

## Europe and the Arabic-Islamic world: a sociological perspective on the socio-cultural difference and mutual (mis)perceptions between two neighbouring cultural areas

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# **Europe and the Arab-Islamic World. A Sociological Perspective on the Socio-cultural Differences and Mutual (Mis)Perceptions between Two Neighbouring Cultural Areas<sup>1</sup>**

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MAX HALLER

**ABSTRACT** *This paper investigates the mutual perceptions and misperceptions between Europe and the Arab-Islamic world. Based on a sociological theory of collective identity formation, a typology and set of hypotheses are developed in the first section concerning the relations between countries and cultures in the world; these are seen as being dependent on inequality in their level of socio-economic development, and on the similarity or difference of their culture and their political systems. In the second and third section, these principles are applied to an analysis of the self-concepts and the mutual perceptions between Europe and the Arab-Islamic world. Here, it is first investigated whether fundamental differences exist in basic value orientations between Europe on the one hand, and Islam and the Arabic world on the other, and in the value orientations of Christians and Muslims in two selected countries. In the third section, the mutual perceptions of these two culture areas are investigated. It is shown that—despite a lack of fundamental differences in value orientations—significant misperceptions exist, particularly of the Arab-Islamic culture and societies in Europe. They are related to colonial history, religious-cultural differences, and inequalities in levels of development. Further reasons for the misperceptions and perspectives for their correction after the terrorist attack in New York in 2001 are outlined in the final section.*

## **Introduction**

There are two reasons why the relations between Europe and the Arab-Islamic world must be considered as very important issues today. The first relates to the process of globalization, the increasing interconnection between the different countries and continents of the world in terms of economic exchanges and flow of communications through the modern mass media, business and private travel, and through cultural and scientific exchange (Castells, 1996/1997; Martin and Schumann, 1996; Albrow, 1997). Globalization is a worldwide phenomenon, yet its concrete forms and consequences vary significantly in different parts of the world. The consequences of it are felt most acutely in those regions of the world where advanced and wealthy countries are bordering directly on less developed regions. People living in a poor country can see a much richer way of life simply by looking or going over the border or some natural boundary which can easily be overcome with modern means of transportation. So, problems of unequal exchange, of mass immigration, of illegal frontier crossing, of smuggling of goods and even of a modern slave trade are felt very acutely at such intersections. One of these

regions constituting a deep *socio-economic and political crash-line*, as I call it, is the Mediterranean Sea: on its northern side lies the European Union (EU), now one of the economically most prosperous regions of the world; on its southern edge, there are the relatively poor North African Arab countries of the Maghreb. A consequence of this is that Europe exerts a strong attraction for people living in North Africa, leading to a considerable volume of legal and illegal immigration (see also Marr, 1994; Salamé, 1994; Badran, 1995; Al-Kawaz, 1999; Riesebrodt, 2000; Díez-Nicolás and Ramírez Lafita, 2001).

A second reason why clarification of the relation between Europe and the Arab world is of utmost actual importance is the fact that both the EU and the Arab-Islamic countries are still in the process of defining their identity. It is only out of this definition that the future and final borders of 'Europe' can be defined, as well as the kinds of relations that it wants to establish with the regions surrounding it. The MENA countries (Middle East–North African) are also presently in the process of finding their own identity. The very different political regimes that we can see between Morocco in the West and Saudi Arabia and Syria in the East show that this region is struggling hard to find its way between Western-style modernization and a return to a supposed traditional Islamic way of life (Lewis, 1994; Dervis and Shafik, 1998, p. 508). Only recently has a serious discussion been initiated about the identity of this cultural area and its relation to Europe (Marr, 1994; Salamé, 1994; Weidenfeld, 1995; Goddard, 1996; Cardini, 1999; Höfert and Salvatore, 2000).

This paper is organized as follows. In the first section, I will work out a few basic principles of a sociological theory of identity and their application to the issue of the relations between nations; in the second section, these principles are applied to the understanding of European and Arab-Islamic society and culture and their historical relations; in the third section, the issue of the mutual perceptions and evaluations of Europe and the Arab-Islamic world is analysed.<sup>2</sup>

### **A new sociological perspective on the relations between nations and cultures**

In this section I will first set out a framework and a set of hypotheses which should help us to understand better the mutual perceptions between countries and cultures. Second, the relations between different countries in the present-day world are subsumed under a comprehensive typology. This typology helps us to sort out the relations between Europe and the Arab-Islamic world in the third section of this paper.

#### *Hypotheses on the processes of mutual perception and evaluation of different nations and cultures*

In this regard, five general theses are put forward. These are based on a sociological theory of identity which maintains that individual and collective actors (such as organizations or nation-states) act on the basis of a certain self-image which is not fixed and which must be confirmed (or can be rejected) by others (Mead, 1934; Erikson, 1959; Weigert *et al.*, 1986; Haller, 1999a; Williams, 2000).

There are two '*master emotions*' connected with identity, namely *pride* and *shame*. Pride is a sign of recognition of one's identity by relevant others, shame is a consequence of degradation and rejection. Secure social bonds, based on mutual recognition, are the forces that hold society together; degradation by others leads to distrust and protracted conflict (Scheff, 1990). Lack of recognition of identity can be glossed over by a striving for domination of others, as in the case of power-hungry political leaders and aggressive

nation-states (Gruen, 1987). An analogy exists between individual and collective actors in this regard: recognition and identity, pride and shame are fundamental also to collective actors such as organizations, nation-states, religious communities and so on (Deutsch, 1966; Haller *et al.*, 1996).

Based on these general assumptions, in what follows five specific hypotheses are developed concerning the mutual perceptions and evaluations between nations.

- (1) *Self-evaluation and evaluation by others*: the relations between different nations, states and cultures are determined to a large degree by their self-images and by their perception and evaluation by other nation-states and collective actors at the international level. The aim of the development of positive self-images and of positive or negative images of others is to enhance one's self-esteem.<sup>3</sup> The recognition by other nation-states, and by the international community of nations, leads to trust between nations and peaceful foreign relations; distrust leads to conflict and wars, even if no fundamentally different material interests are involved (Scheff and Retzinger, 1991; Haller, 1992, 1996).
- (2) *Tendency to form consistent images of self and others*: any social unit—micro or macro—tends to develop a relatively homogeneous image of the self and of the other, both in terms of objective characteristics and in terms of their evaluation. In this process, characteristics which do not fit into a coherent image will be overlooked, neglected or devalued. Characteristics which fit into the image will be stressed and emphasized.
- (3) *Significance of relative objective situation*: images of the self and others are based to a large degree on the objective economic, social and political situation of one's own country. In this regard, the relative position of countries in terms of levels of development is of central importance. Generally, we can say that the higher the level of economic, social and political development of a country, the more positive its self-image will be; more highly developed countries will be seen in more positive terms also by others and considered as models to be followed, while less developed countries will be seen in more negative terms and tend to become devalued on other characteristics as well.
- (4) *Significance of cultural similarity or dissimilarity*: images of the self and the other are also dependent on the degree of similarity or difference between one's own culture and the culture of the other. The more akin to each other the cultures of two countries are—in terms of language, religions background, and so on—the higher the probability of a positive mutual perception and evaluation; the more different the cultures are, the higher the probability of a considerable distance to each other, or even of mutual devaluation and distrust.
- (5) *Significance of direct mutual relations*: finally, the direct relations between two nations and culture areas are at stake. We can distinguish three kinds of relations here: (a) those characterized by equality and friendship, leading to (and conditioned on their side by) positive mutual perceptions and evaluations; (b) unequal relations characterized by positive mutual perception and trust; and (3) relations of distrust, hostility and violent conflict. The more positive these relations have been in history, the more positive the mutual perception and evaluation will be at present.

