argue that it is relevant to compare the rhetoric of race and religion in Renan's philological and religious studies, and the largely undocumented and manifestly false positions in Breivik's manifesto *2083 – A European Declaration of Independence*.³ Renan has been chosen because he is regarded as one of the originators of Orientalism and also accused of legitimizing anti-Semitism. On the contemporary scene Anders Behring Breivik is an obvious choice as a focus for many Islamocritical groups and individuals.⁴ Of course, most of them distance themselves from his acts of terror, but they share many of his positions on Islam and on European governments that are accused of promoting Islamism.

¹ See Marianne Gullestad, *Plausible Prejudice: Everyday Experiences and Social Images of Nation, Culture and Race* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2006).

² My argument is similar to that of Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus. Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), but he studies how racialized thinking continued as an intellectual substructure from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, while I explore the influence of popular views upon academic studies.

³ Anders Behring Breivik, *Complete Manifesto. 2083 – A European Declaration of Independence*. Available online: <https://publicintelligence.net/anders-behring-breiviks-complete-manifesto-2083-a-european-declaration-of-independence> (accessed 9 February 2017).

⁴ See further Sindre Bangstad, *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia* (London: Zed Books, 2014), esp. 13–25, 144–74, and §3 below.

1 Ernest Renan

1.1 Renan's historical Jews in the image of contemporary Muslims

What makes Ernest Renan particularly interesting in a study of racism in biblical studies is his *Life of Jesus* from 1863.⁵ Renan's book was one of the most influential – and controversial – books on Jesus in the nineteenth century.⁶ With his studies of language Renan shaped the terminology of Semitic and Indo-European languages and races, and he was influential in shaping Orientalist discourse, which is still with us today. Orientalism, as Edward Said has argued,⁷ was a discourse established in the nineteenth century, which, from the position of the West, constructed the Orient in terms of being 'the Other' in contrast to 'the Self'. Both religion and race were important categories in this construction. This Orientalism influenced perceptions of the beginning of Christianity as a break with Judaism.

It has long been recognized that Renan's picture of Jews in his *Life of Jesus* was negative, and with his racialized philology he has been accused of initiating anti-Semitism.⁸ Thus, since anti-Semitism is now understood as referring to Jews only, it should be noted that Renan included Arab-speaking Muslims in the races that spoke Semitic languages. Therefore, Renan's writings may also be considered as one of the sources of modern Islamophobia.

What has not been observed, however, is the linkage in *The Life of Jesus* between negative views of Jews at the time of Jesus and of Muslims from Renan's own time. Renan based the negative picture of Jews as the opponents of Jesus to a great extent on analogies with his impressions of the Arab Muslims that he encountered in Syria and Jerusalem when he was writing the book. Thus, the negative picture of the Jews was not only based on deductions from his highly respected philological studies, that had rendered Semitic languages as 'dead' and inferior to Indo-European languages, but also upon a less scholarly source: his own personal experiences of the Levant. Thus, he brings references to Muslims in his own time ('the present') directly into the historical description of Jesus in his time. We have here an example of what Karla Malette observed in her study of Renan and Orientalism: that history represents 'the reconfiguration of the past in the image of the present'.⁹

The description of Jesus' first encounter with Jerusalem is a typical example of the analogy between Jews and Muslims:

⁵ Ernest Renan, *Vie de Jésus* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1863); *The Life of Jesus* (New York: Modern Library, 1927).

⁶ See now the authoritative account in Robert D. Priest, *The Gospel According to Renan: Reading, Writing and Religion in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); see also Halvor Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism: A New Quest for the Nineteenth Century Historical Jesus* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 121–47.

⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

⁸ Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 33–8.

⁹ Karla Malette, 'Orientalism and the Nineteenth Century Nationalist: Michele Amari, Ernest Renan, and 1848', *The Romanic Review* 96 (2005): 233–52, at 248.

Jerusalem was then nearly what it is to-day, a city of pedantry, acrimony, disputes, hatreds and littleness of mind. Its fanaticism was extreme The Pharisees were dominant; the study of the Law, pushed to the most insignificant minutiae, and reduced to questions of casuistry, was the only study It was something analogous to the barren doctrine of the Mussulman fakir, to that empty science discussed round about the mosques, ... by no means calculated to advance the right discipline of the mind.¹⁰

Renan continues this comparison between the Jewish student of the Law and the Muslim fakir and scholar (and also adds in 'the old catholic theologian'), and concludes: 'The Jewish scribe, ... had the same contempt for Greek culture which the learned Mussulman of our time has for European civilization.' Here the historical Jewish Scribes and Pharisees are presented as analogous to the 'learned Mussulman' of Renan's time in their contempt for Greek culture and European civilization, respectively. Whether it was Jewish study of the Law or the 'empty science' of the Muslim, they were both futile and sterile. This notion of the 'empty science' of the Muslims is significant, for it points to the important role Renan gives to 'science' to distinguish between European and Muslim, and also between European Christianity and Judaism.¹¹ This was a distinction in terms of civilization, which was the achievement of Europe, and it placed Europe in a superior position to that of Muslims (and Jews).

