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URL: <https://www.getty.edu/publications/cultural-heritage-mass-atrocities/part-1/01-appiah/>

SOURCE: Cuno, James, and Thomas G. Weiss, eds. *Cultural Heritage and Mass Atrocities*. Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2022. <https://www.getty.edu/publications/cultural-heritage-mass-atrocities>.

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PDF GENERATED: June 10, 2022

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Who Are We? Identity and Cultural Heritage

Kwame Anthony Appiah

I have been writing and ruminating on questions of identity for more than three decades now. My theoretical thinking about identity began, actually, with thoughts about race, because I was genuinely puzzled by the different ways in which people in different places responded to my appearance. That wasn't so much the case in Asante, where, so it seemed to me, one local parent was usually enough to belong. Jerry Rawlings, Ghana's head of state from 1981 to 2001, had a father from Scotland; he wasn't chosen by the people originally—he came to power twice through coups d'état—but his fellow countrymen eventually elected him to the presidency twice. Unlike my three sisters, born, like my father, in Asante, I have never been a Ghanaian citizen. I was born in England, before Ghana's independence, with an English mother, and showed up in Asante at the age of one. So I'd have had to apply for Ghanaian citizenship, and my parents never applied for me. By the time it was up to me, I was used to being a Ghanaian with a British passport. My father, as president of the Ghanaian Bar Association, was once involved in writing one of our many constitutions. "Why don't you change the rules, so that I can be both Ghanaian and British?" I asked him. "Citizenship," he told me, "is unitary." I could see I wasn't going to get anywhere with him! But despite my lack of that legal connection, sometimes, when I do something noteworthy, I am claimed, at least by some, for the place that is home to half my ancestry.

The story in England was complex, too. In my grandmother's village, Minchinhampton, in Gloucestershire, where I spent much time in my childhood, those we knew never appeared to doubt our right to be there. My aunt and uncle lived in this picturesque market town in the West of England, too. My aunt had been born there. My

grandfather had spent time as a child at a house in the valley, which belonged to his uncle, whose mill had once woven cloth for the tunics of British soldiers and green baize for billiard tables. My great-grandfather, Alfred Cripps, had briefly served as the member of parliament for Stroud, a few miles to the north, and *his* great-grandfather, Joseph Cripps, had represented Cirencester, a few miles east, for much of the first half of the nineteenth century. And there were Crippses in that area—some buried in Cirencester churchyard—dating back to the seventeenth century.

But the skins and the African ancestry I shared with my sisters marked us out as different, in ways we weren't always conscious of. I recall going to a sports day, a few years ago, at a school in Dorset I'd attended as a preteen, and coming upon an elderly man who had been headmaster in my day. "You don't remember me," I apologized, as I introduced myself to him. Hearing my name, he brightened and took my hand warmly. "Of course, I remember you," he said. "You were our first colored head boy." When I was young, the idea that you could be properly English and not white seemed fairly uncommon. Even in the first decade of the twenty-first century, I remember the puzzled response of an older Englishwoman who had just heard a paper on race I gave at the Aristotelian Society in London. She just didn't understand how I could really be English. And no talk of thirteenth-century ancestors in Oxfordshire could persuade her!

In America, once I got there, things seemed at first relatively simple. I had an African father and so, like President Obama later, I was Black. But the story here, too, is complicated . . . and has changed over the years, in part because of the rise of the idea of mixed race people as an identity group. Color and citizenship, however, were quite separate matters: after the Civil War no sensible person doubted you could be Black and American. At least so far as the law was concerned, despite a persistent undercurrent of white racial nationalism. I'll say more about the ideas of race that shaped these experiences later but hope it's clear why I might have ended up puzzled about how to make sense of them.

When I turned over the years to thinking about nationality and class and culture and religion as sources of identity, and added in gender and sexual orientation, I began to see three ways in which these very disparate ways of grouping people do have some important things in common.

Labels and Why They Matter

The first is obvious: every identity comes with labels, so understanding identities requires first that you have some idea about how to apply them.¹ Explaining to someone what Ewes or Jains or *kothis* are begins with some suggestion as to what it is about people that makes each label appropriate for them. That way, you could look for someone of that identity, or try to decide, of someone you'd met, whether the label applied.

So, the label "Ewe" (usually pronounced eh-vey or eh-wey) is an ethnic label, what social scientists call an "ethnonym"; which means that if your parents are both Ewe,

you're Ewe, too. It applies, in the first place, to people who speak one of the many dialects of a language that is called "Ewe," most of whom live in Ghana or Togo, though there are some in many other parts of West Africa and, increasingly, around the world. As is typical of ethnic labels, there can be arguments about whether it applies to someone. If only one of your parents is Ewe and you never learned any of the many dialects of the Ewe language, are you Ewe? Does it matter (given that the Ewe are patrilineal) if the parent was your mother rather than your father? And, since Ewe belongs to a larger group of languages (usually called "Gbe" because that's the word for language in all of them) that shade off into one another, it's not easy to say exactly where the boundaries between Ewe people and other Gbe-speaking people lie. (Imagine looking for the boundaries of Southern speech in America or a cockney accent in London and you'll grasp the difficulty.) Nevertheless, large numbers of people in Ghana and Togo will claim that they're Ewe and many of their neighbors will agree.

That's because of the second important thing identities share: they matter to people. And they matter, first, because having an identity can give you a sense of how you fit into the social world. Every identity makes it possible, that is, for you to speak as one "I" among some "us": to belong to some "we." But a further crucial aspect of what identities offer is that they give you reasons for doing things. That's true about being a Jain, which means you belong to a particular Indian religious tradition. Most Jains are the children of two Jains (just as most Ewes are the children of two Ewes), but there's much more to it than that. And anyone can join who is willing to follow the path set by the *jinas*, souls who have been liberated by conquering their passions and can spend a blissful eternity at the summit of the universe. Jains are typically expected to heed five *vratas*, which are vows or forms of devotion. These are: nonviolence, not lying, not stealing, chastity, and nonpossessiveness. (Like taboos, which are also central to many identities, the *vratas* define who you are by *what* as well as *who* you are *not*. There's a lot of "Thou shalt not's" in the Ten Commandments, too.)²

The detailed content of each of these ideals depends, among other things, on whether you are a layperson on the one hand, or a monk or nun on the other. The general point, though, is that there are things people do and don't do *because they are Jains*. By this, I mean only that they themselves think from time to time, "I should be faithful to my spouse . . . or speak the truth . . . or avoid harming this animal . . . because I am a Jain." They do that, in part, because they know they live in a world where not everyone is a Jain, and that other people with other religions may have different ideas about how to behave.

Though there are Ewe religious traditions (lots of different ones), being Ewe isn't, by contrast, a religious identity, and doesn't come with the same sort of specified ethical codes. Ewes can be Muslim, Protestant, or Catholic, and many practice the traditional rites that go by the name of voodoo. (Like the Haitians, they borrowed this word from the Fon peoples, who are their neighbors. It means "spirit.") But, all the same, Ewe people sometimes say to themselves, "As an Ewe, I should . . ." and go on to specify

something they believe they should do or refrain from doing. They do things, in short, because they are Ewe. And this, too, depends, in part, on their recognition that not everyone is Ewe, and that non-Ewes may well behave differently.