It is the task of empirical social scientific research to investigate the relationships between different countries, nations and cultures in terms of this general framework. My general thesis is that the present-day relations between the different nation-states and cultures over the world—their friendly, neutral or hostile character—can be understood much better if this framework of identity formation and recognition is applied than if only objective conflicts of economic interests or if only cultural differences are taken into account.

*A sociological typology of relations between different countries and cultures in the present-day world*

Based on the foregoing theoretical considerations, we can now develop a general scheme for the analysis of the relations between different countries, nation-states and cultures in the world today. Two dimensions are basic for this scheme: (a) the degree of equality or inequality between two countries or regions in terms of socio-economic development as well as in their direct relationships; and (b) their similarity or difference in cultural terms. In this regard, two general hypotheses are put forward.

*Hypothesis (1): equality between two countries or regions in terms of socio-economic development and similarity of cultural background make it easier to develop positive functional or even friendly relations to each other; significant inequalities and differences with regard to levels of development as well as cultural backgrounds and values make it more difficult.*

Between countries with a common language and culture more intense patterns of communication exist in terms of both cultural exchanges (through media, books, journals, etc.) and economic exchanges (Deutsch, 1966, 1968; Haller, 1990; Tichy, 1994; Suleiman, 1996). A similar level of development intensifies exchanges due to similar problems with regard to technological development and socio-economic change and due to common gains from exchange.

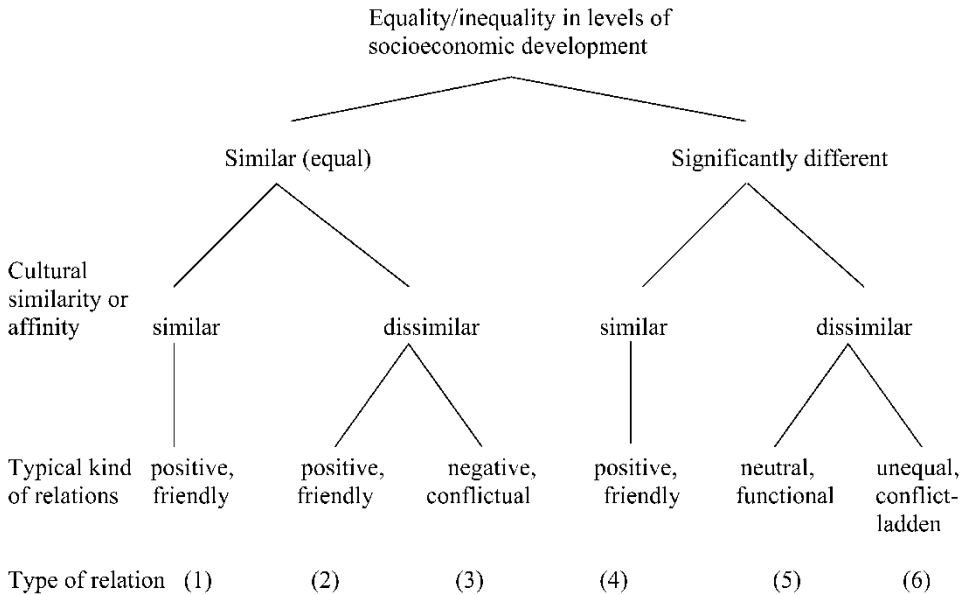
*Hypothesis (2): in the case of significant inequalities and differences in levels of development and in cultural background, the factors which are decisive for the kinds of relationships between two countries are: (a) the mutual perception and evaluation—accurate or distorted, positive or negative; (b) equality or inequality of the relations between the two countries both in history and in the present; (c) the character of the political system (democratic or not) and the behaviour of the political elites and leaders.*

It is well known that the character of the historical relations between two countries plays a decisive role in their present-day behaviour and relations. On the other hand, we know that very cruel or degrading military experiences can imprint themselves into the 'collective memory', often for generations. The historical relations between Europe and the North African and Arab-Islamic world are a case in point. Half a century and more of colonialism, military subjugation and economic exploitation of the countries of the MENA region by European imperialist powers, most notably Great Britain, France, Portugal and Italy, have left a deep and distressing imprint on the populations and elites of that region.

The second aspect concerns the character of the political system and the kind of political leadership and elites. It is well established that democratic political systems with elected political leaders show a more peaceful behaviour in their external relations. The reason is that such leaders must be more responsible to their peoples (Haller, 2003). In the case of autocratic or dictatorial leaders the probability is high that they will use their extraordinary power for violent behaviour and aggressions against their neighbours as well (as they practise it within their own country in order to preserve their power).

Figure 1 and Table 1 present a typology of different kinds of relationships that can be distinguished using these two criteria.

As we can see from Fig. 1 and Table 1, only six out of eight possible relationships between countries are distinguished. In the case of cultural similarity or affinity, I assume that it is quite improbable that the relationship between two countries will be conflictual, even if their levels of development are quite different (Type 4). If the socio-economic level of two countries is comparable, but their cultural background differs, both positive and negative relations between them may result. In the case of similar and high levels of economic development of two countries I assume that it is quite improbable that serious, unresolvable or even violent conflicts break out between them. A relatively high level of



**Figure 1.** A general scheme and typology for the analysis of the relations between different nations, states and cultural areas in the present-day world (see also Table 1).

socio-economic development, connected with economic prosperity and the absence of widespread poverty makes it less probable that conflicts of interests emerge which are felt as being more serious than the many common interests. Furthermore, a high level of socio-economic development is usually also associated with higher education and political participation of the population at large, and with political institutions which make sure that the transfer of political power over the generations takes place in a regular and peaceful way.

Negative, conflictual relationships between countries comparable in levels of development, but different in their cultural background (Type 3) only include less developed countries. Here, unfortunately, we have many examples, including the relations between India and Pakistan, Israel and the Arab countries, or Iraq and Iran. In these countries, internal social and political dissatisfaction and unrest often enter into a dangerous liaison with external ambitions and actions. Irresponsible political leaders are able to initiate conflicts or even wars with other nations in order to divert the attention of their populations from the failure of their internal politics of development. Cultural differences are often more used as excuses or pretexts for actions which otherwise would lack legitimacy.

A very important kind of relationship exists between countries and areas that are culturally similar but different in development, such as between Spain/Portugal on the one hand, and the Latin American countries on the other, or between the rich and the poor Arab-Islamic countries (Type 4). We could call these ‘*developmental bridge relations*’, since they enable much closer relationships between rich and poor countries and regions than is usually the case.

The most difficult problems in establishing positive relations between different groups of countries emerge in those cases where countries are clearly distinct from each other both with regard to levels of development and in terms of culture. At present, it might be the optimum attainable if such relations become functional-neutral. It is a sign of

**Table 1.** A general scheme and typology for the analysis of the relations between different nations, states and cultural areas in the present-day world (see also Fig. 1)

<b>No.</b>	<b>Brief designation of the type of relation</b>	<b>Concrete examples of international and intercultural relations</b>
(1)	Friendly relations between socio-economically equal and culturally close nations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relations between the member states of the EU</li> <li>• Relations between Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand</li> <li>• Relations between Latin American countries</li> <li>• Relations within the rich and within the poor Arab-Islamic countries</li> <li>• Relations between Western Europe/USA and Japan</li> </ul>
(2)	Positive functional relations between culturally different, but socio-economically equal countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relations between India and Pakistan</li> </ul>
(3)	Negative, conflictual relations between socio-economically unequal and culturally dissimilar nations and regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relations between Israel and Arabic-Islamic countries</li> <li>• Relations between Iraq and Iran (and most other Arabic-Islamic countries)</li> </ul>
(4)	Positive, friendly relations between unequal, but culturally close nations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relations between Spain/Portugal and Latin American countries</li> <li>• Relations between the USA and Israel</li> </ul>
(5)	Positive or neutral, 'functional' relations between unequal and culturally different countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relations between rich and poor Arab-Islamic countries</li> <li>• Relations between Western Europe and most Arab-Islamic countries</li> <li>• Relations between Western and Eastern countries (Russia, China)</li> </ul>
(6)	Unequal, partly exploiting and conflictual relations between unequal countries, regions or cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relations between the USA and some Latin American countries</li> <li>• Relations between the USA/Western Europe and some countries of the Third World</li> </ul>

great hope for the world that some of the most important relations of this kind, those between the Western world and China or Russia, are positive and functional (Type 5).

