Chapter 7. Europeanising Spaces in the Work of Jacques Berque

Jacques Berque was one of the leading European Islamic scholars of his generation. Born in 1910 in Molière in provincial Algeria, he was the son of Augustin Berque, a distinguished Arabist and member of the elite in the pieds noirs community. His mother’s roots lay in the petits blancs community and, further back, in Spain. Berque studied at the Sorbonne which he detested, and he was unhappy in the Paris of the time. He spent his early career as a colonial administrator in Morocco while continuing his studies. In 1947 Berque became a Middle East expert for UNESCO. Under its auspices he was sent to Egypt in 1953, an experience that was fundamental to the formation of his world view and his engagement with the post-war wave of decolonisation. In 1955 he returned to Paris and was appointed director of Muslim Sociological Studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. Berque was elected the following year to the Collège de France where he held the Professorship of Social History of Contemporary Islam. He remained in this post until his retirement in 1981. What makes Berque such an interesting figure to examine in an analysis of ideas of Europe is that he was a foremost representative of Oriental studies – a discipline historically intertwined with European imperialism – at the time when European imperialism was manifestly coming to an end. Moreover, he was engaged both personally and academically with Algeria – the focus or source of so much Parisian debate about the meaning of Europe and Europeanness, as we have seen.

It is difficult to pigeonhole Berque’s thought. He was both loyal to the French and European Orientalist tradition and deeply critical, at once a defender of European imperialism and one of its most damning critics in this period. Moreover, although never stale and unoriginal, Berque’s subtle ideas of Europe and Europeanness correlated with those of other Parisian figures in this period, and not only in the imperial context. For this reason there is a strong comparative aspect to this chapter and Berque’s Europe is analysed beside ideas of Europe that invoked its imperialism, its relation to the United States, and its struggle to manage its recent history. His views are compared to the ideas of Europe of figures like like Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Renoir, Louis Massignon, and Manès Sperber. This comparative perspective highlights that Berque’s conception of Europe involved critique, proposition, and faith.

The core arguments of this chapter are as follows: firstly, that it is justified to talk about an idea of Europe and Europeanness in Berque’s thought even though the term itself was seldom used. Indeed, the case is made that there was a strong trend of thought in post-war Paris that was unfavourable to explicit use of what was seen as a discredited label. Circumventing explicit use of its name, Berque nonetheless retained an adherence to a conception of Europe and European values. Secondly, one can delineate a vision of Europe within his conception of the Mediterranean as a whole which involved neither a tacking-on of the Arab world to Europe, nor a transcendence of it. It is a fulfilment of Europe that nonetheless leaves it integral. Thirdly, his conclusions about the Arab world that derived from his scholarly concerns about modernity and authenticity also implied a vision of Europe and Europeanness. In this vein he rejected, to a large degree, the significance of religion to an understanding of contemporary Europe or the Arab world. And yet he reinstated an amended conception of religion via his advocacy of Europe, specifically the Europe that embraces its Oriental Other, through faith. This idea of Europe that
drew from faith was descriptive, but more importantly necessitated a commitment. Similarly, this did not involve a tacking on of faith to a European self-image based on its rationalism but an enrichment of an otherwise inadequate conception of the continent as it related to its Oriental Other.

In terms of sources, the chapter draws from Berque’s works in this period generally and also his memoirs. In particular it analyses two pieces: Berque’s inaugural Collège de France lecture in 1956, and his dialogue with Louis Massignon at the Sorbonne in 1960. The first set out the vision he had of Europe and the Arab world and was a point of reference for all his future stances. The second is particularly interesting because it represents an inter-generational dialogue between two formidable Orientalists, each having invested great personal and intellectual commitment to discussing the nature of Europe and the Orient and their relationship to each other.

Jacques Berque and Europe

Berque’s work is profitable for the exploration of the concept of Europe for three reasons: firstly, the significance of the tradition of Orientalism for reflecting on the meaning of Europe, and its special relevance for conceptualising Europe precisely at the time of the decline of European power in the Islamic and Arab worlds. Secondly, the significance of the discourse of Europe prevalent throughout colonial society of which Berque was both product and analyst. And thirdly, the significance of ideas of Europe and European identity in Algeria in particular, which was the focus of much of Berque’s attention in these years. These last two reasons might seem peripheral to our purpose of an examination of Europeanising spaces in Paris but for Ann
Stoler’s reminder that just as European culture and class politics resonated in the colonial setting, so too did discourse about Europeanness in the colonies reverberate in the metropole.\(^2\)

In a general sense, a study of Berque derives its importance from the historical centrality of the Orientalist tradition of thinking about the meaning of Europe and of European identity. In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Edward Said outlined how the process of European self-definition has historically drawn in large part on its imagination of an Oriental Other.\(^3\) What is more, Said described the privileged part that France and French scholars played in what he describes as modern Orientalism. This is an institutionalised way of thinking that began in earnest with Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt and whose French examples include the collective enterprise of the *Déscription de l’Égypte* and a line of great scholars from Silvestre de Sacy, Ernest Renan, Sylvain Lévi, to Louis Massignon. The prominence of French scholars in Oriental studies should not be taken to mean that France and French imperialism were separate from what was, after all, a conscious common European undertaking that was no less so for usually being competitive and often underwritten by strident nationalism.\(^4\)

Said’s *Orientalism* leaves its examination of the European Orientalist tradition at precisely the moment Berque’s generation came to prominence. This makes sense in terms of Said’s central thesis about academic Orientalism’s intricate and symbiotic relation to political

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4 Fredric Jameson notes that the definition of imperialism as a relation between Europe or the West and the Third World is a relatively recent development. In classical Marxist theories, on the contrary, imperialism designated the rivalry of imperial and metropolitan nation states among themselves. See his ‘Modernism and Imperialism’ in Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, & Edward W. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 47.
power. For in the post-war world, European empire and influence in the Middle East yielded to the ascending political hegemony of the United States, and so it was to American scholars that Said turned his attention in the final section of his book.

An examination of Berque then, allows us to pursue a question that Said omitted: if Orientalism has traditionally defined an ascendant Europe, how might one of its foremost representatives represent and define that same Europe being stripped of that power and control? We should stress here that stripped is meant in the sense of an ongoing process rather than a finalised condition. Perhaps a danger in the narrative of Said’s *Orientalism* lies in a somewhat abrupt transition to an examination of American Middle Eastern and Islamic studies which might incline one to overestimate the speed and ease with which the European order crumbled. As Matthew Connelly shows, France doggedly resisted this demise until at least the conclusion of the French-Algerian war.5 As such, Berque had to negotiate his position on Europe in the context of an ongoing challenge to its authority that was often painted in apocalyptic terms.6 To add urgency to his task, this confrontation took place not in sheltered academic institutions in Paris but at the forefront of the world stage in, for instance, the Algerian war, at the Bandung conference of 1955, or at the Suez debacle in 1956. Furthermore, as Frederick Cooper argues, ‘looking back at the scholarship of the early 1950s, one cannot escape its political engagement, the sense among intellectuals that what they said mattered.’7 It follows that what figures like Berque had to say about Europe or Europeanness is not merely interesting in a dusty, antiquarian

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6 See Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, passim. This kind of discourse is further analysed in relation to the Paris police in the chapter 3.
kind of way, but because of this very urgency and their insistence on real concrete stakes for Europeans and non-Europeans alike.

Berque’s specific position as a professor at the Collège de France – the heart of the Western Orientalist establishment – also bound him to a certain tradition and commitment to think, via the Oriental Other, Europe. Moreover, he took up this position at a time when the Algerian crisis imposed itself on the French consciousness. Although by no means reducible to questions of Europe and European identity, this conflict entailed and highlighted these concepts. Conversely, the prestige of his position conferred him with, to borrow Pierre Bourdieu’s term, the symbolic capital to endow his ideas of Europe and Europeanness with distinct authority.

In colonial society the notions of Europe and of European identity have an importance which is at once transparent and often overly simplified. Ann Stoler demonstrates the importance of the discourse of Europeanness as a means of buttressing the authority of local colonial power in ways that related to shifting markers of race, class, and sexuality. As an instance of the policing of boundaries between the European and the non-European in the empire, Stoler argues that French government concern for ‘the métis problem’ was out of all proportion to the number of people who actually fell into that category.