People who give reasons like these—"Because I'm a this, I should do that"—are not just accepting the fact that the label applies to them; they are giving what a philosopher would call "normative significance" to their membership in that group. They're saying that the identity matters for practical life: for their emotions and their deeds. And one of the commonest ways in which it matters is that they feel some sort of solidarity with other members of the group. Their common identity gives them reason, they think, to care about and help one another. It creates what you could call norms of identification: rules about how you should behave, given your identity.

But just as there's usually contest or conflict about the boundaries of the group, about who's in and who's out, there's almost always disagreement about what normative significance an identity has. How much can one Ewe or one Jain legitimately ask of another? Does being Ewe mean you ought to teach the Ewe language to your children? Most Jains think that their religion requires them to be vegetarian, but not all agree that you must also avoid milk products. And so on. While each Ewe or each Jain will have done things because of their identity, they won't always do the same things. Still, because these identities sometimes help them answer the question "What should I do?" they're important in shaping their everyday lives.

One further reason that's true is the third feature all identities share: not only does your identity give *you* reasons to do things, it can give others reasons to do things *to* you. I've already mentioned something people can do to you because of your identity: they can help you just because you share an identity with them. But among the most significant things people do with identities is use them as the basis of hierarchies of status and respect and of structures of power. Caste in South Asia means some people are born into a higher status than others—as Brahmins, for example. These are members of the priestly caste, who are "polluted" by contact with members of castes that are regarded as lower. In many places in the world one ethnic or racial group regards its members as superior to others, and assumes the right to better treatment. The English poet Shelley, in "Ozymandias," refers to the "frown / And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command" on the stone face of the sculpture of a long-dead Pharaoh. The royal ancestry of this "king of kings" would have meant that he was used to obedience. Dominant identities can mean that people will treat you as a source of authority; subordinate identities can mean you and your interests will be trampled upon or ignored.

And so an important form of struggle over identity occurs when people challenge the assumptions that lead to unequal distributions of power. The world is full of burdensome identities, whose price is that other people treat you with disrespect. *Kothis* in India know this very well. They are people who, though assigned a male identity at birth, themselves identify as feminine, and experience erotic attraction to men who are

more typically masculine. And *kothis* have been subjected over the years to insult and abuse, and to rejection by their families; many of them have been forced by their marginal position into sex work. In recent years, emerging ideas about gender and sexuality—about homosexuality, intersexuality, and transgender identity, and about the complexity of the connection between biological sex and human behavior—have created movements that seek to alleviate the social exclusion of people whose gender and sexuality fall outside traditional norms. The Indian Supreme Court has even declared that individuals are entitled to be recognized as male, female, or third-gender, as they themselves decide.

Once identities exist, people tend to form a picture of a typical member of the group. Stereotypes develop. They may have more or less foundation in reality, but they are almost always critically wrong about something. *Kothis*, some Indians think, really want to be women: they are, many people suppose, what Europeans and Americans would now often call “transgender.” But that’s not necessarily so. Ewes, other Ghanaians fear, are particularly likely to use “juju”—witchcraft or “black magic”—against their enemies. But witchcraft is traditional all over Ghana, so this isn’t, actually, much of a distinction. (I once wrote an account of my father’s funeral, in the course of which I discussed how we had to deal with the threat of witchcraft in our family. We, as you know, were Asante, not Ewe.)³ People believe that Jains are so obsessed with nonviolence that they insist on covering their faces with white cloth to avoid killing insects by ingesting them. In fact, most Jains don’t wear the *muhapatti*, as the white cloth is called, and its use has a variety of rationales that have nothing to do with saving the lives of insects.

In sum, identities come, first, with labels and ideas about why and to whom they should be applied. Second, your identity shapes your thoughts about how you should behave; and, third, it affects the way other people treat you. Finally, all these dimensions of identity are contestable, always up for dispute: who’s in, what they’re like, how they should behave and be treated.



A “Culture” War

Like many Englishmen who suffered from tuberculosis in the nineteenth century, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor went abroad on medical advice, seeking the drier air of warmer regions. Tylor came from a prosperous Quaker business family, so he had the resources for a long trip. In 1855, in his early twenties, he left for the United States, traveling on in the early part of the next year to Cuba, where he met another rich English Quaker, Henry Christy; and they ended up riding together through Mexican towns and countryside, visiting Aztec ruins and dusty pueblos.

Christy was already an experienced archaeologist. Under his tutelage, Tylor learned how to work in the field. He grew impressed by what he called “the evidence of an immense ancient population, shown by the abundance of remains of works of art.”⁴ Tylor published an extensive account of his Mexican journey when he returned to

England, but that sojourn fired in him an enthusiasm for the study of faraway societies, ancient and modern, that lasted the rest of his life. In 1871, he produced his masterwork, *Primitive Culture*, which can lay claim to being the first work of modern anthropology. Over the decades, as his beard morphed from a lustrous Garibaldi to a vast, silvery cumulonimbus that would have made Gandalf jealous, Tylor added to his knowledge of the world's peoples through study in the museum and the library.

Primitive Culture was, in some respects, a quarrel with another book that had "culture" in the title: Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, a collection that had appeared just two years earlier. For Arnold, the poet and literary critic, culture was the "pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world." Arnold wasn't interested in anything as narrow as class-bound connoisseurship—the postprandial flute duet, the recited Keats sonnet. He had in mind a moral and aesthetic ideal, which found expression in art and literature and music and philosophy.⁵

But Tylor thought that the word could mean something quite different, and in part for institutional reasons, he was able to make sure that it did. For Tylor was eventually appointed to direct the University Museum at Oxford, and then, in 1896, he became Oxford's first professor of anthropology. It is to Tylor more than anyone else that we owe the idea that anthropology is the study of something called "culture," which he defined as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."⁶ Civilization was merely one of culture's many modes.

Nowadays, when people speak about culture, it's usually either Tylor's or Arnold's notion that they have in mind. The two concepts of culture are, in some respects, antagonistic: Arnold's ideal was "the man of culture" and he would have considered "primitive culture" an oxymoron; Tylor's model denies that a person could be devoid of culture. Yet, in ways we'll explore, these contrasting notions of culture are locked together in our concept of Western culture, which many people think defines the identity of modern Western people. In this chapter I'm going to talk about culture as a source of identity, and to try to untangle some of our confusions about the culture, both Tylorian and Arnoldian, of what we've come to call the West.

You may have heard this story: someone asked Mahatma Gandhi what he thought of Western civilization, and he replied "I think it would be a very good idea." Like many of the best stories, alas, this one is probably apocryphal; but also like many of the best stories, it has survived because it has the flavor of truth. I have argued elsewhere that many of our thoughts about the identities that define us are misleading, and that we would have a better grasp on the real challenges that face us if we thought about them in new ways. In this chapter I want to make an even more stringent case about a "Western" identity: whether you claim it, as many in Europe and the Americas might, or rebuff it, as many elsewhere around the world do, I think you should give up the very idea of Western civilization. It's at best the source of a great deal of confusion, at worst

an obstacle to facing some of the great political challenges of our time. I hesitate to disagree with even the Gandhi of legend, but I believe Western civilization is not at all a good idea, and Western culture is no improvement.