1.2 Science as sign of European civilization

The difference between the Europeans and the Semites (Jews and Muslims) in relation to science was a major theme in Renan's inaugural lecture as Professor of Hebrew at the Collège de France in 1862.¹² The lecture gave a summary of Renan's high estimation of the historical Jesus, who, leaving behind the particularity of the Jewish religion, founded a religion of humanity. This religion was established in Europe as a result of the progress of civilization that had only happened in the West and that made Europe superior to the Orient, especially the Muslim world. For Renan, science represented progress and respect for mankind and freedom, that is, the most important values of French and European civilization.

In his 1882 lecture, 'Islam and Science',¹³ Renan develops his negative view on Islam and science throughout history. He had to face the objection that there were periods in which science flourished in Islamic countries – in Baghdad in the eighth century and in Spain in the thirteenth century. In order to meet these objections, Renan must

¹⁰ This and the following quotations are from Renan, *Life of Jesus*, 214.

¹¹ On the importance of science in Renan's thought, and in particular on the opposition between science and faith/religion, see Tzvetas Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 118–23, 148–53.

¹² Ernest Renan, *De la part des peuples sémitiques dans l'histoire de la civilisation* (Paris: Lévvy, 1862); see Priest, *The Gospel According to Renan*, 60–6.

¹³ Ernest Renan, *Islam and Science: A Lecture Presented at La Sorbonne 29 March 1883*, trans. Sally P. Ragep, 2nd edn (McGill University, 2011). Available online: https://www.mcgill.ca/islamicstudies/files/islamicstudies/renan_islamism_cversion.pdf (accessed 2 May 2017).

specify what he means by 'Islam'; therefore he goes on to provide 'precision in the use of words that designate nations and races.'¹⁴

He starts by listing all the different forms of social and political groups that are designated as 'Muslim', and speaks of 'the current inferiority of Muslim *countries*, the decadence of *states* governed by Islam, the intellectual sterility of *rac*es that derive their *culture* and *education* from that *religion* alone.'¹⁵ For Renan, it is the *religion of Islam* that creates the problem: It makes a true believer absolutely closed to science. Because of his faith that God alone determines human fate, 'the Muslim has the deepest contempt for education, for science, for all that constitutes *the European spirit*'.¹⁶

Thus, it appears that it was religion, not race that was the reason behind the Muslim contempt for science. So how can Renan explain that, as he admits, for 500 years (from the middle of the eighth century until the middle of the thirteenth) there were distinguished thinkers in *Muslim countries*? Here *race* reappears as part of the explanation, in the combination of the Arab race with Islam in its first period. Arabs were not inclined to philosophy, Renan declares, and therefore, 'as long as Islam was in the hands of the Arab race, ... there did not occur in its midst any intellectual movement of a secular character'.¹⁷ This changed, when about 750 CE Persia took over the hegemony, and the centre of Islam was moved to Baghdad with the civilization of the Sassanid Persians. The caliphs of this period were 'barely Muslims', Renan claimed, so that during their reign 'free thought developed', with Syrian Christian scholars translating Greek philosophy and science into Arabic. Thus, even if its language was Arabic, the philosophy itself was in fact Greek. In Renan's system, Arabic, as a Semitic language, belonged to the 'dead' languages, while philosophy belonged to the Indo-European, the 'living' languages. However, it was not only the language that was 'dead'; this verdict spilled over into Arabs as a racial category, since it was Arabs as a race who had no interest in philosophy.

Similarly, Renan did not consider Arabic philosophy in Spain in the Middle Ages to be a Muslim achievement; it was a result of translations of Greek philosophy. In the early Middle Ages Europe had been dependent upon these Arab translations. However, from the end of the thirteenth century the Muslim countries fell into intellectual decay, whereas Western Europe entered 'upon this great path of scientific research for truth'.¹⁸ So what happened to Islam in the period from the thirteenth until the nineteenth century? Renan's explanation is partly built on race: Islam 'fell into the hands of the Tartar and Berber races, races which are coarse, brutal and without intellect'.¹⁹ The other explanation was that 'the absolute reign of dogma' took over Islam and dominated civilian life.²⁰ The result was a system with no separation between the spiritual and the temporal, that is, the Muslim state.

¹⁴ Renan, *Islam and Science*, 1.

¹⁵ Renan, *Islam and Science*, 1 (emphasis added).

¹⁶ Renan, *Islam and Science*, 3.

¹⁷ Renan, *Islam and Science*, 5 (emphasis added).

¹⁸ Renan, *Islam and Science*, 13.

¹⁹ Renan, *Islam and Science*, 16–17.

²⁰ Renan, *Islam and Science*, 17.

In response to those who would attribute the growth of philosophy to the influence of Islam, Renan claimed that it was a movement ‘which occurred *despite* Islam, *against* Islam, and that Islam, fortunately, was *unable to prevent*’.²¹ His conclusion is that ‘what essentially distinguishes the Muslim is the hatred of science, ... because it is in competition with God’. For Renan, in contrast, science was, in effect, a kind of secular religion that characterized Europe. It represented what he considered the ultimate goal for humanity, since ‘ultimately it will serve only progress, I mean true progress, that which is inseparable from respect of mankind and freedom’.²² Thus, with his distinctions between Arab language and philosophy, by ascribing philosophy to Christians and Persians who lived in Muslim states, Renan established a European ownership of science and philosophy in Muslim states. The ‘real’ Islam, on the other hand, was in its essence an opponent of science.