The primary purpose of the distinction drawn between European and native was the upholding of hierarchy, privilege, and power within a particular colonial territory. The expression of colonial authority was constantly reformulated, and reformulated in particular ways in different European colonies. Nonetheless, Europeanness was term of reference shared by

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8 Benjamin Stora makes the interesting point that a novel feature of the Algerian war was the ambiguity of the private and public in French consciousness which derived in large part from the resistance to calling the conflict a war at all. He argues that death was exclusively a private affair, it was ‘exclu de la vie publique.’ See his La gangrène et l’oubli. La mémoire de la guerre d’Algérie (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1998), 73.

9 See Stoler, ‘Making Empire Respectable’.

10 Ibid., 648. Métis refers to those of mixed race.
European colonial states. In relation to one specific but representative example from the earlier twentieth century Stoler remarks that,

This rethinking took the form of asserting a distinct colonial morality, explicit in its reorientation toward the racial and class markers of ‘Europeanness,’ emphasizing transnational racial commonalities despite national differences – distilling a *homo europeaus* of superior health, wealth and intelligence as a white man’s norm. As one celebrated commentator on France’s colonial venture wrote: ‘one might be surprised that my pen always returns to the words *blanc*… or “European” and never to “*Français*”… in effect colonial solidarity and the obligations it entails allies all the people of the white races.’

Nor were ideas of Europe and of Europeanness in the colonies uncontroversial. They were often vigorously opposed to their equivalents in the metropole, and each one’s ongoing process of definition echoed in the other. Furthermore, Stoler argues that discourse of Europe not only imputed superiority across societies but monitored hierarchy and comportment within them. In sum, colonialism was deeply implicated in discourse about Europe and Europeanness, which in turn was inherently tied up with political power. The question thus arises how Berque conceptualised this mutual relationship between French colonialism, discourse of Europe and Europeanness, and political power.

In this era there was inevitably a marked inclination to receive what French Orientalists had to say in light of the ongoing conflict in Algeria. Berque himself remarked that he suspected one factor in his appointment to the Collège de France was the current public predisposition to inquire into the reasons for France’s failures in the Near East and the Maghreb. Importantly for our purposes, the Algerian war drew attention to a French territory that emphasised the question of Europe particularly heavily.

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11 Ibid., 645.
12 Ibid., 651.
Indeed, there was a consistent historical trend to invoke Europe or Europeanness in discussion of *Algérie française*. Douglas Johnson notes, ‘The French largely failed to integrate themselves or their economy to Algeria. They behaved as if they believed one of the ideas of the 1840s, that Algeria naturally had a European rather than an African destiny.’\(^\text{14}\) This was fostered by Algeria’s sheer proximity to Europe, to the fact that it was a comparatively extensively settled colony, and that it was in fact incorporated into the French metropole as three *départements*. Conor Cruise O’Brien saw Albert Camus as an ‘intensely European’ intellectual, in large part because, as a French Algerian, he ‘belonged to the frontier of Europe.’\(^\text{15}\) By extension so were the *pieds noirs* as a whole. Indeed, Algerian – that is European settler – identity inherited a tradition of self-understanding in terms of a Latin European and Christian culture.\(^\text{16}\)

Additionally, there was necessarily at least a weak sense of European consciousness in Algeria that derived from the pan-European origins of its settler population. France aside, waves of emigrants came from various European territories such as Malta, Alsace, Spain, and Italy. In many cases they continued to arrive on the southern shore of the Mediterranean well after the First World War.\(^\text{17}\) We should not overstate this argument, however. Just as in the Europe they had left, antagonisms proliferated along the lines of different social interests, sectors, and classes, and often did so to an extent bound to frustrate seemingly lofty notions of European cosmopolitanism.

From another perspective, ambiguity about the very Europeanness of the *petits blancs* in colonial discourse could only have reinforced their defensive affiliation to the label. Stoler shows how poor Europeans were treated with, at best, ambivalence in the colonies generally, and were

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\(^{15}\) Conor Cruise O’Brien, *Camus* (London: Fontana/Collins), 84.


often seen as an outright threat to the image of European superiority. Moreover, she traces a shift in metropolitan attitudes whereby the focus on otherness was not limited to indigenous populations but also extended to colonials themselves. Again, given Algeria’s large-scale settlement by poor Europeans in a way that was unacceptable and unpermitted in, for instance, French Indochina, the question of Europe and Europeanness is all the more salient.

However, the label ‘European’ induced a stronger degree of attachment as a mode of distinguishing between the European settlers and the non-European indigenous Arab and Berber populations. The French Algerian writer Jules Roy recalled being instilled with the value that, ‘the Arabs belonged to a different race, one inferior to my own… “They don’t have the same needs we do…,” I was always being told. I was glad to believe it, and from that moment on their condition could not disturb me. Who suffers seeing oxen sleep on straw or eating grass?’

Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* is useful in making sense of such ideas – an ethos so inscribed in the general culture as to be internalised as natural, something that went without saying. As such, it is reflected in the thought of even socially committed and engaged liberal humanists like Albert Camus. Berque would come to concur with a certain postcolonial critique of Camus’s work, who otherwise shared Berque’s interest in Europe and passion for the Mediterranean. Namely, that Arabs are either absent in a land in which they were the overwhelming majority, or else depicted as a shady, anonymous people. We should add that the

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Europeanness of repatriated *pieds noirs* after Algerian independence was a pressing and thorny question (see chapter 2).

In sum, understandings of Europe and Europeanness permeated French settler society in North Africa. As such, as an Orientalist in the Paris academy, Berque was obligated to engage with the questions they posed.

**Berque’s Europe between Paris and Universalism**

The purpose of this section is to take a step back and delineate precisely the grounds for considering ideas of Europe and Europeanness in Berque’s work. After all, one of its manifest traits was to alternate between the terms France, Europe, the West, and universalism. In fact Europe was probably the least used of these terms. But it is suggested here that if we consider these terms in turn, and consider the relation between them, it is reasonable to conclude that a certain concept of Europe is profoundly connected to Berque’s thought.

In the first instance let us clarify the relationship between Paris and France. Frederick Cooper reminds us that France, at least until the end of the period in question in this thesis, was both less and more than itself.\(^22\) Both culture and politics were highly centralised in Paris from where an ethos of universalism was projected by France the empire-state far beyond its hexagonal frontiers. In his discussion of the idea of Europe, Hobsbawm also points to the romanticising of peasants but notes that this also often implied that they were backward and so perhaps not fully European – accordingly, they were the quaint subject of ethnographic museums

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\(^{22}\) Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 171.
in the continent’s cosmopolitan cities.\textsuperscript{23} Herman Lebovics shows the importance of exhibitions in Paris in displaying the exoticness of French folk cultures and non-Europeans alike.\textsuperscript{24} Whether Berque paid attention to such phenomena is less relevant than the fact that the terms of talking about France in relation to its non-European Others were unfailingly centred on Paris.

It is apparent that Berque often referred to France, not Europe as such. Some of his articles of this time mentioned the Europeans of Algeria, but overall they read more as prescriptions for how political France might resolve the crisis.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly, his concluding remarks in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in December 1956 stand out:

Proclamer l’avenir de la chose franco-arabe, au moment où beaucoup, parmi les autres et parmi nous, le déchirent, l’audace semble paradoxe… Province d’étude ou champ de réalisations, ces pays ont été, sont encore pour nous le lieu de notre orgueil et de nos larmes. Dans l’action comme dans la connaissance, l’œuvre française y porte un long héritage d’affirmation humaine. Puisse-t-elle longtemps le soutenir.\textsuperscript{26}

However, of crucial importance was Berque’s accompanying assessment that, ‘le français, j’ose le déclarer même aujourd’hui, reste l’hellénisme des peuples arabes.’\textsuperscript{27} From this we can infer that Berque’s references to France did not reflect a conviction that it was radically distinct in its nature as a European imperial power. Instead it was the highest representative of a common Hellenic, European civilisation.