One reason for the confusions that “Western culture” spawns comes from confusions about the West. We have used the expression “the West” to do a variety of very different jobs. Rudyard Kipling, England’s poet of empire, wrote, “Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,” contrasting Europe and Asia, but ignoring everywhere else.⁷ During the Cold War, “the West” was one side of the Iron Curtain; “the East” its opposite and enemy. This usage, too, effectively disregarded most of the world. Often, in recent years, “the West” means the North Atlantic: Europe and her former colonies in North America. The opposite here is a non-Western world in Africa, Asia, and Latin America—now dubbed “the Global South”—though many people in Latin America will claim a Western inheritance, too. This way of speaking takes notice of the whole world, but lumps a whole lot of extremely different societies together; at the same time, it delicately carves around non-Indigenous Australians and New Zealanders and South Africans, so that “Western” here can look simply like a euphemism for white.

And, as everyone knows, we also talk today of the Western world to contrast it not with the South but with the Muslim world. Muslim thinkers themselves sometimes speak in a parallel way, distinguishing between Dar al-Islam, the home of Islam, and Dar al-Kufr, the home of unbelief.⁸ This contrast is the one I want to explore in this chapter. European and American debates today about whether Western culture is fundamentally Christian inherit, as we’ll see, a genealogy in which “Christendom” was replaced by “Europe” and then by the idea of “the West.”

Creating the European

For the Greek historian Herodotus, writing in the fifth century BCE, the inhabited earth was divided into three parts. To the east was Asia, to the south was a continent he called Libya, and the rest was Europe. He knew that people and goods and ideas could travel between the continents with little hindrance: he himself traveled up the Nile as far as Aswan, and on both sides of the Hellespont, the traditional boundary between Europe and Asia. Herodotus, the “father of history,” admitted to being puzzled, in fact, as to “why the earth, which is one, has three names, all women’s.”⁹ Still, for the Greeks and their Roman heirs, these continents were the largest significant geographical divisions of the world. It is a division we have inherited.

Now, here’s the important point: it wouldn’t have occurred to Herodotus to think that these three names corresponded to three kinds of people, Europeans, Asians, and Africans. He was born at Halicarnassus, Bodrum in modern Turkey. But being born in Asia Minor didn’t make him an Asian; it left him a Greek. And the Celts—about whom he says only that they live “beyond the pillars of Hercules” in the far west of Europe—were much stranger to him than the Persians or the Egyptians, about whom he knew rather a lot. Herodotus uses the word “European” only as an adjective, never as a noun. It was a

place, not an identity. For more than a millennium after his day, no one else spoke of Europeans as a people either.

Then the geography Herodotus knew was radically reshaped by the rise of Islam, which burst out of Arabia in the seventh century, spreading with astonishing rapidity north and east and west. After the Prophet's death in 632, the Arabs managed in a mere thirty years to defeat the two great empires to their north, Rome's residue in Byzantium and the Persian empire that reached through Central Asia as far as India.

The Umayyad dynasty, which began in 661, pushed on west into North Africa and east into Central Asia. In early 711, its army crossed the Strait of Gibraltar into Spain, which the Arabs called al-Andalus, and attacked the Visigoths who had ruled much of the Roman province of Hispania for two centuries. Within seven years, most of the Iberian Peninsula was under Muslim rule; not until 1492, nearly eight hundred years later, was the whole peninsula under Christian sovereignty again.¹⁰

The Muslim conquerors of Spain had not planned to stop at the Pyrenees, and they made regular attempts in the early years to continue moving north. But at Tours, in 732, Charles Martel, Charlemagne's grandfather, defeated the forces of Abd al-Rahman al-Ghafiqi, the governor of al-Andalus, and that turned out to be the decisive battle in ending the Arab attempts at the conquest of Frankish Europe. Edward Gibbon, surely overstating somewhat, observed that if the Arabs had won at Tours, they could have sailed on up the Thames. "Perhaps," he added, "the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mahomet."¹¹

What matters for our purposes is that the first recorded use of a word for Europeans as a kind of person seems to have come out of this history of conflict. A Latin chronicle, written in 754 in Spain, refers to the victors of the Battle of Tours as "*Europenses*," Europeans. Simply put, the very idea of a "European" was first used to contrast Christians and Muslims.¹²

Nobody in medieval Europe would have used the word "Western" to contrast Europeans with Muslims. For one thing, the westernmost point of Morocco, home of the Moors, lies west of all of Ireland. The Muslim world stretched from west of Western Europe into Central and South Asia; much of it, if the points of the compass matter, was south of Europe. And, as we've just seen, parts of the Iberian Peninsula—which was uncontroversially part of the continent that Herodotus called Europe—were under Arab or Berber Muslim rule from 711 to 1492. The natural contrast was not between Islam and the West, but between Christendom and Dar al-Islam, each of which regarded the other as infidels, defined by their unbelief.

Neither of these was the name of a single state: the Muslim world divided politically into two major states—Umayyad and Abbasid—in 750, and gradually split further over the centuries as it spread farther east. Christendom was divided among even more rulers, although in Europe the great majority of them respected to some degree the authority of the popes in Rome. Each of the two religions covered vast areas—the

Umayyad empire at its height extended for over 4.3 million square miles and comprised nearly 30 percent of the world's population; Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire covered some 460,000 square miles in Western Europe, and the Byzantine Empire (the eastern heir to the Roman Empire) was only a little smaller at the time of Charlemagne's death, in 814.

At the end of the eleventh century, the First Crusade opened up another military front between European Christians and the Muslim world. In 1095, at Clermont in France, Pope Urban II, at the urging of Alexios I Komnenos, emperor of Byzantium, declared that anyone who, "for the sake of devotion, but not for money or honor," set out to liberate Jerusalem from Muslim control would no longer need to do any other penance for their sins. What followed was a series of invasions of the Holy Land by Christian armies, from all over Europe, which recaptured Jerusalem in 1099 and set up a number of crusader states there and in other parts of Palestine and Syria. Meanwhile, over the next three hundred years, the Turks who created the Ottoman Empire gradually extended their rule into parts of Europe: Bulgaria, Greece, the Balkans, and Hungary. Eastern Europe and Asia Minor were now a patchwork quilt of Muslim and Christian states, created and maintained by ferocious warfare and mired in intolerance. Only in 1529, with the defeat of Suleiman the Magnificent's army by the Holy Roman emperor's forces at Vienna, did the reconquest of Eastern Europe begin. It was a slow process. It wasn't until 1699 that the Ottomans finally lost their Hungarian possessions; Greece became independent only in 1830, Bulgaria even later.

We have, then, a clear sense of Christian Europe (Christendom) defining itself through opposition. And one approach to understanding talk of Western culture is to think of it as a way of talking about that culture in Tylor's sense—the socially transmitted "knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, customs," and other capabilities—derived from Christian Europe.