**Society and culture in Europe and in the Arab-Islamic world. Are they fundamentally different from each other?**

In this section I will analyse the basic societal-cultural characteristics of Europe and the Arab-Islamic world in three steps: first, I will ask what the specific values of Europe and of the Arab-Islamic countries are. Is the process of European unification in fact based on specific values, such as those of Christianity? If not, what are the main aims of this far-reaching process of integration? In the same way, we have then to ask: can we speak of a common identity for Arab-Islamic countries? What is the 'essence' of Islamic values? Out of these considerations arises the question as to whether there really is a fundamental split between the basic values of these two cultural areas.

*Are Christian values the basis of the EU?*

The EU is now well aware that it must look for and define its specific identity. At some time, the process of enlargement of the Union must come to an end, and the definition of what belongs to 'Europe' will be a necessary element in that decision. In the *Maastricht Treaty* of 1992 the striving towards a specific European identity is mentioned explicitly (Haller, 1999b). Also, the introduction of the common currency, the euro, has been motivated more by the aim of creating a common European consciousness than by strict economic considerations or advantages.

What is the central element of this European identity? It has often been said that Christianity constitutes the core of it (see, for example, Therborn, 1995, p. 233). In this view, Europe became a self-conscious entity since the days of Charles the Great in the High Middle Ages when he united large parts of continental Europe under the banner of Christianity. The century-long fights against non-Christian enemies helped to reinforce European identity. One of the most 'important' enemies in this regard was Islam, the expansion of which throughout Europe was halted first in the Iberian Peninsula, from the eighth until the fifteenth centuries, then in the Balkans and at the walls of Vienna in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Yet I would strongly doubt that Christianity can really serve as the main basis for the identity of the new economic-political community of Europe. There are at least four reasons for this: (1) by taking Christianity as a criterion for the definition of the identity of the EU, this Union could be differentiated neither from Russia nor from America; in both countries, the majority of the populations is also Christian. (2) Within the countries of the EU, all three Christian denominations—Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christian—are represented (Haller, 1990). As we know, however, in European history they have often been very hostile to each other. (3) Christianity and religion today are no longer very significant determinants of the values and behaviour of large sections of the European population (Höllinger, 1996; Waardenburg, 2000). (4) Within the European Union millions of non-Christians, and in particular Islamic people, now live as permanent immigrants.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, in the European Balkans there are three countries with a large Muslim population (Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria).

What, if not Christianity, can be considered as the main cultural base and aims of European integration? I would say that there are three: the fostering of economic growth through economic integration and the securing of democracy within the individual countries and peaceful relations between them. What is decisive here: all three are



universal values, accepted by any enlightened person throughout the world. It is difficult to see any fundamental interest or value ‘clash’ in these regards between Europe and other countries or cultures in the world. Rather, it is probably safe to say that, today, these aims are supported universally and worldwide (at least by enlightened citizens, if not by some political elites and leaders for whom the presentation of power is more important). At least in countries and macro-regions where they have been institutionalized, they must be considered as irreversible ‘axiological’ values (Boudon, 1999).

*The cultural unity of the Arab-Islamic world—myth or reality?*

Our next question is: does an Arab-Islamic identity exist and—if so—what is its ‘essence’? The cultural unity of this world is given by its common religion and (Arabic) language. It was a unique achievement of a 1400-year-old scholarly tradition that classical Arabic was preserved and with it a vital element and link between past and present (Holt, 1996, p. 12). This cultural unity, however, does not imply that a single and compact Arab-Islamic identity did exist in history and/or does exist today. The historian Franco Cardini (1999, p. 22) writes:

In the century-old history of Islam there were, as we know, only short and rare moments of a true unity. In the middle age one believed that the Muslims were united in a way which was much superior to the unity of Christendom. For us ... this appears as a false estimation of medieval Europe ...

The same appears to be the case today. The North African and Near East Arab-Islamic countries vary greatly, not only in terms of economic levels of development but also in their political constitutions, and in their patterns of everyday life, their customs, thinking and behaviour (Al-Azm, 1993; Lewis, 1994; Roberson, 1994; Schulze, 1994; Halm, 2000; Kauz, 2000).

In this view, Arab-Islamic countries are far from constituting a homogeneous group. Table 2 gives some figures for Arab-Islamic countries and compares them with the EU as a whole and its five southern, Mediterranean member countries. On the one side, there is a large group of countries—with Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Turkey as the most populous—whose GNP/capita is under \$5000 per head, only half that of Southern European countries. On the other side, we have a small group of rather wealthy oil-exporting countries—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates—which are small in terms of population but whose GNP/capita exceeds that of Portugal and Greece. Table 3 shows that the socio-economic standard of living in the Arab countries is higher than in sub-Saharan Africa or in South Asia (including India), but somewhat lower than in Latin America. Thus, the now very rich ‘oil countries’ are no longer a part of the capitalist periphery. They are providers of one of the most basic industrial raw materials for Western countries, important buyers of modern Western technologies, industrial products (including weapons!) and services, and employers of tens of thousands of Western experts (technicians, engineers, and professionals).

An even clearer difference probably exists between people living in Arabic countries and those who have emigrated to Europe and live in the ‘diaspora’, in the midst of Christian peoples in France, Germany or England. Men and women from Islamic countries who emigrated decades ago to these countries—and even more so their children born in these countries—identify themselves largely with Western values and follow Western lifestyles. This does not contradict the fact that a considerable proportion of them are active practitioners of Islamic religious prescriptions (Metcalf, 1996; Strobl, 1997; Tibi, 2000). In view of the immense diversity between the adherents of Islam from

**Table 2.** Basic data on the EU, its Mediterranean states, and the Mediterranean and neighbouring Arabic-Islamic states

	Population in 1000s (around 1989-95)	Annual population growth in % (1992-2000)	Labour force (as % of total population, 1991)	% of labour force in agriculture (1990-92)	Real GDP per capita (PPPS-\$, 1991)	Life expectancy at birth (1992)	Mean years of schooling (1992)	Human Development Index <sup>a</sup> (1992)
EU-15	c.365,000	0.5	43	6	16,760	76.3	10.1	
Portugal	9862	1.9	49	17	9450	74.4	6.4	0.84
Spain	39,433	0.9	39	11	12,670	77.4	6.9	0.89
France	56,634	0.7	43	6	18,430	76.6	12.0	0.93
Italy	59,103	0.5	43	9	17,040	76.9	7.5	0.89
Greece	10,259	0.9	39	23	7680	77.3	7.0	0.87
Total Southern Europe (175,291)		0.7	42	12	14,100	76.9	7.2	
Morocco	26,073	2.3	33	46	3340	62.5	3.0	0.55
Algeria	23,033	2.7	24	18	2870	65.6	2.8	0.55
Tunisia	8758	1.9	30	26	4690	67.1	2.1	0.69
Libya	4404	3.4	24	20	-	62.4	3.5	0.70
Egypt	59,272	2.1	31	42	3600	60.9	3.0	0.55
Saudi Arabia	16,929	3.3	29	48	10,850	68.7	3.9	0.74
Jordan	4095	3.4	23	10	2895	67.3	5.0	0.63
Lebanon	2126	1.9	30	14	-	68.1	4.4	0.60
Syria	13,812	3.5	28	23	5220	66.4	4.2	0.73
Iraq	16,335	3.1	24	14	-	65.7	5.0	0.61
Kuwait	1575	-1.4	39	(2)	13,126	74.6	5.5	0.81
United Arab Emirates	2377	2.1	50	5	17,000	70.8	5.6	0.77

<sup>a</sup>The Human Development Index (HDI) comprises: life expectancy, literacy rate and education, real GNP (purchasing power).  
Source: *Human Development Report 1994*, German edn, Bonn, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), 1994.