1.3 Muslim objections to Renan

Renan’s lecture caused strong reactions and criticism among Muslim intellectuals, and resulted in public responses, similar to the reactions from Catholic theologians to his *Life of Jesus*. The most interesting reactions came from Jamal al-Din Al-Afghani, a prominent Modernist Muslim intellectual.²³ He moved between many Muslim countries as a political activist, especially against British imperialism. In his response, he puts his finger directly on the two main points of Renan’s lecture: ‘The eminent philosopher applied himself to proving that the Muslim religion was by its very essence opposed to the development of science, and that the Arab people, by their nature, did not like either metaphysical sciences or philosophy’.²⁴ Although he shared many of Renan’s views on the relations between science and religion, Al-Afghani criticizes the way Renan essentializes the opposition of Muslim religion to science, and makes it absolute. Instead, Al-Afghani says, all religions are intolerant, but Christian societies had liberated themselves and had advanced rapidly ‘on the road of progress and science’. In the same manner, he says, Muslim societies may also break the bonds of religion and march ‘resolutely in the path of civilization someday after the manner of Western society’.²⁵ Al-Afghani is here pointing to the way Renan described how Christianity, following the example of Jesus, liberated itself from Judaism. However, Renan did not allow for the possibility that Muslim societies could do the same, but ascribed to them an essentially static character. Renan recognized Al-Afghani as a Modernist thinker, but saw him as an exception, so he did not change his position on Islam or the Arabs.

²¹ This and the following quotation, Renan, *Islam and Science*, 19 (emphasis added).

²² Renan, *Islam and Science*, 24.

²³ See Monica M. Ringer and A. Holly Shissler, ‘The Al-Afghani-Renan Debate, Reconsidered’, *Iran Nameh* 30, no. 3 (2012): xxviii–xlv.

²⁴ Jamal al-Din Al-Afghani, ‘Answer of Jamal al-Din to Renan’, *Journal des Débats* (1883), in Nikki R. Keddi, *Imperialism, Science and Religion: Two Essays by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, 1883 and 1884* (Modern Middle East Sourcebook Project, 2004), 2–3. Available Online: https://disciplinas.stoa.usp.br/pluginfile.php/2004379/mod_resource/content/1/KEDDIE,%20Nikki.pdf (accessed 10 February 2017).

²⁵ Al-Afghani, ‘Answer’, 3.

1.4 Parallels between Jews and Muslims

We are now in a better position to understand how the past, that is, the picture of Jewish Scribes and Pharisees, could be reconfigured in the image of modern Muslims. Renan saw Jesus – and the origins of Christianity – as the beginning of European civilization, based on progress, respect for mankind, and freedom. In that context, Pharisees and Scribes represented the contempt for Greek culture just as modern Muslims showed contempt for European civilization. Renan saw parallels between the essential, non-scientific character of contemporary Muslim societies and the static character of Judaism in contrast to Jesus. This analogy between Jews and Muslims in opposition to what characterized European civilization occurs at many instances in *The Life of Jesus*, for instance, when Renan says that ‘neither the Jews nor the Mussulman has understood the delightful theology of love.’²⁶

The way Renan conceived of himself and the ideal European is another example of ‘the reconfiguration of the past in the image of the present.’²⁷ The historical example is the negative reception Jesus received from the Samaritans (they believed that he had the same prejudices as the Jews). Renan comments that this was a reaction ‘in the same manner as in our day the European free-thinker is regarded as an enemy of the Mussulman who always believes him to be a fanatical Christian.’²⁸

In Renan’s argument, Islam was primarily a *religion* that was characterized by dogmatism and fanaticism. It lacked all that science represented: progress, respect for humanity, and freedom. For Renan, it was these attributes of science that characterized Jesus; thus ‘science’ became a term for the religion of Europe. But Islam was also associated with *race*. It was when Islam came under the dominion of the Arab, Berber, and Tartar races, which were coarse, brutal, and without intellect, that it became filled with dogmatism and fanaticism. Moreover, it was this dogmatism that dominated the *Muslim state*, in which there was no separation between the spiritual (religion) and the temporal (civic life). The result was a reign with coercion and corporal punishment, a system with acts of torture only surpassed, according to Renan, by the Spanish Inquisition.

With regard to religion, race, and state, Islam and ‘the Muslim’ represented ‘the Other’ to ‘the Self’ of Renan, France, and other European civilizations. The Muslim was the essentialist opposite. If there were periods of apparent similarity between the Muslim world and Europe, for example, periods in which there was evidence of Muslim science and philosophy, these were ascribed to European ownership and stripped of their Muslim character.

Renan’s discussion of the contrast between Jesus and the Jews, especially the Scribes and the Pharisees, follows along similar lines. The religion of the Jews is also characterized as dogmatic, and in the Jerusalem temple, religion and state were intertwined. The most difficult aspect to disentangle was the issue of *race*, or *blood*,²⁹

²⁶ Renan, *Life of Jesus*, 83.

²⁷ See note 9.

²⁸ Renan, *Life of Jesus*, 174.

²⁹ On the difficulty of establishing a fixed meaning for ‘race’ in Renan’s works, see Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 137–45; Priest, *The Gospel According to Renan*, 85–9.

which is the term Renan uses when he describes Jesus as the one ‘who has contributed most to efface the distinction of blood in humanity’. The primary example of this contribution is seen in Jesus’ conflict with the Jewish leaders over the boundaries of the Jewish religion; Renan sees Jesus as having founded ‘the religion of humanity, established not upon blood, but upon the heart’.³⁰ Thus, Renan linked Jewish *religion* and *race* in contrast to Jesus, who founded ‘the religion of humanity’, which did not have any place for race.