\textsuperscript{26} Jacques Berque, ‘Perspectives de l’Orientalisme Contemporain’, Revue de l’Institut de Belles Lettres Arabes 20 (1957), 238. This is in fact Berque’s inaugural lecture at the Collège de France on 1 December 1956.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 237.
This point was highlighted in Berque’s exchange with Louis Massignon in a public conversation at the Sorbonne in 1960 mediated by Jean-Marie Domenach. The premise of the occasion was a discussion of Berque’s book *Les Arabes d’hier à demain* (1960). In the context of his understanding of the unfolding of modern history, Berque referred to ‘les Occidentaux’, who took the initiative in the promulgation of ‘la civilisation technique’. This was in fact one of Berque’s central scholarly concerns. For him this manifest European commonality had structured the globe materially and also existentially. Accordingly, any adequate account of how Europeans and Arabs alike defined the self had to take account of this history.

Fundamental to Berque’s vision of the leading role of France and French culture in the West’s relation with the Arab world was his conviction that this was so in the eyes of the Arabs themselves. We have seen how he set out this case in his inaugural Collège de France lecture, and again in his exchange with Massignon. Although he remarked on the Arab world’s disappointment with France six years into the Algerian war and in the wake of Suez, he still maintained, ‘Je reviens à ce que je disais tout à l’heure des responsabilités de notre pays qui, aux yeux des Arabes, constitue le vrai Occident et peut-être la vraie culture… Le désespoir monte et nous sommes responsables en partie de ce désespoir.’

If we can accurately qualify Berque’s Paris-centred West as an idea of Europe, it is on account of his profound scepticism about the United States as an appropriate agent for non-coercive dialogue and exchange in the Islamic world. In his inaugural lecture, Berque commented on the ‘image néfaste’ of the traditional colonial administrator, but asked ‘préférez-vous celle de l’aventurier évasive que chanta Lawrence, ou celle, plus moderne, de l’affairiste

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29 Ibid., 1506.
30 Ibid., 1509.
31 Ibid., 1517.
dраФ, cher aux grands compagnies?32 The reference to T.E. Lawrence suggests that European imperialists had not been disinterested participants in Middle Eastern affairs, but Berque still maintained that the European sensibility for its Others was superior to crass and impersonal American commercialism. Accordingly, he reflected ominously on the meeting between President Roosevelt and King Ibn Saud in 1947 – a threshold for the rise of the Pax Americana in the region. He finished the thought with a suspicion of some bitterness: ‘Cinq ans après, l’Europe occidentale dépendait du plan Marshall et le tiers monde du point IV de Truman.’33 One might suggest here that Berque left himself vulnerable to being read as regretting less American hegemony’s consequences for the Third World than the decline of Europe and the imperialism which defined it.

Berque was also very dubious about the intellectual methods with which the United States was to impose itself on the Arab world – its crude ideas about modernisation were scant compensation for its utter inexperience there. In his memoirs he recalled his stint working in Egypt under the auspices of UNESCO – an organisation he described as being ‘alors dominée par le triomphalisme américain.’34 Moreover, he felt that the importance in the Arab world of the reciprocity between past and present, and its dilemma regarding revolution and authenticity were completely unappreciated; this was the case even in as systematically researched a thesis as Daniel Lerner’s The Passing of Traditional Society – an archetypal work in post-war American modernisation theory.35 As we will see, Berque did address these questions and in doing so went some way towards expounding a vision of Europe.

32 Berque, ‘Perspectives de l’Orientalisme Contemporain’, 221.
33 Berque, Mémoires de deux rives, 151.
34 Ibid., 150.

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Berque’s thought about Europe in relation to the United States was quite orthodox in post-war Paris, and drew sustenance from a remarkable agreement as to the otherness of America. Tony Judt argues that historically the French exhibited in their acutest form the mixed feelings of Europeans towards the Americas, and in this context, he notes the relevance of the infusion of German thought into French circles which manifested itself in a Heideggerian distaste for ‘technical civilization’, a term very important to Berque’s own thought about both the European and non-European worlds.36

If America was characterised by vulgar materialism and modernity, a lack of polish of centuries of national and popular culture, it was all the same conceived as Europe’s Other not in kind but degree. It was different, to be sure, but not radically so. This is crucial to bear in mind in reflecting on what it meant to talk about America in terms of an idea of Europe or of European identity. As such, Jean-Paul Sartre condemned ‘that super-European monster, North America’ in his condemnation of European colonialism in his preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*.37 In this particular kind of idea of Europe, abhorrence of America at one moment was reinforced in the next by its very familiarity. Scorn was a compensatory mechanism for a distinction that was uncomfortably slight. Such was the significance of Claude Roy’s assessment: ‘In the forties and fifties, America was not very much *liked* by Europeans, and by the French in particular… Europeans detested America because they detested *themselves*.’38 Berque however, was steadfastly optimistic in his vision of Europe, and so it is symptomatic that his distaste for America never approached the extent, itself not at all untypical in post-war Paris, of a 1952 editorial in *Esprit* by the mediator of Berque and Massignon’s conversation.

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Domenarch wrote that, ‘Dès le début, nous avons ici dénoncé la mise en tutelle de la politique française, et les dangers mêmes que faisait courir à la santé de notre pays une culture américaine qui attaque à leurs racines l’originalité et la cohésion mentale et morale des peuples européens.’

Having set out the arguments as to why Berque’s ‘West’ is to be properly thought of as Europe, with France playing a leading role therein, let us turn to investigate the relation and distinction between this idea of the continent and universalism. The salience of the question is shown by James Le Sueur’s discussion of the declining capital of French universalism during, and as a result of, the Algerian War. He argues that hitherto this ideology commanded assent across the political spectrum and transcended endemic conflict between Communists, non-Communists, Marxists, non-Marxists, liberals and non-liberals. In fact, Berque retained a belief in the notion of universalism but approached it cautiously and critically, which is not to say unproblematically. Above all, in an age of decolonisation he considered that it behoved Europeans to reconsider their ‘patterns of existence’, and the West to question its insistence on its hegemony and universalism.

Immanuel Wallerstein’s distinction between a partial and distorted ‘European univeralism’ and a ‘universal universalism’ is useful here. He identifies the former with the legitimisation of the powerful in the modern world system since at least the sixteenth century. In one sense this captures the direction and sense of Berque’s thought. However, Berque was also alert to the limitations of challenges to the rhetoric of the powerful which reproduced in a different form the Eurocentrism they took to task. Berque’s discourse about Europe, then,

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39 Jean-Marie Domenach, editorial in Esprit (June, 1952), 1034.
involved critiquing the inadequate ideas of others as well as setting out his own. Let us illustrate with the examples of Jacques Soustelle and Sartre.

Jacques Soustelle was Governor General of Algeria in 1955 and 1956. Le Sueur argues that he ‘unquestioningly privileged the French nation as a bearer of progress and civilization… he believed that French technology, progress, science and rationality was superior to the Algerians’ indigenous culture and religion.’ Consequently, he professed that Algerian Muslims were capable of being true citizens because they were slowly being westernised by French civilisation. His interlinking of France and the West exemplifies a world view derived from the Enlightenment and French Revolution. That is to say, an idea of Europe’s meritorious potential fulfilled by France – its highest example in Europe itself and best hope for proselytisation of that spirit outside of Europe. As a darling of the pieds noirs community that had initially distrusted him, one risks too easily dismissing Soustelle as an uncomplicated French chauvinist. Disappointed by de Gaulle’s rejection of his advocacy of ‘intégration’ of the French and indigenous communities in Algeria, and the subsequent direction of the war towards Algerian self-determination, Soustelle lambasted French Jacobin parochialism. His remarks in support of the idea of ‘Europafricque’ are a useful reminder that Eurocentrism is not expelled merely by its acknowledgement and a professed aversion to it:

Pour construire une France eurafricaine fédérale, il eût fallu que la métropole jouât le jeu. Et elle n’a pas joué, en grande partie parce qu’elle redoutait, en vertu d’une conception jacobine de sa souveraineté, que fussent créés, comme il était naturel, des pouvoirs fédéraux qu’Européens et Africains auraient exercés à égalité… On aime mieux, en somme, rester entre vieux Français… et cultiver le petit pré carré des ancêtres, que de courir l’aventure avec des Africains, des Arabes, des Kabyles, voire des néo-Français qui, si patriotes qu’ils soient, n’en ont pas moins le tort de s’appeler Hernandez. Jacobinisme? Sans doute. Il y a aussi, chez certains, un racisme sans doute