**Table 3.** Basic socio-economic indicators for Arab countries in relation to other macro-regions of the world

	<b>Arab states<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	<b>South Asia (incl. India)</b>	<b>East Asia (incl. China)</b>	<b>Latin America</b>	<b>Industrial countries</b>
Real GDP per capita	4420	1250	1260	3210	5360	14,860
Life expectancy (1992)	64.3	51.1	58.5	70.5	67.7	74.5
Population growth rate (1992-2000)	2.7	3.4	2.0	1.2	1.7	0.6
Mean years of schooling	3.4	1.6	2.0	5.2	5.4	10.0
Armed forces per 1000 people	13.0	2.6	1.9	4.1	3.4	8.7

<sup>a</sup> Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Rep., Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen.

Source: *Human Development Report 1994*, Bonn, UNDP (German edn: *Bericht Über die menschliche Entwicklung*), 1994.

Morocco to Pakistan, and from central Africa to Albania and Bosnia, France, Germany and England, researchers on this issue note an ‘*over-Islamization*’ by outside observers, a tendency to impose a homogeneity on all peoples of Islamic countries which does not exist in reality (Roberson, 1994; Prenner, 2001). The assertion that a unique system of values exists among all Muslims that is quite distinct from Christian or Western values is also called into question if we look at the basic values of Islam and Christianity and at some empirical findings on the actual values of Muslims compared with people with other faiths.

Are the basic values of Islam contradictory to the values of Christianity? By reconsidering the origins of Islam we can see that a fundamental split cannot exist: Muhammad conceived himself not so much as the founder of a new religion but more as a prophet and warner who tried to renew the old ‘religion of Abraham’ whose essence was the belief in only one God (Mensching, 1989, p. 243). In fact, the Muslims saw Jews and Christians—contrary to the assertion made by Huntington (1996)—not as their main enemies but as being rather near to them in religious-cultural terms. They called them ‘owners of the writings’ and distinguished them clearly from unbelievers or pagans (Goddard, 1996). A central element of Islam is the stress on family kinship and group solidarity (partly taken over from the older stem organization of the Arabic tribes), which was later enlarged to the political-religious community as a whole. Is this idea so far from the central Christian command of brotherhood and charity (Prenner, 1997)?

One significant characteristic that is often attributed to Islam is the fusion of religious and political authority. Today, most Islamic countries still have constitutions which refer explicitly to religion as a basis for the state (Funk, n.d.). Two remarks have to be made in this regard. First, from a historical perspective, this is not so different from European experience. We have to remember that not long ago in the Protestant countries of Scandinavia and Great Britain it was (or still is) a matter of fact that the king or queen was also the head of the Church; nearly 100% of the population belonged to the state Church (Höllinger, 1996). A very close relationship existed (and partly still exists) between state and Church—a situation repeated in East European orthodox countries and in some Southern European Catholic countries such as Portugal and Spain. Second, Islamic prescriptions also have the important function of restricting the absolute power of the monarch or head of state.<sup>5</sup> The legitimacy of many of the regimes of the MENA regions rests to a considerable degree on this religious-transcendental base.<sup>6</sup>

There is one source of empirical data from which we can gain some insight into the differences in the values and attitudes of Muslims compared with people from other religious denominations. In the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) 1998, the main topic was ‘*Religious beliefs and behaviour*’. Several questions on civic and political attitudes were included in this survey, in which 32 countries around the world participated. In two of them, Bulgaria and Israel, a group of over 100 Muslims were included so that we can compare their attitudes with those of other people in these two countries (in Bulgaria these are mostly Orthodox Christians, in Israel they are Jewish).

Table 4 shows data on values and attitudes related to sexuality and marriage, to civic morals, to confidence in institutions, attitudes towards the social and political influence of religious leaders, attitudes towards science, trust in other people and general happiness.<sup>7</sup> The findings can be summarized in three points:

- (1) Among the 17 questions considered, there are only three in which the two groups of Muslims are clearly distinct from their fellow countrymen in Bulgaria and Israel and from the people in the other four groups of countries. Two of these items are related to sexual relations: Muslims have more strict ethical attitudes in this regard and reject

**Table 4.** Civic and political attitudes among Muslims in Bulgaria and Israel compared with non-Muslims in these countries and with other groups of countries. Values are shown as percentages (*N* values are shown in parentheses under the column headings)

Attitude statement	Bulgaria		Israel		North-west Europe <sup>a</sup> (10,369)	Southern Europe <sup>b</sup> (7661)	Eastern Europe <sup>c</sup> (9173)	USA (2495)
	Muslims (119)	Others (932)	Muslims (131)	Others (1072)				
Sexual relations before marriage are always wrong	49	26	89	25	8	16	12	20
Sexual relations with other partner than spouse are always wrong	61	49	95	72	55	59	48	63
It is seriously wrong if a taxpayer does not report all his income in order to pay less in taxes	63	48	17	39	28	37	27	44
It is seriously wrong if one makes incorrect information to get government benefits	65	58	31	55	61	56	40	61
Other people would always try to take advantage of me if they got the chance	35	33	26	19	4	10	11	7
Other people can always or usually be trusted	26	23	25	29	61	36	25	42
Have complete or a great deal of confidence in ...								
the parliament	8	10	27	17	19	15	13	8
business and industry	8	12	36	31	23	18	11	16
churches and religion	38	22	32	28	25	30	35	24
Religious leaders should not try to influence ...								
how people vote	54	64	28	64	47	57	47	54
government decisions	51	60	40	39	39	52	41	51
Overall, modern science does more harm than good (agree/strongly agree)	22	14	19	21	15	24	17	15
We trust too much in science and not enough in religious faith	32	42	45	39	23	34	28	13
Looking around the world, religions bring more conflict than peace (strongly agree)	10	20	24	29	33	25	15	18
People with very strong religious beliefs are often more intolerant (strongly agree)	11	19	18	28	30	30	16	17
I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it	60	24	94	55	22	43	36	32
Considering my life in general, I am very happy	6	9	11	26	26	21	10	25

<sup>a</sup> North-west Europe (Protestant and mixed Protestant-Catholic): Germany, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland.  
<sup>b</sup> Southern (Catholic) Europe: Austria, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Ireland.  
<sup>c</sup> Eastern Europe (Catholic and Orthodox): Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland, Russia, Latvia, Cyprus.  
 Source: *International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), 1998 ('Religion')*. Internet information on ISSP: < [http://www.gesis.org/en/data\\_service/issp/guide.htm](http://www.gesis.org/en/data_service/issp/guide.htm) > .

sexual relations before and outside marriage much more frequently. The third item concerns a strong belief in God: this is much more widespread among Muslims than among any other group or nation.