For Renan, Islam, Muslim, and Arab were essentialist categories, with character traits that could not change. Due to the combination of religion and race these people were inferior to Europeans in terms of intellect, philosophy, and science. This was part of the way scholars of various fields in the nineteenth century saw the world divided into different civilizations, of which the superior one was Europe. The result was the creation of the *homo islamicus*, different from and inferior to ‘the Western Man’.³¹ The image of Jews followed the same lines, with Pharisees and Scribes as typical examples of the fanaticism and racial thinking that characterized them and their religion. Thus, Renan contributed to the way Muslims and Jews were depicted as stereotypes and essentialized because of their race, religion, and political systems. Although there were protests and criticisms already at Renan’s time,³² these assumptions have remained influential down to the present day and reappear in new contexts.

2 Anders Behring Breivik

2.1 The terrorism of 22 July 2011 and contemporary Islamophobia

A particularly chilling reappearance of stereotypes of Muslims literally exploded in Norway on 22 July 2011. Before the Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik went on to blow up the government headquarters and to massacre sixty-seven youths at a Labour Party summer camp, he posted a large tract on the internet – 2083 – *A European Declaration of Independence*³³ – and sent it to many ultra-conservative and fascist contacts in Europe. With this tract he wanted to start a civil war in Europe in order to stop the Islamicization of Europe, which would otherwise be completed by the year 2083. Moreover, he wanted to stop the Europeans who contribute to this Islamicization, whom he named ‘cultural Marxists’. Among these was the governing Labour Party in Norway, hence the attack against the Centre of Government and the massacre of the future leaders of the party.

But we should not attribute the opinions in Breivik’s tract to one individual only; it became obvious that his views, partly in a modified form, were shared by many

³⁰ Renan, *Life of Jesus*, 226.

³¹ Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 74, referring to a term used by Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, trans. R. Veinus (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 60.

³² On Renan and his critics, see Lockman, *Contending Visions*, 78–83.

³³ Available online: <https://publicintelligence.net/anders-behring-breiviks-complete-manifesto-2083-a-european-declaration-of-independence/> (accessed 9 February 2017).

right-wing groups in Europe and Norway. Most of this long tract builds, often in a cut-and-paste fashion, on international Islamophobic writings and their adaptation by Norwegian bloggers, writers, and politicians.³⁴ 'Islamophobia' is a recent and contested term;³⁵ it has been charged with being tendentious, a libel against legitimate fears. However, I think it is a useful term in that it exposes an essentialist way of defining all Muslims, as a basis for attitudes and actions directed against Muslims. It has been defined as 'socially reproduced prejudices and aversion against Islam and Muslims, and actions and practices which attack, exclude and discriminate against people on account of these people either being, or being presumed to be Muslim, and to be associated with Islam'.³⁶ This definition is similar to that of anti-Semitism,³⁷ a term that, despite its name, refers to anti-Jewish attitudes only.³⁸ 'Anti-Semitism' is also a contested term, since it is both an accusation and an analytical category. The sociologist Helen Fein has given this definition: 'A persistent latent structure of hostile beliefs towards Jews as a collective, manifested in individuals as attitudes and in cultures as myths, ideology, folklore and imagery, and in actions – social or legal discrimination, political mobilization against the Jews, and collective or state violence – which results in and/or is designated to distance, displace or destroy Jews as Jews'.³⁹

Thus, with Islamophobia we appear to be in a setting similar to that of Renan: Islam and Muslims as 'the Other' to the modern, European, Christian 'We', where the 'Other' is stereotyped into an essentialist figure. Anti-Semitism is not so directly visible in Islamophobic discourses. However, in a central element of Islamophobia, the hypothesis of the Eurabia conspiracy, there is a striking structural similarity with the influential hypothesis of a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world in the anti-Semitic forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.⁴⁰

³⁴ I draw most of the material of this discussion, in addition to Breivik's tract, from a study by the Norwegian anthropologist Sindre Bangstad, *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia* (London: Zed Books, 2014).

³⁵ It appears to have been used first in 1910; then by Edward Said in 1985. But it became a commonly used term through the report by the British Runnymede Trust in 1997, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*; Bangstad, *Breivik*, 19.

³⁶ Bangstad, *Breivik*, 19, quoting M. Gardell, *Islamofobia* (Oslo: Spartacus, 2011), 17 (emphasis added); see also the discussion in Sindre Bangstad, 'Eurabia Comes to Norway', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24 (2013): 369–91, at 369–70.

³⁷ Edward Said argued that Islamophobia, understood as 'hostility towards Islam in the modern Christian West', had historically been 'nourished by the same sources as Anti-Semitism'; *idem*, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', in *Orientalism: A Reader*, ed. A. M. Lyon (New York: New York University Press, 1985), 345–61; quoted by Bangstad, *Breivik*, 19.

³⁸ According to Priest (The Gospel According to Renan, 44–6), the term 'anti-Semitism' was first used by Moritz Steinschneider (1860) in a criticism of Renan's prejudices against Semites as a race and as inferior to the Aryan race. It was later used exclusively about attitudes towards Jews.