44 Ibid., 109.
inconscient qui leur fait préférer une petite France bien pure à une grande France trop mêlée du point de vue des sangs et des religions.45

Like Soustelle, Berque was also unapologetic in retaining his belief in progress – a view that many in post-war Europe no longer found tenable. Likewise, its standing in historiography in the 1950s was at a particularly low ebb.46 Yet, one of the core tenets of Berque’s work was the historical transition of the world from sacred to historic time, to a temporality driven by the notion of technical progress.47

Berque too, had worked as a colonial administrator and whilst the experience reinforced Soustelle’s colonial certainties, Berque’s impressions were quite different. Consequently, his notion of universalism would differ from Soustelle’s in two key ways. Firstly, Berque was profoundly troubled by the domination and violence which underwrote the colonial enterprise; it distorted human relations and cut the ground from under universalism’s own feet.48 It is important to note, however, that he did not see violence as necessarily constitutive of imperialism – we will return to the implications of this for the representation of Europe below. Secondly, like Soustelle, he professed the necessity and merits of European science, rationality, and technology. But he qualified his enthusiasm with the judgement that though necessary, they were insufficient to know the colonial Other. And so by the same token he disrupted a European self-image based on its universalist capacity to understand the world.

47 Sacrste, Germaine Tillon, 168.
48 Berque, Mémoires de deux rives, 143.
Berque’s developing sense of Europe made him no less sceptical with regard to other ideas of universalism, even when they derived from sources quite opposed to the likes of Soustelle. In relation to the ideas of figures such as Sartre, Berque felt that claims to universalism, radical or not, often did not leave their own borders. They were ideas of Europe, or ideas of what Europe should be, projected elsewhere. In his memoirs, Berque reflected that Sartre’s ‘conclusions procédaient moins de l’analyse des situations et des spécificités en cause que d’une problématique centrée sur l’Occident.’ He assessed Sartre’s support for the FLN as ‘européocentrique’ since ‘le FLN ne faisait qu’entamer une nouvelle révolution universelle, c’est-à-dire française.’

Wallerstein suggests how one might begin to define and approach a ‘universal universalism’, and cites as a point of departure Léopold-Sédar Senghor’s notion of the ‘rendez-vous du donner et du recevoir.’ As a member at once of the Académie française and an exponent of negritude, Senghor was an ideal exponent of the appealing idea of a space of giving and receiving that Wallerstein sees as the basis of a ‘universal universalism’. There are certain parallels between this and Berque’s thought, examined below, about the possibilities and conditions of genuine exchange between Europe and the Arab world.

The Form and Substance of Berque’s Europe

As a point of contextualisation and comparison we will continue the examination of Sartre’s understanding of Europe. The key point to be made here is that Berque necessarily had

49 Berque, Mémoires de deux rives, 200. For a contemporary critique along these lines see Denis de Rougemont, ‘Sartre contre l’Europe’, Arts: beaux-arts, littérature, spectacles (17 January, 1962).
50 Berque, Mémoires de deux rives, 180.
51 Wallerstein, European Universalism, 79-80.
to take account of a strong current of opinion at this time in post-war Paris that strongly critiqued any positive invocation of Europe. This leads us to examine Berque’s conception of the Mediterranean where he articulated a community of Europe and the Arab world. It is argued that his academic preoccupation with modernity and authenticity in the Arab world revealed an underlying conception of Europe.

To borrow again Bourdieu’s concept of a field in which claims about identity confront each other, any conception of Europe could not ignore or avoid the impact of other ideas of Europe, or for that matter claims that Europe as a label of belonging or organisation was actually unimportant. In this period, Sartre, as France’s most famous intellectual, carried considerable symbolic capital to make such claims and to a significant extent set the terms of debate about Europe, and he did so scathingly.

Sartre’s universalism derived from his philosophy of freedom and understanding of history. Europe is an idea that appears repeatedly in his work of this period, in the context of both the Cold War and of Europe’s imperial commitments. As we have seen, Berque preferred to keep Orientalism out of politics at least in the sense of it being the direct academic and spiritual arm of European political hegemony. But like Césaire and Fanon, Sartre was more intent on showing how, as far as the idea and ideals of Europe were concerned, culture was immersed up to its neck in the sordid politics of European imperialism:

The European elite set about fabricating a native elite; they selected adolescents, marked on their foreheads, with a branding iron, the principles of Western culture, stuffed into their mouths verbal gags, grand turgid words which stuck to their teeth; after a brief stay in the mother country, they were sent back interfered with. These living lies no longer had anything to say to their brothers; they echoed; from Paris, from London, from Amsterdam we proclaimed the words ‘Parthenon!'
Fraternity!’ and somewhere in Africa, in Asia, lips parted: ‘…thenon’, ‘…nity’. It was a golden age.\footnote{52 Sartre, ‘The Wretched of the Earth’, 153-154.}

For Sartre, Europe here was worth exceedingly little – it was nothing more than a transient phase to be transcended in a higher unity. And for him so much the better since Europe was a term sullied by its own behaviour, and all the more so for its protestations of its high ideals. Sartre makes a damning summary of this state of affairs:

In the past, our continent had other devices to keep it afloat: the Parthenon, Chartres, the Rights of Man, the swastika. We now know what they are worth: and now the only thing they claim can save us from shipwreck is the very Christian sentiment of our guilt. This is the end, as you can see: Europe is taking in water everywhere. What then has happened? Quite simply this: in the past we were the subjects of History, whereas we are now its objects. The balance of power has been reversed, the process of decolonisation is in progress; all that out mercenaries can attempt is to delay its completion.\footnote{53 Ibid., 170-71.}

For Sartre, in any context Europe was a term which connoted so strongly domination and illegitimate hierarchy as to override all else. ‘The word “Europe”,’ he wrote in 1947, ‘formerly referred to the geographical, economic, and political unity of the Old Continent. Today, it preserves a musty smell of Germanism and servitude.’\footnote{54 Sartre, \textit{What is Literature?} (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 218.} Elsewhere in the intellectual field, the dominance of Lévi-Strauss signified that after his \textit{Race and History} (1952) it was somewhat more difficult to appeal to staid notions of European superiority. In this work, Western industry and science were presented to a wide audience as merely ‘the outcome of chance combinations at the roulette table of time, rather than any inner historical dynamic.’\footnote{55 Perry Anderson, ‘The Mythologian’, \textit{New Left Review} 71 (September-October, 2011), 138. Sacriste argues that Berque eschewed the approaches of both Sartre and Lévi-Strauss, and was closer in academic orientation to Fernand Braudel. See Sacriste, \textit{Germaine Tillion}, 138-139.}
that to the extent that Berque thought in terms of Europe, he was obliged to formulate it taking into account a prestigious body of thought which insisted at best that the concept’s importance was exaggerated, or at worst that it was barely serviceable. What, then, did Berque wish to retain in an idea of Europe, and how was he to circumvent the discrediting of the label by the likes of Sartre, and, as Berque saw it, their parochialism?