The Golden Nugget

The educated people of Christian Europe, however, inevitably inherited many of their ideas from the pagan societies that preceded them. Thus, even though the divide between the West and Islam began with a religious conflict, not everything in Western civilization is supposed to be Christian. This itself is a very old idea. At the end of the twelfth century, Chrétien de Troyes, born a hundred or so miles southwest of Paris, celebrated these earlier roots: "Greece once had the greatest reputation for chivalry and learning," he wrote. "Then chivalry went to Rome, and so did all of learning, which now has come to France." The idea that the best of the culture of Greece was passed by way of Rome into Western Europe in the Middle Ages gradually became a commonplace. In fact, this process had a name. It was called the *translatio studii*, the transfer of learning. And this, too, was an astonishingly persistent idea. More than six centuries later, Hegel, the great German philosopher, told the students of the high school he ran in Nuremberg,

“The foundation of higher study must be and remain Greek literature in the first place, Roman in the second.”¹³

So from the late Middle Ages through Hegel until now, people have thought of the best in the culture of Greece and Rome as a European inheritance, passed on like a precious golden nugget, dug out of the earth by the Greeks, and transferred, when the Roman Empire conquered them, to Rome, where it got a good polish. Eventually, it was partitioned among the Flemish and Florentine courts and the Venetian Republic in the Renaissance, its fragments passing through cities such as Avignon, Paris, Amsterdam, Weimar, Edinburgh, and London, and finally reunited in the academies of Europe and the United States. This priceless treasure is no doubt nestled now somewhere here in the American academy, where I work . . . perhaps in the university library right around the corner. And its content is the West’s Arnoldian culture, not the everyday habits of life that make up much of what Tylor had in mind.

There are many ways of embellishing the story of the golden nugget. But they all face a historical challenge—at least if you want to make the golden nugget the core of a Western civilization opposed to Islam. For the classical inheritance it identifies was shared with Muslim learning. In ninth-century Baghdad, in the Bayt al-Hikmah, the palace library set up under the Abbasid caliphs, the works of Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, and Euclid were translated into Arabic. They became the basis of a tradition of scholarship that the Arabs called *falsafa*, adapting the Greek word for philosophy. In the centuries that Petrarch called the Dark Ages, when Christian Europe made little contribution to the study of Greek classical philosophy, and many of the texts were lost to view, these works, and the capacity to interpret them, were preserved by Muslim scholars. And a good deal of what we now know of the texts of classical philosophy and how to read them we know only because that knowledge was recovered by European scholars in the Renaissance from the Arabs.

In the mind of its Christian chronicler, as we saw, the Battle of Tours pitted Europeans against Islam; but the Muslims of al-Andalus, bellicose as they were, did not think that fighting for territory meant that you could not share ideas. Even in its prosperous heyday, under Abd al-Rahman III, who ruled from 912 to 966 and proclaimed himself Caliph of Córdoba, al-Andalus was hardly a paradise of pluralism, to be sure; the character of the autocratic state was not to be challenged. Still, by the end of the first millennium, in Córdoba (then the largest city of Europe) and other cities of the Caliphate, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, Arabs, Berbers, Visigoths, Slavs, and countless others created the kind of cultural goulash—a spicy mixture of various distinct components—that generates a genuine cosmopolitanism.¹⁴ The caliph himself, who, like his father, had a mother from the Christian north, was blue-eyed and fair-haired; mixing in al-Andalus was not merely cultural.

There were no recognized rabbis or Muslim scholars at the court of Charlemagne; in the cities of al-Andalus, by contrast, there were bishops and synagogues. Racemundo, Catholic Bishop of Elvira, was Córdoba’s ambassador to Constantine VII, the Byzantine

ruler, in Constantinople, and to Otto I, the Holy Roman emperor, in Aachen. Hasdai ibn Shaprut, leader of Córdoba's Jewish community in the middle of the tenth century, was not only a great medical scholar, he was the chairman of the caliph's medical council; and when the Emperor Constantine in Byzantium sent the caliph a copy of Dioscorides's *De materia medica*, the caliph took up ibn Shaprut's suggestion to send for a Greek monk to help translate it into Arabic. The knowledge they acquired made Córdoba one of the great centers of medical knowledge of Europe as well as of the Muslim world.¹⁵

The translation into Latin of the works of ibn Rushd, born in Córdoba in the twelfth century, was crucial for the European rediscovery of Aristotle. Ibn Rushd came from a distinguished family—his father and grandfather held the office of chief judge in Córdoba—but though trained, like them, as a Muslim legal scholar, he devoted most of his intellectual energy to recovering Aristotle's original ideas from the encrustations of ideas associated with Platonism. He was known in Latin as Averroes, or more commonly just as "The Commentator," because of his extensive commentaries on Aristotle. Around 1230, for example, Aristotle's *De anima* (On the Soul), which had been unknown in Latin, the language of scholarship throughout the Middle Ages and after, was translated into Latin from Arabic, along with Averroes's commentary, probably by the court astrologer of Holy Roman emperor Frederick II, one of whose titles was King of Jerusalem. (The translation was finished while Frederick was recovering from the disastrous failure of the Fifth Crusade and preparing for the Sixth.) The *De anima* became an important part of the philosophy curriculum in medieval European universities. So the classical traditions that are meant to distinguish Western Civ. from the inheritors of the caliphates are actually a point of kinship with them.

Even the later boundaries of Christendom turn out to be more complicated than we usually recall. In the heyday of the Ottoman Empire, our battle lines were, we imagine, to the east. But in the late sixteenth century, Queen Elizabeth I of England allied with the Ottoman sultan Murad III, in part because of her Protestant isolation from the great powers of continental Europe. (Some in her court shared Murad's skepticism about whether Roman Catholicism succeeded in avoiding idolatry. The Bishop of Winchester declared that the pope was "a more perilous enemy unto Christ, than the Turk; and Popery more idolatrous, than Turkery.")¹⁶ And the Franco-Ottoman alliance, which persisted sporadically through three centuries—from the time of Suleiman the Magnificent through the time of Napoleon—saw Christian and Muslim soldiers fighting alongside each other, largely united by their Hapsburg enemies.¹⁷

The golden-nugget story imagines Western culture as the expression of an essence that has been passed from hand to hand on its historic journey. And we've seen the pitfalls of this sort of essentialism again and again, such as how the scriptures of a religion are supposed to determine its unchanging nature; or the nation, bound together through time by language and custom; racial quiddity shared by all Blacks or all whites; or the essence of social class.

In each case, people have supposed that an identity that survives through time and across space must be underwritten by some larger, shared commonality; an essence that all the instances share. But that is simply a mistake. What was England like in the days of Chaucer, “father of English literature,” who died more than six hundred years ago? Take whatever you think was distinctive of it, whatever combination of customs, ideas, and material things that made England characteristically English then. Whatever you choose to distinguish Englishness now, it isn’t going to be *that*. Rather, as time rolls on each generation inherits the label from an earlier one; and, in each generation, the label comes with a legacy. But as the legacies are lost or exchanged for other treasures, the label keeps moving on. And so, when some of those in one generation move elsewhere from the territory to which English identity was once tied—move, for example, to *New England*—the label can even travel beyond the territory. Identities can be held together by narratives, in short, without essences: you don’t get to be called “English” because there’s an essence this label follows; you’re English because our rules determine that you are entitled to the label—that you are connected in the right way with a place called England.

So how did people in New York and old York; in London, Ontario, and London, England; in Paris, Texas, and Paris, France, get connected into a realm we call the West and gain an identity as participants in something called Western culture?