³⁹ Helen Fein, 'Dimensions of Antisemitism: Attitudes, Collective Accusations and Actions', in *The Persisting Question: Sociological Perspectives and Social Contexts of Modern Antisemitism. Current Research in Antisemitism*, Vol. 1, ed. Helen Fein (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1987), 67; quoted in a report by the Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities (CSHRM), *Antisemitism in Norway? The Attitudes of the Norwegian Population towards Jews and Other Minorities* (Oslo, 2012), 10 (emphasis original). Available online: <http://www.hlsenteret.no/publikasjoner/antisemitism-in-norway-web.pdf> (accessed 2 May 2017).

⁴⁰ First published in Russia in 1903 and widely circulated. For instance, in the 1920s, Henry Ford financed the printing of 500,000 copies to be distributed in the United States.

For Renan, the suppression of science in Islam was due to an absolute rule of dogmatism that did not separate the spiritual and the temporal. The result was a reign with coercion, corporal punishment, and torture, with no respect for freedom. Thus, it was the opposite of European civilization. Renan was secure in his conviction of the superiority of European civilization over the Muslim Orient, a conviction that of course was also built on the military, economic, and political superiority of Europe over the Muslim Levant, with the Ottoman Empire as ‘the sick man of Europe’.

In modern Islamophobia we find a similar evaluation of the inferiority of Islam, but the confidence in European civilization is gone. The conspiracy theory that is central to Islamophobia builds on a fear of the takeover of Europe by Islam. Europe is portrayed as a civilization under threat. Central to this fear is the growing number of Muslims in Europe. Even if it is a small percentage, much emphasis is put on demographics, with (badly founded) hypotheses that within this century (by 2083, according to Breivik) Muslims will make up the majority population in Europe.⁴¹

2.2 The power of language: Redefining ‘racism’ and ‘indigenous’

This hypothesis does not seem plausible to many, so how can Breivik and other Islamophobists think that they can convince people? The answer reminds us of Renan, who with his philological definitions of ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’ sought to establish the right understanding of nations and races. Breivik also wishes to establish the right understanding of the nations and races in Norway and Europe through definitions of central terms like ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘race’.

‘Multiculturalism’ is a term that it is notoriously difficult to define; it is a ‘floating signifier’. Breivik never explains it, but combines it with ‘cultural Marxist’ to indicate something very bad, for instance when he says that multiculturalism is ‘as evil and racist as Nazism and as brutal as Stalinism’.⁴² It is obvious that for Breivik ‘multiculturalism’ has to do with the presence of Muslims in Europe. He holds that it is promoted by European governments that ‘are still committing genocide against the indigenous peoples of Europe by exposing them to more than twenty-five million Muslims’.⁴³ The terminology here is chilling. With this definition of ‘multiculturalism’ as ‘committing genocide against the indigenous peoples of Europe’ Breivik aims to justify not only his destruction of the Centre of the Norwegian Government, but also the massacre of teenagers who might become future political leaders.

The term ‘indigenous’ is increasingly used by Islamophobes and far-right political parties in Europe to speak not of minorities but of the majority, white, and (mostly) Christian population as victims and those who experience grievances.⁴⁴ By portraying ‘the indigenous peoples of Europe’ as those who suffer genocide, Breivik also wishes to turn around the meaning of ‘race’ and ‘racism’. He gives the following advice:

⁴¹ See Bangstad, *Breivik*, ch. 3: ‘The fear of small numbers’, 71–106.

⁴² Bangstad, *Breivik*, 92.

⁴³ Breivik, 2083, 3:23; quoted in Bangstad, *Breivik*, 89.

⁴⁴ Francois Soyer, ‘Faith, Culture and Fear: Comparing Islamophobia in Early Modern Spain and Twenty-first-century Europe’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (2013): 399–416, at 412.

Don't let the multiculturalist define what racism is or isn't. ... Loving your extended family/your ethnic group and fighting for ethnic and/or indigenous rights does not make you a racist, quite the opposite in fact. It makes you a civil rights activist. ... Anyone who calls you a racist ... is therefore an anti-European racist supporting the anti-European hate ideology known as multiculturalism.⁴⁵

Here the language of racism is turned upside down: It is no longer non-white minorities living under structural discrimination, poverty, and violence that suffer racism, it is the white majority population. And Breivik employs the well-known terminology of ethno-nationalism, family and ethnic group, which in recent years has been used to deadly ends in political conflicts in Europe, Africa, and Asia.

2.3 The dream of a fixed racial and national identity

Breivik outlines a Norwegian ethnicity that is threatened by a multiculturalism that allows Muslims to infiltrate the Norwegian population. He speaks of it as 'the multicultural glorification of race mixing and interracial relations'. If this is allowed to continue for four to five generations, 'the Germanic/Nordic race in several countries will be diluted or annihilated to such an extent that there will be no one left with Nordic physical characteristics: blond hair, blue eyes, high forehead, sturdy cheekbones'.⁴⁶

This description of 'the Germanic/Nordic race' could have been taken directly from the Nazi ideology of the Second World War. It is Breivik's dream of a Norway of a bygone era, in the 1950s when 'we were more or less a pure Nordic country', before the start of the immigration of 'non-Nordics'.⁴⁷ It is the idea of a *fixed* national identity, which does not include hybridity and fluidity; this is the dream of Breivik that he wants to restore. In the process, he attributes to Muslim and Islam just the fixity and homogeneity that Norway has lost.