A core idea in Berque’s thought is the Latin Mediterranean. This is particularly interesting in the context of Todd Shepard’s observation that today the Mediterranean Sea has become a definitive border of Europe, whereas decades ago it was projected as a bridge that would facilitate the conjoined construction of Europe and Africa as a replacement for European colonial domination.56 Various influential Parisian figures expounded on the concept of the Mediterranean in this period, notably Albert Camus and Fernand Braudel.57 So what was the nature of Berque’s vision and how did it connect to Europe? He later contrasted the authentic and creative kind of community this Latin Mediterranean might represent with the uninspiring mercantile actuality of Western Europe – a sort of ‘grosse Suisse bouffie.’58 He posed the question: ‘Dire qu’entre la latinité, c’est-à-dire aussi l’hellénisme, et l’Islam méditerranéen nous devons forger une synthèse, est-ce là une irréalisable utopie? Utopie je veux bien. Mais irréalisable non pas! Ce qui depuis un siècle monte autour de la mer commune, et s’aime et se bat, et se cherche en l’autre, et par et contre lui, peut nous mener, si nous y travaillons, à des Andalousies nouvelles.’59

57 Interestingly given the subject of this chapter, Carole Reynaud Paligot examines the Orientalist underpinnings of the work of Braudel and his fellow annaliste Lucien Febvre, both of whom were important influences on Berque. See Carole Reynaud Paligot, ‘Les Annales de Lucien Febvre à Fernand Braudel: Entre épopée coloniale et opposition Orient/Occident’, French Historical Studies 32/1 (2009), 121-144.
59 Ibid., 308.
There are two arguments to be made as to how this expressed an idea of Europe, albeit of course a particular and differentiated variant. This section will proceed as follows: firstly, we will examine the nature of his conception of the Mediterranean and equivalent terms to make the case that these encompass a particular way of conceptualising Europe. His terminology emphasised self-identification by Othering, but in a dialogical, not reactionary and xenophobic, sense. Secondly, the case will be made that, contrary to Sartre’s formulation, there was to be no transcendence of Berque’s Europe. Europe was a component of the Mediterranean world and yet not constitutively dependent on it. If he talked about a synthesis of new Andalusias, this was something to struggle for in the long term, and could not be prematurely declared by radical philosophy. If this was true at the time of his closing Collège de France lecture, it was even more so at the time of the bloody French-Algerian war.

To be clear, when Hourani writes that Berque ended his career by affirming his faith in the Mediterranean community in his closing Collège de France lecture, it is not to say that this was a departure from his earlier thought. Rather, Berque completed his academic career having unswervingly upheld his commitment to such an idea. Of course, if Berque meant that Europe as a whole was less important than its own southern, Mediterranean region then it would be unpersuasive to talk about an idea of Europe, or of European identity, at all. But a regional and detached Latin Mediterranean sits at odds with Berque’s insistence that ‘notre monde n’est plus cantonal.’ Throughout his career, in fact, Berque used several different terms as equivalent to this Latin North Mediterranean: as we have seen, in his inaugural lecture in 1956 he maintained that the French language was still, and would remain, ‘the Hellenism of the Arab peoples’; and in his exchange with Massignon in 1960, he spoke of wanting to convey a ‘Greco-Oriental message’, of an Asiatic Mediterranean and of the Greek figure Heraclitus as representative of

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60 Berque, ‘Perspectives de l’Orientalisme Contemporain’, 218.
this ethos.\footnote{Berque & Massignon, ‘Dialogue sur “Les Arabes”’, 1518.} These various labels should be interpreted as a common sentiment – a certain vision of Europe among others. Again this correlates with the argument we will set out that this understanding of the idea of Europe is a commitment as much as a description. After all, Berque was too subtle a scholar to collapse the history of Medieval Andalusia with Ancient Greece together on the one hand, and on the other all the histories and societies of the Mediterranean Arab world; nor to idealise them beyond what serious scholarship could sustain in good faith.

We might better understand this Europe as part historical analysis and part program. His historical analysis reiterated that however flawed, there was a real and important historical legacy of coexistence and mutual and profitable exchange and interaction between Europe and its Oriental Other, despite his insistence on the pronounced difference in their respective trajectories of material development.\footnote{Berque, ‘Perspectives de l’Orientalisme Contemporain’, 225.}

Yet his choice of terminology leaves the impression that Europe is a word so loaded with negative connotations of domination and exploitative hierarchy that it cannot uphold its own positive aspects. It is as if he had to ditch the name to save the content of his idea of Europe, in contrast to the enthusiasm for the term of, for instance, Denis de Rougemont. It is as if Europe was torn between the condemnations of the Sartres on the one side, and the appropriation of the label by the likes of Soustelle and Maurice Papon to defend the colonial status quo on the other. It is not plausible to suggest that Berque’s ‘Asiatic Mediterranean’ was not European at all. Rather the use of the expression Asiatic suggests compensation as if even to use the label Europe would be to prejudice the very attributes in that idea of Europe he wished to mobilise. By this point Berque saw decolonisation as inevitable as well as desirable. But the implication was that even when the current subjective overt violence of the Algerian war should cease, the label
Europe would retain an insidious connotation of illegitimate hierarchy and violence, surreptitiously distorting relations between Europe and the Arab world. In other words, even when the outward manifestations of imperial hierarchy and violence were removed, the very term Europe retained a loaded association with these negative qualities. It still implied a subtle, intricate Eurocentric interest significant enough to undermine the theoretical goal of a ‘universal universalism’.

Secondly, unlike Sartre’s conception of the universal, Berque’s Europe was not transcended into a higher unity. His Europe is a constituent part of the Mediterranean, but no less integral and self-contained for that. But neither is this Mediterranean merely a tacking-on of the Orient to Europe; the articulation of the former fulfils the latter while each remains integral. Herein lies the value of Berque’s Europe as Latin Mediterranean as opposed to, say, de Rougemont’s idea of a Europe with its heart in the western part of the continent.63 In Berque’s terms, de Rougemont’s Europe is not inaccurate, merely impoverished. Berque counter-proposed this Latin Mediterranean as a more enriching basis for Europe.

Berque might have thought that most differences between Europe and the Orient were historically contingent, but differences they remained.64 And though formulae for a quick resolution or synthesis of the contradictions of the colonial situation might have been comforting, they were actually disabling. What would become of ‘la “chose franco-arabe”’, and by extension European and Arab mutual understanding, would be worked out over the long wave of history.65

Interestingly, there is a certain parallel in Berque’s conception of Europe and the anticolonial theory of Frantz Fanon. Berque knew Fanon, discussed his work with him, and

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64 Berque, ‘Perspectives de l’Orientalisme Contemporain’, 225.
65 Berque, Mémoires de deux rives, 180.
admired him, whilst not sharing what he saw as his strain of morbidity and masochism. Said surmises that Fanon drew from Lukács’s classic analysis of subject-object relations; ultimately though, Fanon refused Lukács’ promise of transcendence. According to this analysis, for the Martinican psychiatrist there was no higher unity to be reached between coloniser and colonised, the relation was cemented by mutual exclusivity. But contrary to the way in which he is often read as celebrating violence as an end in itself, Fanon was aware that anticolonial nationalism was in itself no solution to colonialism. Indeed, if it was not to lapse into a repetition of the European colonialism it defeated, anticolonial nationalism must quickly transform itself into a consciousness of social and political needs. Berque’s lived experience among the Arabs instilled in him a sense, complementary to Fanon’s formulations, that history could not be reduced to formulae nor willed away into a tidy totality. Rather, it was something to work through and he retained a vision of Europe that would engage this challenge in a mutually sustained and equal dialogue. Through this, the mutual and self-definitions of Europe and the Arab world would incorporate precisely these social and political needs that Fanon pointed to, rather than tired labels of identity or spurious promises of utopian resolution. Next to Fanon’s theoretical exposition of colonialism, Berque added a personal anecdote that evinced a comparable absence of transcendence of Europe and the Arab world despite the possibility of mutual and fruitful coexistence within the Mediterranean community: ‘Jamais mes amis africains et asiatiques ne m’auront demandé même par insinuation, de renoncer à mon açâla [Berque

translates this as authenticity or identity]. Les Arabes tiennent trop à la leur. Et l’açâla commande la réciprocité."⁶⁸

If Berque allowed the relation of Europe to the Arab world or of Occident to Orient to sit as it was, he did not suggest that either was timeless and unchanging, much less that Europe was superior. Each label was in fact of secondary importance; for both Berque and Sartre ‘politics begins not ends with identity.’⁶⁹ An idea of Europe or of European identity as an end in itself did not interest Berque; rather it was a historically accessible frame of reference to further his cause of mutual understanding and profitable exchange. One might argue that this is something like, to borrow and adapt Gayatri Spivak’s concept, unintentional strategic essentialism. Spivak’s concept entails the idea that though differences might permeate certain groups, for the purpose of pursuing certain goals it is worth essentialising themselves.⁷⁰ By analogy, Berque perhaps suggests a Europe he should not believe in as a hard identity, but whose deficiencies or contradictions are overridden by its potential for human exchange and understanding. Indeed he assured his audience in his inaugural lecture that his understanding of the Occident/Orient relationship differed from that of Kipling, nor was it comparable to Herodotus’s irredeemable opposition between Greeks and Barbarians. Interestingly, Berque then cited the Egyptian scholar Ah’mad Amîn who, ‘dans un de ses livres, niait d’abord que cet Orient et cet Occident formassent deux entités différentes. Il les définissait plus justement comme deux styles, voire comme deux phases de la même civilisation.’⁷¹ Berque drew back from fully endorsing the idea, but one has the impression he was tempted by it nonetheless. Europe as a style, as opposed to an

⁶⁸ Berque, Mémoires de deux rives, 214.
⁷⁰ For her discussion of the term and how it has been used by others see Sara Danius & Stefan Jonsson, ‘An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’, boundary 2 20/2 (Summer 1993), 24-50. One should note that Spivak later renounced this concept.
⁷¹ Berque, ‘Perspectives de l’Orientalisme Contemporain’, 225.
identity or essence, suggests something more provisional, even something aesthetic. But conversely, it risks being inadequate to carry the kind of analytical weight Berque wanted for it in both senses of his idea of Europe as description and commitment.