How the West Was Spun

In English, the very idea of the “West,” to name a heritage and object of study, doesn’t really emerge until the 1880s and 1890s, during a heated era of imperialism, and gains broader currency only in the twentieth century. So you can wonder about an age-old concept with such a recent name. For that matter, talk of “civilizations,” in the plural, is pretty much a nineteenth-century development, too. When scholars in the late nineteenth century offered a view of Western civilization, it was somewhat at odds with our own: they would say Western civilization was rooted in Egypt and Phoenicia; or that Greek seaport towns were the cradle because they brought together elements from Egyptian, Syrian, Persian, and Indian civilizations; or that civilization traveled from East to West.¹⁸

The kindred term “Western culture,” too, is surprisingly modern—certainly more recent than, say, Edison’s phonograph. We’ve seen precursor ideas in the concepts of “Christendom” and “Europe,” of course. Apropos of “class,” the history of a term isn’t always a guide to the history of its referent, but in this instance there is a true intimacy between the label and what it labels. It’s significant that Tylor, say, never spoke of Western culture. And, indeed, he had no reason to, since he was profoundly aware of the internal cultural diversity even of his own country. In 1871 he reported evidence of witchcraft in rural Somerset. A blast of wind in a pub had blown some roasted onions stabbed with pins out of the chimney. “One had on it the name of a brother magistrate of mine, whom the wizard, who was the alehouse-keeper, held in particular hatred,” Tylor

wrote, “and whom apparently he designed to get rid of by stabbing and roasting an onion representing him.”¹⁹ Primitive culture, indeed.

The Decline of the West, written by Oswald Spengler around the time of the First World War, was the work that introduced many readers around the world to the concept. (He actually titled it *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, literally, the decline of the evening lands—those lands nearest the setting sun. The term had once referred to the western provinces of the Roman Empire.) Yet his conception of the West was startlingly different from the one that’s now commonplace. Spengler scoffed at the notion that there were continuities between Occidental culture and the classical world. “The word ‘Europe’ ought to be struck out of history,” he further avowed. “There is historically no ‘European type.’”²⁰ For him, critically, the West was defined by contrast to the culture of the classical world, to the culture of the ancient Christians (and Jews and Muslims), and to the “semi-developed” culture of the Slavs. For others, though, the Ottoman incursions remained imaginatively key. During a visit to the Balkans in the late 1930s, Rebecca West recounted her husband’s sense that “it’s uncomfortably recent, the blow that would have smashed the whole of our Western culture.” The “recent blow” in question was the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683.

If the notion of Christendom was an artifact of a prolonged series of military struggles against Muslim forces, our modern concept of Western culture largely took its present shape in the late 1940s and the 1950s, during the Cold War. In the chill of battle, we forged a grand Plato-to-NATO narrative about Athenian democracy, the Magna Carta, the Copernican Revolution, and so on.²¹ Western culture was, at its core, individualistic and democratic and liberty-minded and tolerant and progressive and rational and scientific. Never mind that premodern Europe was none of these things, and that until the past century democracy was the exception in Europe, something that few stalwarts of Western thought had anything good to say about. The idea that tolerance was constitutive of something called Western culture would certainly have surprised Edward Burnett Tylor, who, as a Quaker, had been barred from attending England’s great universities. (Tylor’s university appointments at Oxford occurred after the passage of the Universities Tests Act in 1871, which allowed people who were not Anglican to enter Oxford and Cambridge.) Indeed, it’s possible to feel that if Western culture were real, we wouldn’t spend so much time talking it up. Settling over us like a low-hanging fog, “culture,” however qualified, has been required to do a great deal of work. I admit I have sometimes wondered whether the concept of culture, like the luminiferous ether that nineteenth-century physicists posited as the medium through which light waves traveled, explains rather less than we might hope.

Still, such historical and intellectual vagaries did not discourage genuinely distinguished scholars from accepting something like that Plato-to-NATO narrative. “The essence of Western culture, the basis of its success, the secret of its wide influence, is liberty,” the French political theorist Raymond Aron declared in the 1950s. More recently, the intellectual historian Gertrude Himmelfarb has maintained that justice,

reason, and the love of humanity “are, in fact, predominantly, perhaps even uniquely, Western values.”²²

Once Western culture could be a term of praise, it was bound to become a term of dispraise, too. Critics of Western culture, producing a photographic negative—light areas exchanged for dark—emphasizing slavery, subjugation, racism, militarism, and genocide, were committed to the very same essentialism, even if they saw a nugget not of gold but of arsenic.

Mirror, Mirror

In ways we’ve seen, the assertion of an identity always proceeds through contrast or opposition; and such critics are sometimes preoccupied with another supposed cultural clime, that of Africa. In a battle against the Victorian ideologies of “Eurocentrism,” some critics have therefore rallied behind “Afrocentrism.” Yet Afrocentrists have not always been certain whether Western culture is a burden to be jettisoned or a prize to be claimed. Starting in the 1950s, Cheikh Anta Diop, the Senegalese man of letters, argued strenuously that Greek civilization had African origins. (He maintained that its achievements derived from a more advanced Egyptian civilization, and that the ancient Egyptians were Black.) His followers were left with certain awkward implications. If the West was spawned by Greece, which was spawned by Egypt, then wouldn’t Black people inherit the moral liability of its legacy of ethnocentrism? Other Afrocentrists, favoring a separate development, were happy to disclaim Greece, while elevating the civilizational achievements that were peculiarly African. Either way, this lineage-based model of culture confronts a challenge. If the ideology of “Western culture” posits an implausible unity, equally enrobing Alexander and Alfred and Frederick the Greats, the ideology of Afrocentrism had to make similar claims for the cultural unity of Africa.

Where might such a unifying essence repose? Many took inspiration from Janheinz Jahn’s *Muntu: African Cultures and the Western World*, a work that appeared in the United States to great acclaim in the early 1960s. Its author was a German literary scholar who, in part owing to his friendship with the Senegalese poet and statesman Léopold Sédar Senghor, became an enthusiast for Négritude, a movement that stressed the cultural and racial kinship putatively shared by people of African descent. Curiously, though, he discovered the power core of African culture on the other side of the continent, in the concept of “NTU.” It’s the last syllable of the Kinyaruanda-Bantu words “Muntu” (person), “Kintu” (thing), “Hantu” (place and time), and “Kuntu” (modality). “NTU,” Jahn concluded, “is the universal force as such.” For the African, force and matter are integrally bound up, and it is in the “cosmic universal force” of NTU that “being and beings coalesce.” At the heart of the African conceptual world, then, was a truth that Western rationalists had grown estranged from: a profound recognition of the harmony and coherence of all things.²³

I recall, when I first encountered these arguments, being drawn into a fantasy in which an African scholar returns from London to Lagos with the important news that

she has uncovered the key to Western culture. Soon to be published, *THING: Western Culture and the African World*, a work that exposes the philosophy of ING, written so clearly on the face of the English language. For ING, in the Euro-American view, is the inner dynamic essence of the world. In the very structure of the terms *doing* and *making* and *meaning*, the English (and thus, by extension, all Westerners) express their deep commitment to this conception: but the secret heart of the matter is captured in their primary ontological category of *th-ing*; *everything*—or *be-ing*, as their sages express the matter in the more specialized vocabulary of one of their secret societies—is not stable but ceaselessly changing. Here we see the fundamental explanation for the extraordinary neophilia of Western culture, its sense that reality is change.

