



**IS-LE**

CA18129 - Islamic Legacy: Narratives East,  
West, South, North of the Mediterranean  
(1350-1750)

***Islamic Legacy:  
Narratives East, West, South, North of the Mediterranean (1350-1750).  
A Thesaurus under Discussion.***

**Position Papers debated at the Sarajevo IS-LE Meeting,  
September 7, 2021.**

# Introduction to the debate

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This material is based upon work from COST Action 18129 Islamic Legacy: Narratives East, West, South, North of the Mediterranean (1350-1750), supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology). The purpose of the Action has been to provide a transnational and interdisciplinary approach capable of overcoming the segmentation that has traditionally characterized the study of relations between Christianity and Islam in late medieval and early modern Europe and the Mediterranean.

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Framework Programme  
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## ***Islamic Legacy: Narratives East, West, South, North of the Mediterranean (1350-1750). A Thesaurus under Discussion.***

Studying the relations between Christianity and Islam in late medieval and early modern Europe and the Mediterranean means to cover a vast geographical region, which is diverse in its languages and cultures. Against this background it is necessary to find a common ground that makes it possible to understand the exchange between these two cultures as one border-crossing phenomenon. To achieve this comprehensive understanding, it is necessary to identify overarching ideas and common terms that are widely used in this field of research. Some of these terms are used analogically or even equivalent in different languages, which emphasizes the fact that there were similar images circulating throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. Therefore, the aim of this debate has been to discuss each of the 5 below terms in the context of their historiographies and how they were shaped by then prevailing notions.

1. Orient-Occident, Morgenland-Abendland, Doğu-Batı
2. Coexistence, Convivencia
3. Hybridity
4. Border-Frontier, Center-Periphery, Holy Land
5. Reconquista, Rückerobringung, Fetih

When defining the signified, Roland Barthes states that the signified is not the 'thing' but the mental representation of the 'thing'. One of the challenges in current historiography is the ambiguity that occurs between terms (signifier) used in primary sources and what they refer (signified) to the modern-time readers. Historians are often confronted with terms that are comfortably used to signify communities, concepts, conditions and circumstances in the minds of the authors who might have lived in the distant past. By using the same terms today, however, the historian wishes they signify the same mental representation as they did in the past. Another challenge is on modern terms that define the past, such as Reconquista, which are not found in primary sources. They reflect the historiographical perspectives of the era in which the terms were coined and now ill-fitting. Furthermore, they leave the modern-day historian with an arduous task to deconstruct these deeply rooted terms that have been permanently in use until today. These inherent anachronisms in historiography creates a vacuum of meaning to be filled by the modern reader who might be willingly or unwillingly biased while filling the gap. What is the reader supposed to imagine when the historian uses terms such as "Turks" and "Ottomans" interchangeably by being loyal to his/her primary sources? Do such terms not rely heavily on the imagination of our authentic writer and his/her cultural and historical context than on any detached, scientific observation? How



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did the use of the terms change from their use in primary compared to their use in more recent secondary literature?

The meanings of the terms and the associations related to them changed over time, as they were dependent on the current relation between Muslims and Christians. A term could be influenced by political events, for example war or diplomatic relations, or by objects or inventions from foreign countries that reached Europe and the Mediterranean through travelling or trading. Because of these complex interrelations between the two cultures, the terms have to be discussed from a differentiated point of view. Therefore, we wish to address researchers from all fields within Humanities and with different language skills, as it is crucial to understand the multiple layers of below terms in the context of their historiography, considering how their meanings changed over time, in different languages and regions. This should hopefully lead to nuanced and critical analyses, resulting in well-rounded explanations of the terms.