Modernity and Authenticity

One can extrapolate Berque’s ideas about the nature of Europe and the meaning of Europeanness from his scholarship of the Arab world, specifically his inquiry into its struggle with the issues of modernity and authenticity. As Hourani describes it, ‘at the heart of his concern has been the problem of alienation: how can men and women repossess a world which has grown alien to them, and to do so without losing their authenticity? How can they avoid the two dangers of a stagnant reassertion of an identity inherited from the past, and a cosmopolitan and futureless modernity?’

Modernity was indeed a constant preoccupation in Berque’s thought, and fundamental to his conception of what defined and drove Europe and the Arab world respectively. This derived from his understanding of history in which Europe had taken the lead whilst the Arab countries embarked on modernity no earlier than the First World War, and not really until the Second World War. In his inaugural lecture, Berque suggested a working definition of modernity by which to understand the current situation in which relations between Europe and the Orient were framed:

Les derniers siècles ont été pour nous des siècles de conquête de la matière, tandis qu’en Orient subsistaient les modes du passé: agriculture somnolente ou marchandages agiles. Une telle

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73 Berque, ‘Perspectives de l’Orientalisme Contemporain’, 223.
difference a causé la plupart des autres. Celles-ci n’ont en tout cas rien d’essentiel. Elles n’autorisent ni une recherche réduite à celle de particularités, ni une action qui renierait l’unité souveraine et les communes espérances de l’homme.  

As such, Berque’s conception of what both Europe and the Arab world were, and what they could be, stemmed from an appreciation of their histories. Berque insisted on the enduring relevance of history, and of the historian as mediator, to an understanding the European self. In his 1960 dialogue with Massignon he reflected that, ‘je serais tenté de croire, comme vous, que l’avenir, pour les Arabes comme pour nous, consiste dans la vivification du passé. L’avenir est à beaucoup d’égards le passé vivant, le passé revivant, revécu, et non pas ce passé pourri auquel se cramponnent les conservateurs.’

Later in his life, reflecting on his career, Berque made a fleeting and unexamined but telling point about the nature of history. He remarked that in Algérie française ‘le souvenir des traumatismes subis au XIXe siècle et la persistance de la domination éluadaient le gros des effets créateurs du contact des cultures.’ Against the grain of a certain trend of conceiving of Europe as starting again from a tabula rasa after the Second World War, Berque hinted at the continuing determinacy of violence to distort societies, though not irreparably so, provided it is acknowledged and worked through. Though Sartre might disapprove of the invocation of history as the alibi of inauthenticity, he would add to this that it is not only the society of the victims of violence that is distorted. So too is the Europe that perpetrates violence: ‘Pas un français ne sera en sécurité tant qu’un Juif, en France et dans le monde entier, pourra craindre pour sa vie.’

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74 Ibid., 225.
76 Berque, ‘Le veilleur de la nuit coloniale’, in Une Cause jamais perdue, 27.
Furthermore, Berque’s invocation here of the continuing presence of the past draws our attention beyond one’s stance on Europe to process – how such ideas are formed. In one sense Berque’s Europe derived from an understanding of the longue durée nature of history, and in this regard he made explicit his debt to figures like Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel. However, this historical consciousness was not so settled as to be unaffected by the unraveling events of decolonisation. Berque’s intellectual trajectory correlates to Frederick Cooper’s observation about how quickly the acceptance of imperialism as a fact of a life was completely overturned in a matter of a couple of decades. Berque himself credited his espousal of the cause of anticolonial nationalism to his short-term work in an Egyptian village in the 1950s. One might make a case here for the potential of travel as a means of rethinking even longstanding and entrenched notions of the European self. Sartre, on the other hand, reminds us not to confuse such arguments with self-congratulatory worldliness which cancels through into a European imperialistic mindset – one thinks here of Soustelle’s remarks above. In his preface to Henri Cartier-Bresson’s collection D’une Chine à l’autre (1954), Sartre maintained that tourists were the later equivalent of irritated missionaries and soldiers, and more generally a culture of war and ‘a refusal to understand the enemy’.

Berque’s idea of Europe thus intermixed chronic and acute causation, long-term structural consistency and short-term contingency. This question of the precise nature of

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78 Cooper, Colonialism in Question, 54.
79 Berque, Mémoires de deux rives, 159, 164.
81 Sartre, ‘From One China to Another’, in Colonialism and Neocolonialism, 22. Interestingly, Stephanie Hare points to Papon’s formative travels while an administrator in the Muslim world and his subsequent interest in Islam. In what is a non-sequitur, Hare finds this largely to preclude any colonialist rationale for Papon’s actions, including in his role as an administrator in Algeria and as head of the Paris police at the time of the 17 October 1961 killings. See See Stephanie Hare, Death, Duty and the Republic: The Career of Maurice Papon from Vichy France to the Algerian War (PhD dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2008), 81-82 & passim.
historical time that informs ideas of Europe and of Europeanness is complex but important, since it implies that one needs to examine them also in terms of the struggle to imagine them, which cannot be reduced to a smooth progressive development.

The idea of Europe’s modernity has historically been a justification for its universalism, and its science and technology a legitimisation of its rule over non-Europeans.\(^{82}\) The ambiguity and problematic nature of the discourse of modernity has detracted from this not at all.\(^{83}\) Indeed, Wallerstein reminds us that historically Occident to Orient was often presumed analogous to modernity to tradition.\(^{84}\) With regard to his conceptualisation of Europe, here we will look at two ways in which Berque dissented from this orthodoxy and one way in which he upheld it.

Firstly, Berque was frustrated by colonial inertia which sat at odds with the image of a modern and dynamic enterprise. Equally, he was appalled by reactionary colonial violence.\(^{85}\) Such concerns stand at odds with the influential Foucauldian notion of ‘governmentality’ as characteristic of modern Europe.\(^{86}\) Upon close examination, an assertive European identity or idea of Europe was unpersuasive when it based on an imperial enterprise whose capacity for adaptation was so clunky and limited. Indeed, whether in North Africa or in Palestine or anywhere else, European empires so often failed to do anything substantive by way of political reform when they needed to and were still able to, and only attempted to do something when it was too late to do anything.

\(^{83}\) See Frederick Cooper’s discussion of modernity in his *Colonialism in Question*, 113-149.
\(^{84}\) See Wallerstein, *European Universalism*, 75-76.
\(^{85}\) Berque, *Mémoires de deux rives*, 143. See also Albert Hourani’s similar contemporary analysis of colonial violence and inertia and the European consciousness in Hourani, ‘The Decline of the West in the Middle East I’, *International Affairs* 29/1 (January, 1953), 22-42; Hourani, ‘The Decline of the West in the Middle East II’, *International Affairs* 29/2 (April, 1953), 156-183.
\(^{86}\) Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 48.
Secondly, in his inaugural lecture, he concurred with H.A.R. Gibb about the difficulty of penetrating the Arab world. However, this is not to be taken as a further endorsement of the traditional notion of the unfathomable, mysterious, and irrational Oriental Other, but a comment on the limits of the knowledge upon which Europe had defined and prided itself: its modernity and technical mastery were less awesome that Europeans would like to think. After all, in the same lecture Berque explicitly invoked the inadequacy of present research methods:

N’est-il pas difficile, voire impossible, de se pencher sur l’Islam d’aujourd’hui, avec les précautions, mais aussi les exigences de l’histoire? En une matière aussi vivante, aussi brûlante, aussi souffrante, les moyens habituels de la science ont leur valeur, immense, mais qui ne saurait suffire. Il faut vivre au contact de ces hommes, rechercher leur familiarité, presque une connivence… Mon sujet exige de qui veut l’étreindre, non seulement la rançon habituelle de l’étude: longues années de lectures poudreuses, enquêtes prolongées sur le terrain – mais un pacte de sympathie, d’engagement.