2.4 A monolithic Islam

Breivik starts his manifesto by saying that 'Islam is less a personal faith than a political ideology that exists in a fundamental and permanent state of war with non-islamic civilizations, cultures and individuals'.⁴⁸ This way to define Islam primarily as a political ideology has become common among right-wing political parties in Europe, comparing it to other ideologies like communism and Nazism.⁴⁹ That of course serves to underline the threat that Islam poses to Europe. Breivik says that Islam has been in a 'civilizational war' with Christendom and Europe for more than 1,400 years. It is a civilizational war that Europe is in the process of losing. This is where the idea of Eurabia enters: The political governments, as well as the cultural and social elites of Europe, have accepted the influence of Islam, which will result in a Europe dominated and governed by Islam,

⁴⁵ Breivik, 2083, 3:799; quoted in Bangstad, *Breivik*, 90–1.

⁴⁶ Breivik, 2083, 3:84; quoted in Bangstad, *Breivik*, 93.

⁴⁷ Breivik, 2083, 1:353; quoted in Bangstad, *Breivik*, 102.

⁴⁸ Breivik, 2083, 1:5; quoted in Bangstad, *Breivik*, 233 note 24.

⁴⁹ Bangstad, *Breivik*, 130.

and therefore renamed Eurabia. This situation is termed 'dhimmitude', a fabricated word used by Islamophobes for those who accept this situation.⁵⁰ It is this process that Breivik thinks will be completed by 2083, as the title of his tract indicates.

But in addition to this willing attitude of the multiculturalists, Breivik sees Al-Qaeda as the force behind this war against Europe, and as the 'true Islam'.⁵¹ Most people, whether Muslims or Christians, will absolutely disagree with this view; consider, for example, how American presidents (up until the current president Donald Trump) have distinguished between Muslim terrorists and the large majority of peaceful Muslims. However, Breivik will not accept this distinction; he argues that all Muslims have the same goal: the ultimate dominance and control over Europe by Muslims. Those who pretend that they are peaceful are just practising *taqiyya*, that is, 'dissimulation'.⁵² His view is that no Muslim can ever be trusted.

This is where Breivik's fantasy of fixed identities comes in. His fear of the loss of a fixed Norwegian identity corresponds to a fear – and admiration – of a static and unchangeable Muslim identity. In Bangstad's words, the 'figure of the Muslim ... is overdetermined by the person's allegiance to Islam and unaffected by local contexts and particularities'.⁵³ This figure represents the *homo islamicus*, an unchangeable stereotype in the manner of Shakespeare's Shylock the Jew.

3 Norwegian anti-Muslim positions

Breivik was a 'lone rider'; he had no accomplices in his terrorist attacks. But his views of Muslims are shared by a number of extremist bloggers, and more and more, although in milder versions, by politicians, intellectuals, and many of the general population. These views have increasingly been spread by social media as well as by mass media. Thus, instead of an absolute contrast between Breivik's extreme positions and the opinion of most Norwegians, it may be more accurate to speak of a continuum of negative attitudes.⁵⁴

The *Letter to America: Europe in Danger* by a former Conservative Parliamentarian, Hallgrim Berg, is an example of the position of mostly rightist politicians.⁵⁵ Berg addressed the letter to America because he found that the United States represented 'freedom and enlightenment'. These values were now under threat in Europe because of its tolerance for the intolerant Muslims, 'who want to destroy democracy and replace it with sharia laws'.⁵⁶ This intolerance is of course seen as a result of the influence of religion; Berg holds that 'the more loyal to the Qur'an a Muslim happens to be, the more concerned he is with mixing religion and politics'.⁵⁷ Berg also shares Breivik's

⁵⁰ Bangstad, *Breivik*, 73–4, 148–50.

⁵¹ Bangstad, *Breivik*, 98–9; Breivik, 2083, 3:155.

⁵² Bangstad, *Breivik*, 130–1; Breivik, 2083, 1:5.

⁵³ Bangstad, *Breivik*, 100.

⁵⁴ Bangstad, *Breivik*, 107–43.

⁵⁵ Hallgrim Berg, *Amerikabrevet: Europa i fare* (Oslo: Koloritt, 2007); Bangstad, 'Eurabia Comes to Norway', 374–5.

⁵⁶ Berg, *Amerikabrevet*, 9; quoted in Bangstad, 'Eurabia', 374.

⁵⁷ Berg, *Amerikabrevet*, 57; quoted in Bangstad, 'Eurabia', 375.

criticism of multiculturalism and the refusal to be accused of xenophobia, rejecting what he sees as the current situation in which 'anyone wanting to preserve democracy at the level of the nation state is to be portrayed as suffering from xenophobia'.⁵⁸

There are many examples of similar statements in social and public media. Taking into account that the only racially motivated terrorist attack in Norway was carried out by a white, rightist Norwegian, it is surprising and disappointing that the public discussion after 2011 has not been concerned with the potential danger of these views to the social fabric of Norwegian society. The debate has increasingly concerned the right to express Islamophobic views, invoking the right of free speech, which is highly valued in Norway.⁵⁹

4 Anti-Semitism and attitudes to other minorities in Norway

It is difficult to know how representative such views, which are very vocal in the public debate and on social media, are for Norwegians at large. A comparison of attitudes to Jews and to Muslims in the Norwegian population may be instructive. In 2012 the Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities undertook a survey of anti-Semitism in Norway.⁶⁰ We must take into consideration that the Jewish population in Norway is very small, less than 2000 of a population of five million. It is officially recognized as one of several national minorities. During the Second World War one-third of the Jewish population in Norway, around 800 people, were deported to concentration camps, with few survivors.