- (2) There are a series of attitudes in which the Muslims in Bulgaria and Israel are more similar to their fellow countrymen than to people in Europe or America: these include a rather low trust in other people, parliament, business and science, and a lower overall happiness in life; in most of these dimensions, people in post-communist East European countries also show rather low values.
- (3) There is no evidence at all concerning the widespread thesis that Muslims do not distinguish between political and religious areas. Bulgarian and Palestinian Muslims agree as much as non-Muslims with the belief that religious leaders should not influence politics; a considerable proportion of them thinks that very devoted religious adherents are less tolerant; finally, they do not trust less in science than their fellow countrymen or other Europeans (only the Americans have a very high level of faith in science). In some cases, the attitudes of Muslims are even more similar to those of US-Americans. They share with them, for instance, a strong condemnation of extramarital sexual relations, and a relatively high trust in religion.

These findings are quite unequivocal: the values and attitudes of Muslims in Bulgaria and Israel are not distinguishable from their fellow countrymen or from other Europeans in a way which corresponds with many widespread assumptions or, better, prejudices about a lack of civic and modern attitudes among Muslims.

*Is present-day Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism a revival of Djihad?*

In a discussion of the differences in values between Europe and the Arab-Islamic world, we cannot omit a consideration of the widespread assertion that Islam represents a violent, aggressive worldview. The widely discussed book *The Clash of Civilizations* by the American political scientist Samuel Huntington (1996) proposed this idea quite forcefully. His main thesis is that future international conflicts will no longer be based on political ideologies and economic interests, but on cultural-religious communities or 'civilizations'.

Islam occupies a very prominent place in Huntington's work. In a chapter entitled 'The resurgence of Islam', Huntington argues that we have been witnessing a broad and far-reaching revival of Islamic values and practices in recent decades, including an awakening of religious life, publications and programmes, a rising self-consciousness of Islam, and the establishment and rise of Islamic educational, welfare and political institutions and organizations. Huntington also recognizes many elements of a renewed aggressive, hostile stance among Islamic countries against the 'West' which, in his opinion, are the cause of many present-day problems and evils. The wars between Russia and Afghanistan and the Gulf War were the first examples of many possible future wars between the Islamic and the non-Islamic, especially Western countries; international terrorism is another example.

These theses, however, are true neither from the historical nor the contemporary point of view. First, the expansion of Islam over a vast territory in the Middle East and North Africa was primarily a political and military achievement; the spread of Islam as a religion came only later, conveyed by traders and merchants, and by Muslim scholars (Fischer, 1987, p. 33; Prenner, 2001, p. 60). There was no systematic missionizing by the invaders comparable with the Christian missionizing after the European conquest of indigenous peoples in America. From this point of view, it must be considered as a myth invented by the Roman popes and by the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire that it

was the deliberate intention of Islam to conquer the whole of Europe in the Middle Ages (Cardini, 1999).

Second, we must recognize that the present-day forms of aggressive Islamic fundamentalism can in no way be identified with historical Islam; the human sacrifices of violent fundamentalism, for instance in Algeria, were mainly other Muslims, not Christians or other non-Muslims. The Koran itself calls for a violent fight against enemies only when Islamic societies are threatened by them; the use of force depends on their behaviour as well (Zirker, 1993, p. 229ff.). There are also many passages in the Koran which point to the virtue of peace and patience with the unbelievers; the words 'Islam' and 'Muslim' (a person who dedicates him/herself to God) are cognate to the word 'salam' (peace; see Prenner, 1993).

The conclusion that Islam as a whole cannot be equated with violence and aggression emerges also from a few basic statistical facts. Table 5 presents data on the size of the military forces and the military budgets in Arab-Islamic countries, compared with the European Community as a whole and to some selected European countries. The findings can be summarized in two points: (1) huge differences exist within Arab-Islamic countries in terms of the relative size of their armies and military budgets. Only four of them have very large armies and military budgets: Iraq, the Syrian and the Libyan Arabic Republics, and Jordan. (2) The relative level of military expenditure in several Arabic

**Table 5.** Indicators of the relative importance of the military sector in the Arabic-Islamic world, in Europe and other countries and regions of the world

	<b>Armed forces per 1000 people (1990)</b>	<b>Military expenditure as % of GDP (1990–91)</b>
Arabic-Islamic countries		
Iraq	52.9	16.0
Syrian Arabic Republic	32.7	16.8
Jordan	26.9	10.6
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	18.7	7.8
Turkey	11.9	4.0
Egypt	8.6	4.0
Lebanon	8.2	3.5
Morocco	7.7	4.6
Saudi Arabia	4.6	14.0
Algeria	5.0	1.6
Tunisia	4.7	2.9
United Arab Emirates	2.2	4.8
Kuwait	1.7	6.5
All Arab states	13.0	7.0
European countries		
Italy	30.3	2.1
Spain	14.6	1.7
Greece	–	5.5
Portugal	–	3.1
France	5.4	3.5
European Community	2.9	14.0
Other countries and regions		
Israel	3.5	8.6
Eastern Europe/former USSR	6.3	7.4
USA	–	5.1

*Source: Human Development Report 1994, German edn, Bonn, Deutsche Gesellschaft für die Vereinten Nationen, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), 1994, table 43.*

countries is significantly lower or at least not much higher than that of the EU as a whole, or that of Russia or the USA. These countries include Algeria, Tunisia, and—if we look at the size of the armed forces—Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

All these facts lead to the following four conclusions: (1) there is no evidence that the Arab-Islamic world forms a coherent group of countries characterized by similar and high levels of military spending. (2) There is no evidence of the existence of a general tension or conflict between the Arab-Islamic world on the one side and Europe on the other—rather, the contrary seems to be the case. Roberson (1994, p. 291) notes rightly in this regard that Islam has been seen as expansionist only since the breakdown of communism but was seen formerly as a bulwark against it. (3) Those Arab countries that have large armies and high military budgets include two groups: one group includes those countries with rather centralized-authoritarian Islamic regimes. These countries have large armies not in relation to religious considerations but primarily for reasons of military and political power.<sup>8</sup> The second group of countries comprises those bordering Israel. This is not the place to enter into a discussion on the very complex issue of Israeli–Arab relations. There is no doubt, however, that the establishment of the state of Israel with the help of Western powers in the late 1940s was perceived by the Palestinians and other Arabs in the region as a brutal invasion. Israel’s present-day military power, as well as its aggressive behaviour in recent decades (which certainly must also be seen as a reaction to a profound sense of threat from surrounding Arab-Islamic countries), has not diminished the resentment and fear felt by those of the Arabic countries (Said, 2000). (4) Finally, violent Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism is much more an internal problem of many Islamic countries than an issue of new Islamic aggressiveness towards the West. In fact, the political and military support given to authoritarian regimes in the region by the West (and particularly the USA) indirectly supported the rise of extremist Islamic movements in those countries.<sup>9</sup>

### **The mutual perception of Europe and the Arab-Islamic world: forms and sources of misunderstandings, stereotypes and prejudices**

The foregoing sections have shown that many stereotypes and misperceptions exist in relation to the historical characteristics and relations between Europe and the Arab-Islamic world. In this final section let us look into the present-day mutual perceptions between Europe and the Arab-Islamic world. How is the Arab-Islamic world perceived in Europe? How are the EU and individual European countries perceived in the Arab-Islamic world? I must focus mainly on European perceptions of the Arab-Islamic world in this paper since data on perceptions in the other direction are hardly available.<sup>10</sup>

In principle, at least five levels of mutual perceptions and evaluations should be taken into consideration here: (1) ‘official’ presentations of a country in its constitution, and in official speeches and declarations of its highest representations (presidents, monarchs, etc.); (2) speeches and writings of its leading economic, cultural and political elites; (3) schoolbooks and other didactic texts; (4) texts and informational sources for a mass public, particularly the press, radio, TV and Internet; and (5) opinions of the population at large, as recorded by surveys.