This call for a pact of sympathy and commitment are crucial to an understanding of Berque’s conception of Europe. We will return to a fuller examination of this idea below.

On the other hand, in his reflection upon his career Berque remarked on his intellectual affiliation to the bureaux arabes – a classic institutional example of colonial modernisation. However, he recalled in his memoirs that to a greater and greater extent he repudiated not the prestigious tradition of the bureaux but its ‘dégénérescence, son inadéquation.’ This is a very important point in terms of ideas of Europe and of European identity. Pace Sartre then, for Berque there were good and bad colons; it was possible to separate the positive benefits of colonialism from its exploitation and violence – regrettable, even shameful, but contingent and unnecessary phenomena. Of course, the value of the distinction is most obvious in the case of

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88 Ibid., 218-219.
90 Berque, Mémoires de deux rives, 141.
those nostalgic for a Europe of imperialism. But it applies all the same to other visions of Europe; an idea of Europe either starting again from a tabula rasa, or an idea of Europe siphoning out the bad and stressing the good in the manner of, say, Robert Schuman, is chastened by the reminder of the possibility of the inextricable intertwining of the two.

This ties in to differing narratives of the end of French and European empires. Sartre argued that the innate logic of empire was boomeranging on itself. Berque on the other hand saw decolonisation as the fulfilment of the ideal of European imperialism, and in no way necessitating a repudiation of Europe. On the contrary, after independence France would continue to help Algeria and the Arab world precisely in accordance with the best French tradition and authentically European imperial values.

**Religion and Faith in Berque’s Europe**

Parallel to Berque’s wish for Orientalism, religion too was something which in theory might stand aloof from politics yet in practice was implicated in it, particularly in the colonial context. After all, a generation earlier, President Clemenceau had invoked the crusades at the Versailles conference in 1919. Similarly, Sartre made a point of condemning the complicity of

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95 Hourani, ‘Decline of the West in the Middle East I’, 32.
religion in imperialism. And referring to the colonised, Fanon of course charged that ‘no priest has ever stepped in to bear the blows in his place or share his bread.’

In fact the question of religion is directly connected to modernity in Berque’s work. However, since it occupied such an important place in his thought a separate section is devoted to its analysis here. One of Berque’s key theses was what he termed the passage in the Arab world from the sacred to the historic. This was the basis of his work *Les Arabes d’hier à demain*. In raising the issue, he also posed the question of the relationship between religion, modernity, and his understanding of Europe.

This section will approach religion in three ways, each of which relates to how Europe was perceived: firstly, religion in the formal sense of the three monotheisms. Here we will expand on Berque’s core thesis about of the diminishing relevance of religion and analyse its implications for Europe. Secondly, religion in its appropriated metaphoric sense. And thirdly, in terms of the concept of faith which, though not strictly speaking synonymous with religion, overlaps considerably and is at the core of Berque’s vision of Europe.

As we have seen, the point of departure for Berque’s historical consciousness and world view was the history of Europe-led modernisation. It was in accordance with this that he dissented from Louis Massignon’s view of the continuing importance of the interaction between the monotheistic faiths. Instead, Berque spoke of ‘la profanation du monde’ or what he also refers to as ‘le passage du sacré à l’historique’. This was not to suggest that observation of sacred rites would no longer shape Arab society, but the major driving force behind its

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development would come from its submission to the historical process of modernisation that had defined Europe: industrialisation, mass technology, revolutionised communications.\(^{99}\)

Massignon and Berque’s differences on religion were laid out in their 1960 dialogue. Throughout his career, Massignon’s understanding of Europe was defined by a view of a familial relationship between Christianity and the Jewish and Islamic faiths as they existed in the non-European world and it was in accordance with this ethos that Massignon distanced himself from contemporary apologetics for imperialism. Massignon reaffirmed this kind of vision in the course of his exchange with Berque in 1960. As such, he saw the dispute between Arabs and Jews in terms of Semitism – a fratricidal hate between ‘Israël et Ismaël’;\(^{100}\) Europeans and Europe came into the equation in their function as representatives of Christianity and he was disappointed at the extent to which they fell short of this standard of conduct.

While Massignon conceded that perhaps the definitive experience of Europe was now modernisation, he did so grudgingly and suggested that it had detracted from what was valuable in Europe and vital in the European peoples. Feeling that his belief in the possibilities for mutual definition and development between Europe and Islam had been disappointed, he reproached Europeans for ‘notre rage laïque de comprendre, de conquérir, de posséder’ and their abuse of ‘l’hospitalité sacrée’.\(^{101}\) Similarly, in the 1960 exchange with Berque, Massignon complained of the ‘mécanisation du monde musulman à notre image’ which was ‘une chose qui nous fait toucher du doigt le côté infernal de la technocratie’. Contrary to Berque, he denied any

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\(^{99}\) Later in his life he would concede that he had overestimated this phenomenon not only in the Arab world but also in Europe, pointing, for example, to European deference to Israel as in large part motivated by a quintessentially European Christian sense of original sin regarding its role in the Jewish Holocaust. See Berque & Suha Sabbagh, ‘The Pen and the Sword’, 114. For a discussion of his revision of his thesis of the passing from the sacràl to the historic, see Berque’s closing lecture at the Collège de France in Jacques Berque, *Andalousies* (Paris: Sindbad, 1981).

\(^{100}\) Berque & Massignon, ‘Dialogue sur les “Arabes”’, 1506.

distinction between ‘la technocratie’ and ‘la civilisation technique’ and suggested ‘en ce moment même en France, nous sommes au stade de l’étranglement.’ One is reminded here of the later Max Horkheimer’s thesis of the sanctuary of religious spirituality as an addition to his protest against a blind belief in historical progress.

However, despite Massignon’s passionate advocacy of friendship between Occident and Orient he did not depart fundamentally from a certain axiom of European Orientalist thought. In the final analysis, he reaffirmed an essential imaginary divide between Orient and Occident. Moreover, as Said suggests, Massignon steadfastly adhered to ‘the entire nineteenth century tradition of the Orient as therapeutic for the West’, although ‘in Massignon it was joined to a sense of Christian compassion’, whereby Europe could take from the Orient what it had lost in spirituality and traditional values. In the 1960 dialogue, Massignon argued, ‘Justement, je crois qu’actuellement la France a le devoir de se pencher sur le problème arabe avec le plus grand respect fraternel, car il y a chez eux des valeurs uniques au point de vue humain que nous avons perdues, qui étaient nôtres: le patrimoine abrahamique, la parole donnée, le droit d’asile.

His idea of Europe, then, was one that was diminished from it should be, what it had been in the past, and what it could be again by dint of the Orient. Herman Lebovics demonstrates a commensurable but more pessimistic interpretation of this train of thought in the late work of Jean Renoir, who found in India personal solace and cultural compensation for a political ideal of Europe in which he could no longer believe.

However, for Berque, this drawing on the Orient was problematic. He could agree with Massignon’s call for mutual hospitality but was even more rigorous in its application. As

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103 Said, Orientalism, 271.
Hourani put it, ‘for him Islam is the “other”, to be apprehended and accepted in itself.’ Again Berque was insistent on an idea of Europe in which dialogue between it and the Orient was undistorted by force or any ulterior desire or self-interest.

Ideas of Europe and Europeanness in this period also drew from the metaphoric invocation of religion and could only reinforce Berque’s desire to distance his conception of the continent from religion. In this usage, Christianity became less a theological designation than an identity claim, and call to rigid exclusion. Matthew Connelly draws attention to this rhetoric of religion in the course of the Algerian war, an underestimated phenomenon in what is conventionally depicted as a conflict between two nationalisms. The second connotation of religion as metaphor is the raising of the stakes to a zero-sum game, of two sides embattled with religious intensity and zeal. One could read both overtones in the example of a French officer engaged in the Algerian war who peremptorily declared that ‘there is no true war but religious war.’