A full-scale study of attitude to Jews had not been undertaken before, so no comparison with results over time was possible, only a comparison with other European countries. Norway came out at the lower end, together with the UK, the Netherlands and other Scandinavian countries, with 12.5 per cent considered as significantly prejudiced against Jews. The survey wanted to see anti-Semitism in context; therefore it also measured attitudes to immigrants and foreigners, and people belonging to other religions, especially Muslims.⁶¹

The respondents were not asked about their own positions, but what they thought the attitudes of the Norwegian population were in relation to the various questions. With regard to the comparison between attitudes to Jews and to other minorities, the report stated that 'the social distance to most other groups is greater than to Jews. The Norwegian population is most negative towards contacts with Muslims, Somalis and Romani (gypsies). However, those with the strongest anti-Semitic attitudes also most strongly reject other groups' (esp. Muslims, Somalis, and Romani). 'Seventy-six per cent of those who distance themselves socially from Jews display similar attitudes towards Muslims'.⁶²

⁵⁸ Berg, *Amerikabrevet*, 14; quoted in Bangstad, 'Eurabia', 374.

⁵⁹ Bangstad, *Breivik*, 175–219.

⁶⁰ CSHRM, *Antisemitism* (see note 39).

⁶¹ Other relevant contexts were attitudes to the Holocaust and the Middle East, that is, Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

⁶² CSHRM, *Antisemitism*, 10.

Behind these differences in attitudes towards Jews and Muslims, there seem to be differences as to which factors were ascribed most importance.⁶³ Twenty-one per cent responded that they believed there were negative attitudes to Jews in the Norwegian population. Among the reasons given, there was little emphasis upon religion, but much upon the role of Israel in the Middle East conflict. There was also little emphasis on personal contacts with Jews, most likely because of the small number of Jews living in Norway.

In contrast, as many as 87 per cent of the respondents believed that there were widespread negative attitudes towards Muslims. Here there were more responses that reflected social contact with or knowledge of Muslims: some mentioned crime, negative behaviour, and unwillingness to become integrated. However, other reasons were also given, for instance that Muslims were foreign, that they were religious fundamentalists, and that this fundamentalism was linked to terrorism and suppression of women. Several of these reasons must be called stereotypical, attributing to Muslims an essentialist character. When confronted with a list of traditional stereotypes of Jews,⁶⁴ few identified with them. A major finding of the survey was that most Norwegians consider Jews to be less 'foreign' than Muslims.

5 'Religionization' or politicization of identities

Here it is in order to comment upon the names of the groups that have been compared, especially the use of 'Muslim' and 'Somali' as two separate categories. Somali is used of people from the state of Somalia, but they are also overwhelmingly Muslims in terms of religion. Thus, they might also be included in the group 'Muslims', which is made up of people from various ethnic and national groups (e.g. from Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Morocco, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan). That all these different groups are lumped together as 'Muslims' is in itself an essentializing element, and it is an indication of the 'religionization' of various ethnic and national groups that has happened in Europe over the last few years. Or, is it an opposite process, so that religion has become part of a political identity?

During the last few decades there has been a significant change in terminology used of immigrants and refugees from countries with a dominant Muslim population. From the 1970s with the first large wave of immigrants (in Germany called 'guest workers') to Europe, they were identified with the names of their country of origin. In Norway they were mostly Turks, then Pakistanis, Moroccans, together with refugees from Vietnam and Chile. Religion was viewed as only one part of their identities as foreigners, immigrants, or ethnic minorities. But from the 1990s, and especially after 9/11 2001, religion, that is, Islam, started to take on more significance as an identity marker.⁶⁵

⁶³ CSHRM, *Antisemitism*, 34–7.

⁶⁴ For example, that Jews 'consider themselves to be better than others'; 'have too much influence on the global economy'; 'have enriched themselves at the expense of others'; 'largely have themselves to blame for being persecuted'; CSHRM, *Antisemitism*, 20–1.

⁶⁵ Although some are (also) still named after their country of origin, especially Somalis, who are the group with least education, and who have had most difficulty finding work and accessing education.

Thus, 'Muslim' has become a common denominator for the identity of diverse groups and has been effectively used in negative stereotyping. The case of Anders Breivik and the ongoing discussion of many of the issues he raises – in the media, in scholarship and in public debate in Norway, and all over Europe – serve to construct and reify the existence of 'Muslim' populations in Europe.

This development seems to have had a parallel in many other countries. According to a study from the UK by Fiona B. Adamson,⁶⁶ 'Muslim' has become a politicized identity category in the UK. Adamson finds insufficient the explanation that the growth of Islam as a category of identification is a reaction to lack of opportunities of political participation. Instead she invokes the geopolitical context and attributes to 'Muslim political entrepreneurs' in Western Europe a strategic use of the category of 'Muslim' to create a broader political constituency. This is relevant internally, with large umbrella organizations, Muslim Councils, and so on, that can act as interest groups vis-à-vis national governments. However, Adamson also points to the international scene, in which organizing people as Muslims serves to strengthen their identification with and political engagement for other Muslim populations around the world. Her suggestion, made in 2011, that this engagement is especially directed towards those who are in conflict with Western states or their allies, for example, in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, has been confirmed by later developments.