As mentioned in the introduction, there is a serious shortage of information from many of these sources, particularly from surveys of public opinion. Material of types (1) and (2)—official declarations and the writings of elites—is available in principle; but its systematic analysis would constitute a research programme of its own. So, I can rely here only on sources (3) and (4), that is, on analyses of schoolbooks and—to a lesser degree—content analyses of mass media. I must also concentrate on the German-



speaking world in this regard. As an introduction, let us consider from a more general historical point how the perception of the Arab-Islamic world in Europe has developed over the last century.

*The devaluation of the Arab-Islamic world by Europe and the West as a consequence of colonialism*

The decay of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century, and the following military invasion and occupation of Tunisia and Egypt by France and Britain led to a fundamental change of the prevailing image of the Arab-Islamic world in Europe (Lewis, 1994; Schulze, 1994, p. 14ff.).

The Islamic world was no longer seen as the bearer of a high culture of its own, as a region with which it was useful to have significant economic exchange, and as a region composed of independent political powers. Instead, this area became evaluated increasingly only from a political point of view—as a weak and dependent ‘factor’ in the framework of the imperialist powers. A devaluation also occurred in cultural terms.

This devaluation was internalized by the elites of the Islamic countries themselves. In the first phase of contact with the West they began to imitate and take over Western institutions and symbols, partly also because they needed Western instruments of power—modern and effective armies (Elmusa, 1997). Technological-industrial development, educational and scientific institutions, political and military institutions, and lifestyles were all imported from the West and made possible by the huge revenues from crude oil (Lewis, 1994). The consequences of this process of Westernization were far-reaching: population growth exploded, but social inequality and poverty increased, and technical inferiority persisted, as did political instability and military dependence. In this situation, admiration and emulation of the West began to change to envious embitterment and hostility. Significant parts of the political and cultural elites became increasingly opposed to the West as a whole, and began to rely increasingly on the ancient, traditional ideals of Islam and the unity of the Islamic world. By this return to the supposed ‘true old’ values of Islam, they hoped to avoid the accusation of ‘Westernization’. In this new polarization between the modern Western world and the backward world of Islam, the basics were laid for the fundamental mutual misunderstanding that partly exists even today: Islamic revival is interpreted in Europe and other Western countries as ‘fundamentalism’, as a return to the ‘traditional’ very rigid Islamic religion and forms of life. Does this picture look different today? Let us look at some recent evidence.

*The perception of the Arab-Islamic world in Austrian and German school textbooks and the mass media*

A well-established research tradition exists in German-speaking countries which investigates the content of textbooks, in terms of history, social geography and religion, for schools at elementary and secondary level in relation to how they represent other countries and cultures. This research tradition has been established on the basis of the declared aim of such textbooks to improve pupils’ knowledge of other countries and cultures and thus to contribute to an education for peace (Fischer, 1987, p. 19). Let us first look at the results of an analysis of 66 German social geography textbooks at the secondary school level (Fischer, 1987). Here, the author found a series of typical stereotypes, problematic statements or simply wrong assertions about the Islamic world. Among them were:

- The designation of the followers of Islam as ‘Mohammedans’ (*Mohammedaner*)—this does not correspond to the Muslim tradition which considers Mohammed only as the bearer of the words of Allah but not as a person to be worshipped.

- The extensive treatment of *Djihad*, or the 'holy war', as a perennial element of Islamic history with the central thesis that Islam was spread over a large territory by 'fire and sword'.
- The understanding of 'Islam' as fatalism, with the assumption that the power of the almighty God nullifies autonomous human striving and action and leads to passivity of Muslims in private, economic and public affairs.
- Stereotypical, incorrect presentations of Muhammad, his origins and his life. He is often portrayed in cliché-like and even deprecatory terms, but seldom as an exceptional historical personality who passionately tried to raise the spiritual and moral life of his people.

In another analysis, devoted to catholic religious schoolbooks in Germany, the authors conclude that Islam and Muslims are seen only in their relation to Christianity and as their strong and uncomfortable rivals. Therefore, the spread of Islam is depicted as a concomitant of the pushing back of Christendom. An impression of violence is associated with the concepts of Islam, Allah, Muhammad and the Koran. All this serves to prove the validity of the negative Western image of Islam. Its positive achievements are seldom mentioned (Vöcking *et al.*, 1988).

Similar facts result from an analysis of Protestant school textbooks. Here, Islam is portrayed only as the religion of foreign workers in Europe who are surrounded by an aura of primitiveness or social weakness. There is, however, a tendency to a more sympathetic characterization of Turkish guest workers in more recent schoolbooks (Tworuschka, 1986, p. 270f.). A general comparison of the curricula of school textbooks in Germany finds insufficient attention given to Islam as a monotheistic world religion, little space for the history of Islam, and—again—an emphasis on the confrontation between Islam and Christianity. The many interweavings between the three monotheistic world religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—are not treated in an adequate way (Schultze, 1988, p. 394f.; see also Vöcking *et al.*, 1988; Heine, 1995, for Austrian schoolbooks).<sup>11</sup>

Other sources of information that are highly important for the whole population are the modern mass media, the printed press, radio and television. The worldwide press agencies and television networks have been among the most important agencies to create a global or 'world society'. The content and method of presentation of their information is a crucial factor which influences worldwide public opinion in a significant way. After dramatic presentations of catastrophes, political demonstrations, acts of violence, etc. in the worldwide media, politicians of many countries often feel strong pressure to intervene in places far removed from their own country. Conversely, powerful corporations, organizations and nations can exert strong control of information through the global media and thus try to influence public world opinion in their interests. The extremely selective information policy of the USA and the allied forces in the Gulf Wars was an example. An even more selective information policy may exist within several Arab-Islamic countries. Dictatorial regimes in those (and other) countries use the media as massive propaganda machines to present a distorted view of the outside, inimical and aggressive world to their populations.

From this point of view, it would be very important to have systematic research findings on the presentation of Arab-Islamic countries in the mass media of Europe, and also to know what image of Europe is presented by the Arab-Islamic media for their audience. In Austria and Germany, topics relating to the Arab-Islamic world have gained in importance in the media only since the oil crisis in the mid-1970s and the fall of the Shah regime in Persia at the end of the 1970s (Strobl, 1997). Most of these reports,

however, focus on crises, conflicts and wars in the Near East, such as that between Israel and the Palestinians and the Arab countries, between Iraq and Iran, the Gulf Wars, fundamentalist movements, and so on.<sup>12</sup> Several authors argue that, after the fall of communism, Islam became the new enemy of the West—thus echoing Huntington’s theory discussed above. Many television reports, journals and popular books portray the Arab-Islamic world as a monolithic bloc; reports and books concentrate on a few themes (violence, fundamentalism, and so on). A central role in these reports is played by a few prominent journalists who were able to launch themselves as ‘experts’ on the Near East. German authors of this sort, such as Gerhard Konzelmann and Peter Scholl-Latour, have given thrilling titles to their books (‘The Sword of Islam’, ‘Allah’s Sword’, ‘The Islamic Challenge’), which indicates that their main intention is to produce commercially successful books; this is also the case in the USA (Said, 2000, p. 10).