I am caricaturing a caricature, of course. At such levels of abstraction, almost everything and its opposite can be claimed of almost anything we might call a culture. When non-Western cultures are extolled for their collectivism, cooperation, and spiritual enlightenment, it is typically in order to criticize the West for complementary vices such as rampant materialism, selfish individualism, and rapacious exploitation. This move is itself a familiar part of Western Europe's cultural repertory. Ventriloquizing the perspective of non-Western interlopers has often served the purposes of social commentary, notably in fictional epistolary works like Montesquieu's 1721 *Persian Letters* (in which one of his Persian travelers tartly reports that "there's never been a kingdom where there were as many civil wars as in that of Christ") or Oliver Goldsmith's 1761 *Citizen of the World* (in which a Chinese philosopher visiting London marvels that, while "their compacts for peace are drawn up with the utmost precision and ratified with the greatest solemnity . . . the people of Europe are almost continually at war").²⁴ The aim is, in Burns's phrase, to "see ourselves as others see us," or as we imagine they might.

Organic Temptations

Simply as a matter of scale, talk of "Western culture" has an immediate implausibility to overcome. It places at the heart of identity all manner of exalted intellectual and artistic achievements—philosophy, literature, art, and music, the things Arnold prized and humanists study. But if Western culture was there in Troyes in the late twelfth century when Chrétien was alive, it had little to do with the lives of most of his fellow citizens, who didn't know Latin or Greek and had never heard of Plato. Today in the United States the classical heritage plays no greater role in the everyday lives of most Americans. Look around at our modern metropolises, which must count as centers of Western civilization if anything does, and you will see great museums, great libraries, great theater, great music in every genre. Are these Arnoldian achievements what hold us city-dwellers together? Of course not. What holds us together, surely, is Tylor's broad sense of culture: our customs of dress and greeting, the habits of behavior that shape relations between men and women, parents and children, cops and civilians, shop assistants and consumers. Intellectuals like me have a tendency to suppose that the

things *we* care about are the most important things. I don't say they don't matter. But they matter less than the story of the golden nugget suggests.

So how have we bridged the chasm here? How have we managed to persuade ourselves that we're rightful inheritors of Plato, Aquinas, and Kant, when the stuff of our existence is more Justin Bieber and Kim Kardashian? Well, by fusing the Tylorian picture and the Arnoldian one, the realm of the everyday and the realm of the ideal. And the key to this was something that was already present in Tylor's work.

Remember his famous definition: it began with culture as a "complex whole."²⁵ What you're hearing there is something we can call *organicism*. A vision of culture not as a loose assemblage of disparate fragments but as an organic unity, each component, like the organs in a body, carefully adapted to occupy a particular place, each part essential to the functioning of the whole. The Eurovision Song Contest, the cutouts of Matisse, the dialogues of Plato are all parts of a larger whole. As such, each is a holding in your cultural library, so to speak, even if you've never personally checked it out. It's your heritage and possession. Organicism explained how our everyday selves could be dusted with gold.

The trouble is that there just isn't one great big whole called culture that organically unites all these parts. There *are* organic wholes in our cultural life: the music, the words, the set design, and the choreography of an opera are meant to fit together. It is, to use Richard Wagner's term, a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art. But the Tylorian cultures of the North Atlantic were not made together. They are not an organic whole. Spain, in the heart of the West, resisted liberal democracy for two generations after it took off in India and Japan in the East, the home of Oriental despotism. Jefferson's cultural inheritance—Athenian liberty, Anglo-Saxon freedom—did not prevent the United States from creating a slave republic. Nor, for that matter, did the Christian heritage of hostility to adultery keep him from having children with Sally Hemings, his slave. At the same time, Franz Kafka and Miles Davis can live together as easily, perhaps even more easily, than Kafka and the waltz king Johann Strauss, his fellow Austro-Hungarian. (Those bleakly comic parables don't keep 3/4 time.) You will find hip-hop in the streets of Tokyo and Takoradi and Tallinn. The same is true in cuisine. In my youth, Britons swapped their fish and chips for chicken tikka masala.²⁶ (This was a very wise exchange.)

Once we abandon organicism, we can take up the more cosmopolitan picture in which every element of culture—from philosophy or cuisine to the style of bodily movement—is separable in principle from all the others; you really can walk and talk in a way that's recognizably African-American *and* commune with Immanuel Kant and George Eliot, as well as with Bessie Smith and Martin Luther King Jr. No Muslim essence stops individual inhabitants of Dar al-Islam from taking up anything from the Western Civ. syllabus, including democracy. No Western essence is there to stop a New Yorker of any ancestry taking up Islam. Wherever you live in the world, Li Po can be one of your favorite poets, even if you've never been anywhere near China.

Property Crimes

In some of the darker recesses of the Internet, enthusiasts for the idea of North America or Europe as the home of the White Race celebrate the achievements they claim for the West as somehow theirs. They claim National Socialism and Shakespeare, eugenics and Euclid, democracy and Dante. The far-right German movement Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West) has called for the “preservation and protection of our Christian-Jewish Western culture,” offering a pleasant compound in which a hyphen masks a history of massacres, expulsions, and mass murder.²⁷ I will let white nationalists have Nazism and eugenics for themselves; but I begrudge nobody the things I also love, because, like Arnold, I can love what is best in anyone’s traditions while sharing it gladly with others. Yet if they believe that something in them, some racial essence, somehow connects them with an organic kernel, a *Geist*, that pervades Western culture, they understand neither race nor civilization. For what is best in Arnoldian culture cuts across color, place, and time. One of Goethe’s great poetic cycles is the *West-östlicher Divan*: it is inspired by the poetry of the fourteenth-century Persian poet Hafez, whose tomb in Shiraz is still a place of pilgrimage. (*Diwan* is the Persian word for a collection of poetry, so Goethe’s title, “West-eastern Collection,” is explicitly meant to bridge the gap.) Matsuo Basho, the magnificent haiku master of the seventeenth century, was shaped to a large degree by Zen Buddhism, and so an Indian—Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha—is part of Basho’s heritage. Kurosawa’s *Throne of Blood*—its dark castle walls on Mount Fuji swathed in mist—is a powerful cinematic rendering of *Macbeth*.

That’s why we should resist using the term “cultural appropriation” as an indictment. All cultural practices and objects are mobile; they like to spread, and almost all are themselves creations of intermixture. Kente in Asante was first made with dyed silk thread, imported from the East. We took something made by others and made it ours. Or rather, they did that in the village of Bonwire. So, did the Asante of Kumasi appropriate the cultural property of Bonwire, where it was first made? Putative owners may be previous appropriators.

The real problem isn’t that it’s difficult to decide who owns culture; it’s that the very idea of ownership is the wrong model. The Copyright Clause of the United States Constitution supplies a plausible reason for creating ownership of words and ideas: “To promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries.” But the arts progressed perfectly well in the world’s traditional cultures without these protections; and the traditional products and practices of a group—its songs and stories, even its secrets—are not best understood as its property, or made more useful by being tethered to their putative origins.