Thus, there seem to be similar dominant mentalities and ideologies both on the Muslim side and on the side of the non-Muslim, post-Christian majority population in European countries. Radical groups and their supporters on both sides have common interests to reify and essentialize identities. These radical terrorists and entrepreneurs also work to problematize the interchanges, mixtures, and hybridization of identities that are going on all over Europe, and that are necessary for integration and social cohesion in European societies.

Postscript: Reconfiguring the history of Jesus in the moral image of Jesus today

Finally, I return to the task of writing a history of Jesus that Renan undertook 150 years ago. As noted above, Karla Malette commented that writing history represents 'the reconfiguration of the past in the image of the present'.⁶⁷ In the case of Renan, he portrayed Jesus and his opponents, the Jewish leaders, within the antagonistic context of his own world, with the powers of the West standing over against the Orient. When we observe that this pattern is repeated in our world also, with Islamophobia as a pressing reality, we realize that history as 'the reconfiguration of the past in the image of the present' is not an objective matter. It brings us up against a moral challenge: There are many images of the present. Anders Behring Breivik and people who share his worldview have a completely different image of the present world than mine. I find his – and their – 'image of the present' a dangerous image that destroys communality

⁶⁶ Fiona B. Adamson, 'Engaging or Contesting the Liberal State? "Muslim" as a Politicised Identity Category in Europe', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37 (2011): 899–915.

⁶⁷ Malette, 'Orientalism', 248 (cf. note 9).

and respect for human lives in their complexities. Therefore, it is necessary to make an absolute break with that kind of image, and therefore to break with a configuration of the past that supports the idea of a closed and 'pure' community (e.g. Norway in the 1950s).

In the history of the study of the historical Jesus we have an example of such a break with an 'image of the present' that could no longer be supported, with the result that the history of Jesus had to be reconfigured. The aftermath of the Second World War had such an effect. Strangely enough, it was not the war itself but the later awareness of the Holocaust, created by conscious efforts of Jewish groups, that forced the churches to make a break with anti-Semitism, to rewrite anti-Jewish liturgical texts and to establish dialogues between Christian and Jewish groups. That led to a reconsideration of the way the Gospels had been read as stories of conflict between Jesus and his Jewish opponents. The ultimate result of this conflict was found in the death sentence over Jesus by the Sanhedrin. A rereading led to the recognition that the passion stories were polemical constructions directed against the Jewish leadership at the time of writing, thereby hiding the responsibility of the Romans, who historically must have been responsible for the arrest and execution of Jesus. This was an extraordinary reconfiguration of the past of Jesus' history in light of a new understanding of the present. It has now become the historical truth about the death of Jesus, although with little recognition of the processes that have led to this rewriting.

There is a need for further new challenges to established images of Jesus in the present that can lead to fresh reconfigurations of the past. The present image of Jesus is without doubt the Jewish Jesus. This has become the dominant picture to such an extent that aspects that might seem to cast doubt on it, for example, that the itinerant Cynics may have inspired the Gospels in their picture of Jesus, are almost regarded as scholarly heresy. But what are the ideological presuppositions underlying this presently dominant picture of Jesus the Jew? There may be an idea of Jewishness as a fixed category, in line with modern orthodox understanding of Judaism. This translates into an image of Jesus as ethnically and culturally 'pure', so that there can be no other elements in the idea of Jewishness.⁶⁸ This notion corresponds to the idea of a 'pure' nation, of a national identity that is fixed and permanent and that represents 'us' in contrast to the 'others'. This is the bottom line of Islamophobia and of political opposition to immigration of persons who are 'culturally different' from 'us'.

If we chose a different image of the present, not of purity, but of 'cultural complexity',⁶⁹ we might look at the gospel narratives with a different set of questions. Cultural complexity confronts us with the situation of a world and societies that are composed of people from many different cultures and backgrounds. With the Jewish Jesus as the ruling paradigm, focus has been on identity as *religion*, and on Jesus practising Jewish religion. But that makes *religion*, a nineteenth-century concept, the model for reading a first-century text from a very different world. If we instead take for granted that the

⁶⁸ See William E. Arnal, *The Symbolic Jesus: Historical Scholarship, Judaism and the Construction of Contemporary Identity* (London: Equinox, 2005).

⁶⁹ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 'What is Cultural Complexity?', in *Jesus Beyond Nationalism: Constructing the Historical Jesus in a Period of Cultural Complexity*, ed. Halvor Moxnes, Ward Blanton, and James Crossley (London: Equinox, 2009), 9–23.

Gospels place Jesus within the geographical area of Judea and Galilee with their border areas, and with Jewish cult as a given fact, we can observe the diversity of people whom Jesus encounters. There are fishermen and peasants, slaves and householders, there are women who are mothers, sisters, but also 'sinners'. They come from a variety of backgrounds: Samaritan, Syro-Phoenician, and non-Jewish Gerasenes who keep pigs. In addition, there are Roman or Herodian officers. There are leaders among the people, Scribes and Pharisees, but also outsiders like tax collectors. There are people in many different marginal positions: possessed, sick, paralysed. These are groups of people that cannot be described in a simplistic way with any one category; we need categories that allow for the complexities and hybridities of societies.

If we start from the cultural complexity that we experience in the present, we will realize that the past can be reconfigured as a parallel complexity. This opens up for us an inclusive image of Jesus that represents a very different ideal, making it possible to break with stereotypes.

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