*The presentation of Europe and the Western world in Arab-Islamic school textbooks and in the media*

Large gaps may also exist in terms of the knowledge of Europe among the elites of Arab-Islamic countries. It is well known that the Western world as a whole is seen quite ambivalently. On the one hand, the West has brought many positive achievements, technical progress and material wealth. On the other, Western European countries were also those foreign powers which subjugated the Arab-Islamic world and which helped Israel to drive away millions of Palestinians from their traditional home villages. From this point of view, even a dictatorial political leader such as Iraq’s Saddam Hussein gained considerable respect in many Arab-Islamic countries.

One small source of systematic information in this regard is an analysis of five elementary school textbooks in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Iraq (Cornaro, 1991). In some of these, the Arab-Islamic world is portrayed as being threatened by Western imperialism and Zionistic aggressiveness; the former is described as being strongly united in the fight against these foreign aggressors. In one book, the Islamic world itself is portrayed in harmonistic, idyllic terms, depicting a rather peaceful family and work life, reminiscent of the idealized Islam of old times. However, it is striking that very few European or other Western countries are mentioned by name at all; non-Arabic foreign countries are portrayed in surprisingly shadowy and abstract terms.

In a recent German publication, a brief overview is given on the public debate that occurred in Arab countries after the attack on the USA in 2001. After widespread public rejection of the attack, a broad debate began through media contributions by various intellectuals (Aretin and Wannemacher, 2002, p. 91ff.).<sup>13</sup> Traditional and ideological arguments were used in the debate to highlight the increasing Westernization and Americanization of the Arab world and the consequent threat to local identities. The Arab world and Islam were depicted as victims of these trends. A further trend has been the widespread use of conspiracy theories: the attack is seen as having been planned and carried out consciously by the West or by Zionist groups in order to provide a legitimation for the expulsion of all Muslims from the West or for military interventions in Arab countries. However, a few commentators have given objective, moderate and self-critical accounts of developments in Arab-Islamic countries.

### **Summary and outlook**

Our survey of the existing evidence on the mutual perceptions and evaluations of the countries and peoples of Western Europe and the Arab-Islamic world can be summarized as follows. Overall, the Arab-Islamic world today is seen in Europe mainly as

a backward and crisis-laden region, continually shattered by religious fundamentalism, recurring violent internal conflicts and authoritarian and aggressive political actors. Mass media, political commentators, and journalistic and popular writers explain this deplorable state by the presumed cultural-religious and political heritage of the Arab-Islamic world—namely that, from the beginning, Islam has been spread over large territories by ‘fire and sword’; the emerging political structures always remained pre-modern in that they failed to distinguish between religious and political spheres; the ethics of Islam prohibited the unfolding of modern ways of thinking and individual independence (subjugation of women!), of successful economic activity and of political participation of the citizens.<sup>14</sup> Only recently have some attempts at understanding the cultural heritage and forms of living of present-day Muslims in the Arab-Islamic world been recognized,<sup>15</sup> including the immigrant workers in Western Europe. Overall, however, their ways of life and religious practices have also been downgraded as being typical of low and poor social strata.

There is little available evidence in relation to the image of Europe in the Arab-Islamic world. Serious deficits of information and distorted perceptions may exist here as well. Due to the historical experience of having been deprived of political and economic independence and due to the present-day political and military interventions of Western powers, the West is probably seen in very ambivalent terms in the Arab-Islamic world. More often than not Europe as a whole is seen as an integral part of a post-imperialist West, the main interest of which is that of securing the provision of essential crude oil from the Gulf region.

An exemplary case exists here of two neighbouring cultural areas which are doubtless different in several regards but which—upon closer inspection—have always had very close relations and an important common cultural heritage. Yet there is little focus on this common heritage and what these areas have in common politically and culturally is perceived in an incomplete and one-sided way. There is little appreciation of the positive achievements of present-day Arabian culture and science,<sup>16</sup> and the Arabic language, which is a highly developed language spoken by over 150 million people, is not very prominent in the further education and university curricula in Europe.

*Three further reasons for the mutual misperceptions between Europe and the Arab-Islamic world*

I have argued in the first section of this paper that mutual perceptions, stereotypes and prejudices have an objective base in the socio-economic and political structures of the countries involved. This is doubtless also the case here. We should mention at least three further factors that have contributed to the emergence of these mutual misperceptions.

The first is the deep socio-economic development gap between Europe and the neighbouring region of North Africa and the Near East. On the basis of a theory of identity, there is a tendency to upgrade or value more highly other countries similar to one’s own or with higher levels of development, and to undervalue those countries with significantly lower levels of development. From the viewpoint of Arab-Islamic countries, the corresponding process concerning Europe—a region doubtless higher in its level of development—may have contradictory trends. On the one side, a depreciation of the positive aspects and an over-evaluation of the negative aspects may take place. But one-sided, distorted information is highly problematic also in the case of an uncritical, undifferentiated positive evaluation. This process is probably strongly at work among the thousands of (mainly young) people who try to enter the EU by legal or illegal immigration. Empirical research among black Africans living in the Austrian provincial capital Graz, for instance, has shown that these people often experience very grave

disappointment: rather than being able to find well-paid jobs which would allow them to send money back to their families in Africa (which was the primary reason for their emigration to Europe) they often fall into a deplorable state of poverty due to the lack of legal rights to residence and employment (de Colle, 1999). Large streams of immigration also have many negative consequences for the receiving countries, including growing political discontent and frustration with Western democracies.<sup>17</sup>

The second set of factors that contributes to the mutual misperceptions of the Arab-Islamic world and Europe is the fundamentalist religious-political movements in the former countries, and the continuing violent internal conflicts and external wars in the Near East (Salamé, 1994). Again, it is very easy from a European perspective to attribute these conflicts to the lack of modernization in Arab-Islamic countries, to a seeming fusion of politics and religion, and to a lack of civic-democratic institutions and values. The century-old anti-Semitism in Europe, which accused the Jews of being the bearers of a dangerous conspiracy against the Christians, may today find its functional equivalent in anti-Islamism (Ezzeldin, 1994).

Social and economic backwardness per se, however, need not lead to hostile attitudes; it could also lead to compassion and, thereby, to increased readiness to support poor countries. Poverty and political powerlessness, however, might appear threatening to peoples and governments in the West if they are accompanied by considerable financial resources of the governments of many of those countries. This is precisely the case, and here we have a third factor contributing to the persistence of the negative image of the Arab-Islamic world in Europe: several of these states are controlling vast resources of crude oil which provides them with a high income and considerable power at an international level. Here, we can now specify the typology of international relations depicted in Fig. 1 and Table 1: if the relative level of two countries is significantly different in one aspect but equal or even reversed in some other aspect, the overall relationship may become very conflict-ridden. So, many Arab-Islamic countries may perceive themselves today as being treated quite unfairly by the West, and as not being taken as serious and equal partners. Several of these countries—most notably those with authoritarian governments—try to compensate their internal and external social and political weakness by using their incomes from oil exports to build up large, oversized military machines.<sup>18</sup> In this regard, they are often supported openly or secretly by European and American weapons' producers (and their governments) without any consideration of the consequent use of these weapons or of the democratic and peace-oriented character of the respective regimes.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Europe and the terrorist attack on the USA*

The terrible criminal attack on the World Trade Center in New York and on the Pentagon in Washington on 11 September 2001 is highly relevant for the question of the relations between Europe and the Arab-Islamic world. Was this attack, as many other commentators wrote, an attack on Western civilization, against its 'cherished values of freedom, tolerance, prosperity, religious pluralism and general suffrage' (Chomsky, 2001)? If this were true, Europe could soon become a target of similar attacks also. I doubt that this hypothesis is true (see also Aretin and Wannemacher, 2002: 19). What were the reasons for this terror and what conclusions can be deduced from it?