For centuries, the people on the Venetian island of Murano made a living because glassmakers there perfected their useful art. Their beads, with multicolored filaments, some made of gold, were among the artistic wonders of the world. To keep their

commercial advantage, the Venetian state forbade glassmakers from leaving with their secrets; the penalty for revealing them to outsiders was death. Good for Murano and its profits: bad for everyone else. (As it happens, lots of the skilled artisans escaped anyway and brought their knowledge to a wider European world.) Venetian beads were already being imported into the Gold Coast by the turn of the seventeenth century, arriving across the Sahara, where they had been an important part of the trade on which the empire of Mali had risen to commercial success centuries earlier. Crushed and sintered to make new beads, they developed into the distinctive *bodom* you still see today in Ghana, beads my mother and my stepgrandmother collected and made into bracelets and necklaces.²⁸ What sorts of progress would have been advanced by insisting that the Venetians owned the idea of glass beads, and policing their claim? Unfortunately, the vigorous lobbying of huge corporations has made the idea of intellectual property (IP) go imperial; it seems to have conquered the world. To accept the notion of cultural appropriation is to buy into the regime they favor, where corporate entities acting as cultural guardians “own” a treasury of IP, extracting a toll when they allow others to make use of it.

This isn't to say that accusations of cultural appropriation never arise from a real offense. Usually, where there's a problem worth noticing, it involves forms of disrespect compounded by power inequities; cultural appropriation is simply the wrong diagnosis. When Paul Simon makes a mint from riffing on mbaqanga music from South Africa, you can wonder if the rich American gave the much poorer Africans who taught it to him their fair share of the proceeds. If he didn't, the problem isn't cultural theft but exploitation. If you're a Sioux, you recognize your people are being ridiculed when some fraternity boys don a parody of the headdress of your ancestors and make whooping noises. But, again, the problem isn't theft, it's disrespect. Imagine how an Orthodox Jewish rabbi would feel if a gentile pop-music multimillionaire made a music video in which he used the Kaddish to mourn a Maserati he'd totaled. The offense isn't appropriation; it's the insult entailed by trivializing something another group holds sacred. Those who parse these transgressions in terms of ownership have accepted a commercial system that's alien to the traditions they aim to protect. They have allowed one modern regime of property to appropriate *them*.

Culture as Project

Although Tylor's notion of culture helped create our own, it wasn't exactly ours. Unlike so many of his colleagues, he saw culture as something you acquired and transmitted, and not as a feature of your racial inheritance. He did not use “culture” in the plural, however; he was a progressivist (like Arnold, in this respect) who thought in terms of stages, advancing from savagery to the happier state of civilization. Still, his fascination with the cultural range of humanity acknowledged, precisely, the humanity of those he studied, in a way that refashioned a discipline. Culture wasn't vaporous to him. He loved the material artifacts that he collected, although his vast beard once got entangled with

a bow he was demonstrating to his students, and his attempts to start fires with flints did not always end well. When he retired from Oxford, he gave the university's committee for anthropology his enormous library on the topic: whatever your origins, he was convinced, you could enter deeply into other forms of life, but you had to put in the work.

We must, as well. This project can start with the recognition that culture is messy and muddled, not pristine and pure. That it has no essence is what makes us free. To be sure, the stories we tell that connect Plato or Aristotle or Cicero or St. Augustine to the contemporary American or European world have some truth in them. These grand arcs are sustained by self-conscious traditions of scholarship and argumentation. Remember those medieval Christians digging back through Averroes looking for Aristotle; or Chrétien claiming chivalry from Rome. The delusion is to think it suffices that we have *access* to these values, as if they're songs in a Spotify playlist we've never quite listened to. These thinkers may be part of our Arnoldian culture, but there's no guarantee that what is best in them will continue to mean something to the children of those who now look back to them, any more than the centrality of Aristotle to Muslim thought for hundreds of years guarantees him an important place in Muslim communities today.

Values aren't a birthright: you need to keep caring about them. Living in the West, however you define it—being Western, however you define *that*—provides no guarantee that you will care about Western Civ. The values that European humanists like to espouse belong as much to an African or an Asian who takes them up with enthusiasm as to a European. By that very logic, they *don't* belong to a European who hasn't taken the trouble to understand and absorb them. The same is true, naturally, of what we term non-Western cultures. The story of the golden nugget suggests that we can't help caring about the traditions of "the West" because they are ours: in fact, the opposite is true. They are ours only if we care about them. A culture of liberty, tolerance, and rational inquiry: that *would* be a good idea. But these values represent choices to make, not tracks laid down by a Western destiny.

In 1917, the year of Edward Burnett Tylor's death, what we've been taught to call Western civilization had stumbled into a death match with itself: the Allies and the Central Powers hurled bodies at each other, marching young men to their deaths in order to "defend civilization." The blood-soaked fields and gas-poisoned trenches must have shocked Tylor's evolutionist, progressivist hopes, and confirmed Arnold's worst fears about what civilization really meant. Arnold and Tylor would have agreed, at least, on this: culture isn't a box to be checked on the questionnaire of humanity; it's a process you join, in living a life with others.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Jerry Brotton, *The Sultan and the Queen: The Untold Story of Elizabeth and Islam* (New York: Penguin, 2016).

Christopher GoGwilt, *The Invention of the West* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

David Levering Lewis, *God's Crucible: Islam and the Making of Europe* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009).

James Reston Jr., *Defenders of the Faith: Christianity and Islam Battle for the Soul of Europe, 1520–1536* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

NOTES

1. Publisher's note: this material originally appeared in Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity* (New York: Liveright, 2018), 6–12 and 189–211, and is reproduced by permission of Liveright Publishing Corporation and Profile Books Ltd.
2. Paul Dundas, *The Jains*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2002), 158–59.
3. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
4. Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, *Anahuac; or, Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern* (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1861), 1. Tylor ended his book with a lament for old Mexico, as the country was gradually being impinged upon by its neighbor to the north: “it was our fortune to travel there before the coming change, when its most curious peculiarities and its very language must yield before foreign influences” (330). Invaluable discussions of Tylor can be found in the work of anthropology's greatest historian, George W. Stocking, notably “Matthew Arnold, E. B. Tylor, and the Uses of Invention,” *American Anthropologist* 65, no. 4 (1963): 783–99; and *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1991). See also Peter Melville Logan, *Victorian Fetishism: Intellectuals and Primitives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009); and the accounts collected at Pitt Rivers Virtual Collections, “The Invention of Museum Anthropology, 1850–1920,” <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/sma/index.php/articles/article-index/335-edward-burnett-tylor-1832-1917.html>.
5. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5. Arnold pitted culture against the encroachments of “civilization,” which, in his industrializing country, was obsessed with money and machinery, in his view. Civilization was the disease for which culture was the treatment. Norbert Elias famously asserted a general contrast in nineteenth-century thought between *Kultur* and *Zivilization*—the German concept being more particularist and spiritual, the French being more universalist and encompassing of economic as well as normative patterns—but his binary is perhaps more imposed than educed.
6. Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1871), 1.
7. “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet, / Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat; / But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!” Rudyard Kipling, “The Ballad of East and West”; for the full text see <http://www.bartleby.com/246/1129.html>. So the point of the poem is that people from East and West can come together, even though they come from unchangeably different places.
8. See Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Clark, NJ: Lawbook Exchange, 2006), 52.
9. Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4.45.2. The original text is “ὄδ' ἔχω συμβαλέσθαι ἐπ' ὅτε μὴ εὐούση ἤ οὐνόματα τριφάσια κέεται ἔπωνυμίας ἔχοντα γυναικῶν.”
10. Much of what I say here—including about the use of the word “Europenses”—I learned from reading David Levering Lewis's magisterial *God's Crucible: Islam and the Making of Europe, 570–1215* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009). Another broad-gauged history I've found valuable is