Hobsbawm uses the term religion in the second sense and he explains its historical implications in a discussion of barbarism in the twentieth century, which is worth reiterating here:

What made the cruelty which is the natural result of religious wars more brutal and inhuman, was that the cause of Good (i.e. of Western great powers) was confronted with the cause of Evil represented, most commonly, by people whose claim to full humanity was rejected. Social revolution, and especially colonial rebellion, challenged the sense of a natural, as it were a divine or cosmically sanctioned superiority of top people over bottom people in societies which were naturally unequal, whether by birth or by achievement.

107 Connelly, A Diplomatic Revolution, passim.
109 Hobsbawm, ‘Barbarism: A User’s Guide’, 48. One manner in which this attitude was manifested was the denial of the validity of non-European, and especially, Algerian nationalism. Berque’s contemporary, the Orientalist Charles-André Julien resigned from the SFIO in light of the way his expertise on Algeria had been ignored. One
Berque illustrated this kind of usage in his description of the current state of affairs in the Algerian war. He argued that, ‘entre la revendication politique et le ressentiment barbare qui la soutient, entre le droit français et la violence qui la protège, personne plus, au fond, ne distingue. Le primitivisme l’emporte. De part et d’autre, le recours à ces “démons”, dont parlait Dostoïewski, ensanglante et déshonore le débat.’\textsuperscript{110} We have seen that Berque aspired to replace non-negotiable conceptions of a superior Europe with a self-image formulated in mutual equality with its Oriental other. As such his Europe was predicated on a resounding rejection of this metaphorical sense of religion that traversed colonial discourse, manifesting itself not only in ultras but among the commonplace dogmatic dismissal of the very possibility of Algerian nationalism.

Another understanding of religion is closely connected to the broader concept of faith. As outlined above, Berque commented in his inaugural lecture that Oriental scholarship, science, and reason were inadequate if not complemented by sympathy and commitment. Also, Hourani made a point of remarking on Berque’s faith in the larger Mediterranean. Accordingly, these points suggest that Berque’s Europe was somewhat different from the sort Dipesh Chakrabarty wants to provincialise – a Europe characterised by a triumphalist and pervasive post-Enlightenment secular rationalism.\textsuperscript{111} But what alternative Europe did Berque’s concepts suggest?

It is the contention here that Berque’s conception of faith is not to be thought of as something tacked onto reason, just as his Arab Mediterranean is not something tacked on to

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aspect of this was his insistence on the reality of Algerian nationalism. See Martin Evans, \textit{Algeria: France’s Undeclared War} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 199.

\textsuperscript{110} Berque, ‘L’Algérie et les faux dilemmes’, 704.

Europe. In both cases the latter permeates the former whilst leaving it self-integral; neither is dissolved. The implications of this for ideas of Europe are significant. For once one concedes Berque’s contention of the necessity of faith to validate reason as opposed to being a supplemental benefit to it, it is possible to push the argument to the extent of saying a self-image of Europe based on its reason, science, and technology alone is not merely inadequate or partial, but a neurosis.

On the other hand, much as there was something appealing about his vision of Europe within a cooperative Mediterranean, there was something initially unsettling about the invocation of faith. It suggested that Europe might never fully know itself, never be secure, having lost the confident reasoning certainty of its self. But a more positive and creative interpretation of what Berque might have intended in terms of faith and Europe and Europeanness is suggested by Terry Eagleton’s analysis of the concept. It is argued here that Eagleton’s contention about the nature of faith on the interpersonal level captures Berque’s sense of the faith and empathy that should form the basis of the relation between European and non-European worlds. Eagleton writes that, ‘it is only by having faith in someone that we can take the risk of disclosing ourselves to him or her fully, thus making true knowledge of ourselves possible. Intelligibility is here closely bound up with availability, which is a moral notion.’\textsuperscript{112} Moreover, faith in this sense also ‘articulates a loving commitment before it counts as a description of the way things are. That it also involves an account of the way things are is clear enough, just as moral imperatives do… Faith cannot be reduced to the endorsement of certain propositions which cannot be proved.’\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 119.
Likewise, Berque’s idea of Europe was not reducible to taking stock of recent European history, nor of the ongoing war in Algeria in the name of European civilisation. It also involved a prior commitment not to accept this status quo, to insist unswervingly that a plural Mediterranean of Europe and the Arab world was never a lost cause. For faith here is not credulous romanticism but the correlative of the twinning of knowledge and virtue, and, Eagleton explains, for this reason love alone, which is implied by faith, ‘can achieve the well-nigh impossible goal of seeing a situation as it really is, shorn of both the brittle enchantments of romance and the disheveled fantasies of desire.’\footnote{Ibid., 121-122.} It is in this vein that Berque dismissed criticisms of his advocacy of, for example, ‘une synthèse possible entre la France et l’arabisme en Algérie’ as unpersuasively idealistic, insisting instead that those advocating the colonial status quo are, in fact, thoroughly Panglossian, recklessly jeopardising ‘Mediterranean humanism’ and the role Europe has to play in this mutually profitable, cooperative undertaking.\footnote{See Berque, ‘La nation algérienne et le 13 mai’, in Une Cause jamais perdue, 40.}

The parallels between the Europe of Berque and the Europe of Manès Sperber – also based in Paris in the post-war period – are compelling, despite the wide differences in their backgrounds. Raised in Austrian Galicia, Sperber’s thinking about Europe was necessarily inflected by his experience of pre-war Germanic intellectual cosmopolitanism.\footnote{See Tony Judt, ‘The Jewish Europe of Manès Sperber’, in Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century (London: William Heinemann, 2008), 63-72.} Reflecting on his Jewishness, Sperber reiterated the importance of an idea of Europe: the Acropolis in Athens meant more to him than the Wailing Wall.\footnote{Manès Sperber, ‘My Jewishness’, New German Critique 20/ 2 (Spring-Summer, 1980), 4.} But neither could he ever forget that his ‘people were humiliated, dehumanized, and exterminated by the ruling murderers in the heart of Europe.’\footnote{Ibid., 11.} It is this experience and understanding of Europe that informed Sperber’s remarks: ‘I
have never found an idea that so overwhelmed me or guided me so forcefully as the idea that this world cannot remain as it is, that it can be different, that it will be different. Ever since I can remember, this single challenging certitude has determined my being a Jew and an active individual of our times. This idea of Europe was characterised not by credulousness; on the contrary it was the foundation of faith and empathy shorn of illusions that was the rationale for his shrewdness to oppose Stalin and the Soviet Union implacably even as their currency was at its apogee in Paris until at least 1956.

Conclusion

From the Parisian Orientalist academy to the colonies and back again, the question of Europe arose repeatedly in this era and often did so in disruptive ways. Its connection to a stable sense of the self in a time of transition and uncertainty and to issues of hierarchy, privilege, authority, and power, both within and outside Europe, precluded to a large extent serene contemplation of Europe as a solely cultural question. Berque distrusted rigid and exclusionary claims to Europe as much as he distrusted formulas for the hasty resolution or transcendence of the controversies and debates surrounding Europe. He recognised that the slogans of both such positions could easily blind one to the fact that history was still to be made. Necessarily this was to be done in mutual and genuine dialogue and underscored by the commitment and engagement implied by faith, in his sense of the term, in a Mediterranean Europe and its Arab Other. His was a more modest and realistic conception of Europe than many of his contemporaries, but no less radical for that. His work suggested the need to negotiate constantly between Europe and the

119 Ibid., 13.
Arab world as they existed and how they might exist. For all that he differed from Sartre, Berque might have found it propitious to borrow his description of ‘négritude’ to portray the Europe whose name he so seldom directly and explicitly invoked. Imagining a response to the question of all the possibilities of what negritude might be, Sartre wrote, ‘Sans doute répondra-t-on qu’elle est tout cela à la fois et bien d’autre choses encore… Comme toutes les notions anthropologiques, la Négritude est un chatoiement d’être et de devoir-être; elle vous fait et vous la faites: serment et passion, à la fois.’¹²⁰