- Hugh Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus* (London: Longman, 1996).
11. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: John Murray, 1887), 387.
 12. Even this, however, is a bit of a simplification. In the middle of the eighth century, much of Europe was not yet Christian. Charlemagne was to spend three decades of bloody warfare, starting around 770, seeking to convert the pagan Saxons to Christianity. The question of when “European,” as a group identity, gained broader traction is taken up, if not entirely resolved, in Peter Burke, “Did Europe Exist before 1700?,” *History of European Ideas* 1, no. 1 (1980): 21–29. He notes: “If the first context in which people became aware of themselves as Europeans was that of being invaded by other cultures, the second was that of invading other cultures.”
 13. G. W. F. Hegel, “On Classical Studies,” in *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox and Richard Kroner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 324. The lecture was given in 1809. “The perfection and glory of those masterpieces,” he continued, “must be the spiritual bath, the secular baptism that first and indelibly attunes and tinctures the soul in respect of taste and knowledge.”
 14. Mark R. Cohen in *The Crescent and the Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), xvii, xix, suggests that “the ‘myth of the Islamic-Jewish interfaith utopia’ and the ‘countermyth of Islamic persecution of the Jews’ equally distort the past. . . . When all is said and done, however, the historical evidence indicates that the Jews of Islam, especially during the formative and classical centuries (up to the thirteenth century), experienced much less persecution than did the Jews of Christendom.” And see David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
 15. A compelling account of Hasdai ibn Shaprut’s career appears in Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 46–53.
 16. Jerry Brotton, *The Sultan and the Queen: The Untold Story of Elizabeth and Islam* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 61.
 17. James Reston Jr., *Defenders of the Faith: Christianity and Islam Battle for the Soul of Europe, 1520–1536* (New York: Penguin, 2009).
 18. See, for instance, Jan Helenus Ferguson, *The Philosophy of Civilization: A Sociological Study* (London: W. B. Whittingam, 1889), 319; William Cunningham, *An Essay on Western Civilization in Its Economic Aspects*, vol. 1: *Ancient Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898); and A. L. Kip, *Psychology of the Nations* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1902). In Germany, the culturally fraught use of the Occident, the *Abendland*, can be traced back a few generations earlier.
 19. “My friend, apparently, was never the worse, but when next year his wife had an attack of the fever, there was shaking of heads among the wise.” See Chris Wingfield, “Tylor’s Onion: A Curious Case of Bewitched Onions from Somerset,” at the Pitt Rivers Virtual Collections, <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/england/englishness-tylors-onion.html>. The article quotes from a letter of Tylor’s to an uncle in 1872, owned by Sarah Smith née Fox and transcribed by Megan Price. See also Chris Wingfield, “Is the Heart at Home? EB Tylor’s Collections from Somerset,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 22 (December 2009): 22–38.
 20. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 12, n.5. (The translation was originally published by Knopf in two volumes, appearing in 1926 and 1928.)
 21. See, inter alia, Christopher GoGwilt, *The Invention of the West* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 220–42; and David Gress, *From Plato to NATO: The Idea of the West and Its Opponents* (New York: Free Press, 1998). GoGwilt nimbly argues that the late-nineteenth-century emergence of the idea of the West “can be traced to the convergence of two distinct discursive

- contexts: the ‘new imperialism’ of the 1890s that gave wider currency to oppositions between East and West, and the influence of nineteenth-century Russian debates on Western European ideas of Europe.”
22. Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), 258. The first English edition of Aron’s book appeared in 1957; it was originally published as *L’Opium des intellectuels* in 1955. Gertrude Himmelfarb, “The Illusions of Cosmopolitanism,” in Martha C. Nussbaum, *For Love of Country?*, ed. Joshua C. Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 75. Amartya Sen responded with a gentle rebuttal: “Because I have gained so much in the past from reading Himmelfarb’s careful analysis of historical literature, I can only conclude that she simply has not yet taken much interest in the not insubstantial literature on these and related matters in Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, and Arabic.” Amartya Sen, “Humanity and Citizenship,” in Nussbaum, 117.
 23. Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu: African Cultures and the Western World*, trans. Marjorie Grene (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), 101. A longer discussion can be found in my “Europe Upside Down: Fallacies of the New Afrocentrism,” *Sapina Journal* 5, no. 3 (1993).
 24. “*Aussi puis-je t’assurer qu’il n’y a jamais eu de royaume où il y ait eu tant de guerres civiles que dans celui du Christ.*” Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 29.
 25. Raymond Williams, a century later, picked up on it when he encouraged us to think about culture not just as “the arts and learning” but as “a whole way of life,” emphasis, again, on whole. See Williams, “Culture Is Ordinary” (1958), reprinted in his *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989), 3–14, although the phrase turns up often in his work.
 26. “Chicken Tikka Massala is now a true British national dish, not only because it is the most popular, but because it is a perfect illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external influences. Chicken Tikka is an Indian dish. The Massala sauce was added to satisfy the desire of British people to have their meat served in gravy.” Robin Cook, April 2001, when British foreign minister. See Robin Cook, “Robin Cook’s Chicken Tikka Masala Speech,” 19 April 2001, *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/apr/19/race.britishidentity>.
 27. Or, in its official statement, “*den Erhalt und den Schutz unserer christlich-jüdisch geprägten Abendlandkultur.*” Quoted in Christian Volk, “Why We Protest: Zur politischen Dimension transnationaler Protestbewegungen,” in *Herrschaft in den Internationalen Beziehungen*, ed. Christopher Daase et al. (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2017), 160. See also Matthias Gretzschel, “Das Abendland—ein Mythos der Romantik,” *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 26 April 2016, <https://www.abendblatt.de/hamburg/kirche/article207470743/Das-Abendland-ein-Mythos-der-Romantik.html>; and Hannes Schammann, “Reassessing the Opinion-Policy Gap: How PEGIDA and the AfD Relate to German Immigration Policies,” in *Fortress Europe? Challenges and Failures of Migration and Asylum Policies*, ed. Annette Jünemann, Nicolas Fromm, and Nikolas Scherer (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2017), 139–58.
 28. Suzann Gott, “Ghana’s Glass Beadmaking Arts in Transcultural Dialogues,” *African Arts* 47, no. 1 (2014): 10–29; Alexandra Robinson, “‘Citizens of the World’: The Earle Family’s Leghorn and Venetian Business, 1751–1808,” in *Slavery Hinterland: Transatlantic Slavery and Continental Europe, 1751–1808*, ed. Felix Brahm and Eve Rosenhaft (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2016), 60–61.