It appears almost certain that the key actors were very small groups of fundamentalist and extremist Islamists—if they were Islamist at all. Within the Arab-Islamic world, the attack was rejected on a broad scale (Aretin and Wannemacher, 2002, p. 84). Several of the terrorists had not come to the USA from Afghanistan or some other Islamic

country, but had been living there (and some also in Europe) for many years. What were their main targets? As indicated above, a new generation of militant Islamists came into being in the 1970s which argued that an uncompromising armed fight was necessary against the 'unbelievers'. They saw two main targets of their fight. First, Arab leaders themselves who had betrayed Islam by introducing Western lifestyles into their countries and by allowing Western powers to influence their politics. Many Western-oriented Arab leaders have been deposed or killed since the Second World War.<sup>20</sup> The main enemy of Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida network was the Saudi Arabian government, which had allowed US troops to remain in their country after the first Gulf War. He called it an 'idolater of the Satan'—quite similar to the label given to the Persian Shah by Ayatollah Khomeini in the late 1970s (Pohly and Durán, 2001). US representatives and facilities have been the second target of Islamic terrorists for decades.<sup>21</sup> Why have they been attacked? The reason is not difficult to see. Since the Second World War, the USA has had military forces in the Middle East, in many cases it has intervened in the internal political affairs of various Arab-Islamic countries and it has used military force on many occasions.<sup>22</sup> Probably most relevant in this regard is the massive support of the Israelis in their five wars with Arab countries and in their suppression of the Palestinians. Nearly all these US actions were and are perceived by many in the Arab-Islamic world as aggressive inroads by the world's remaining superpower (Lewis, 1994; Pohly and Durán, 2001; Talbott and Chanda, 2002). The use of violence also led to massive counter-violence within Arab-Islamic countries. Wherever Muslim fundamentalists have been allowed to participate in elections they have failed to gain more than 20% of the votes; where they have been excluded forcibly from political participation, their readiness to use violence has increased and the dividing line between moderate and aggressive fundamentalists has become blurred, thus increasing the number of open or tacit supporters of the users of violence (Aretin and Wannemacher, 2002, p. 31).

What is the role of Europe in all this? Evidently, Europe does not support large military forces in the Middle East, as it has always been hesitant to use indiscriminate counter-violence as an answer to terrorist attacks. Official European—but also American—reactions to the attack on the USA were cautious in so far as they did not accuse Islam as a whole as being responsible for them.<sup>23</sup> Public opinion in the EU did not change in relation to its view on Islam; rather, a greater and renewed interest in Islamic culture became noticeable.<sup>24</sup> Yet the merits of Europe in this issue are few: Europe may have been exempted from massive Islamic attacks mainly because of its political abstinence and weakness. In many cases Europeans may often have been happy that the USA 'pulled the chestnuts from the fire' for them. Europe seems to have been satisfied with profitable economic exchanges with the region; it has also often been quite willing to enter into economic and political relations with dictatorial regimes (such as Saddam Hussein's in earlier times) provided these were useful.

*Europe's task of collecting and spreading more reliable information about the Arab-Islamic world*

'The closing of channels of communication, and the loss of the ability to understand other peoples and cultures ... are major and perhaps increasing risks in any of the systems of social communication we call nations' (Deutsch, 1966, p. 184). In this regard, it is one of the main tasks of Europe to collect and disseminate detailed and reliable information about the Arab-Islamic world and the Middle East and North African region. Europe is predisposed to this task both because of its longstanding and close relations with this region and also because of its own traditional sensitivity to cultural

variety. Let us point to some of the most urgent issues in this regard—even at the risk of stating the obvious.

As far as the mutual politics of information is concerned, all those agents must be aware of their responsibilities and potential which I have mentioned previously in this paper. In Europe, the task for leading politicians and the political and cultural elites in general is to pay much closer and continuous attention to the Arab-Islamic world, which now seems to take only a back seat in the politics of the EU compared with its Eastern neighbours. This should include granting Arabian history, culture and language a much more prominent place in secondary and university school curricula. The mass media are also faced with the challenge of abstaining from sensational reporting which may satisfy the demands of the profit-oriented press and television makers but which does not constitute true information.

Another group of people which has to take over responsibility to provide better information about the other region are the cultural and educational, scientific and technical elites, such as the authors of books on the Arab-Islamic world, of schoolbooks, etc., as well as university teachers and researchers. In this regard we could also include here tourists travelling to the Arab-Islamic world; businessmen and engineers involved in economic exchanges or working in those areas; the diplomatic corps, the mission of which is directly related to a dissemination of objective knowledge and understanding about their own countries in the foreign world; and semi-official or private friendship associations promoting the understanding of the Arab-Islamic world in Europe. Thousands of young Europeans are already engaged in non-governmental organizations' relief activities in large, impoverished parts of the Middle East (Salamé, 1994).

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## Notes

1. The elaboration of this paper goes back to an invitation to the First International Conference on 'Social Sciences and the Development of Society', College of Social Sciences, Kuwait University, Kuwait, 10–12 April 2001. I am very grateful to the organizers of this conference, Dr Yagoub Al-Kandari and Professor Ali Al-Tarrah. I found important materials for this article at the library of the Arab Planning Institute (the Conference site). Thanks for useful comments go to Karl Prenner, University of Graz.
2. When using the term 'Arab-Islamic world', I am aware that these two terms do not fully coincide. There are large Islamic countries (e.g. Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia) which do not belong to the Arab linguistic-cultural area. Yet historically the Arabian peoples form the core of Islam culture since the Koran was written and has been propagated in Arabic (Mensching 1989, p. 277). Moreover, it is mainly the Arabian-Islamic countries that are direct neighbours of the EU.
3. In the extreme case, negative self-images can also arise, leading to a much lower action potential of a unit than it would have been in the case of a positive self-image; such images may also induce anti-social, self-destructive, or aggressive behaviour.
4. Tibi (1999, p. 247) gives a figure of 15 million, which seems too large, however. Jocelyne Cesari ('Islam américain, islam européen', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2001, p. 31) and Marr (1994) give a figure of about 12 million.
5. How this works in present-day Saudi Arabia—an Islamic theocracy par excellence—is described in 'Saudi Arabia's Majlis ash-Shura: a parliament according to Sharia', *Arabian Trends*, April 1998, pp. 26–31; for Kuwait see Tétreault (1995).

6. See the excellent analysis of a speech made by the Saudi Arabian king after the Gulf War, which introduced significant reforms, in al-Rasheed (1996).
7. I have explicitly included a broad series of attitudes (often two or three items for one dimension) in order to ensure that the results are not dependent on the specific wording of one single item. Given the relatively small numbers of Muslims, we can interpret only rather large differences in percentages; all of them are statistically significant.
8. In an excellent article, Adeed Dawisha (1999) shows how, in order to legitimate his power and aggressive actions, Saddam Hussein shifted freely between different ideologies from a secular-socialist ideology to Arabism, then Islamism and, finally, to Iraqi tribalism.
9. See the informative article 'Islamic extremism: a special report on America's secret alliance with radical Islam and the menace to Europe', *Arabias Trends*, March 1998, pp. 20–28; see also Hudson (1996).
10. I would consider it a main success of this paper if it helps initiate empirical studies on this issue.
11. In Great Britain, however, the curricula contain more comprehensive and objective information about Islam, including the common practice of pupil visits to mosques, discussions with Muslims, and attendance at presentations of Muslim pupils (*ibid.*, p. 398f.).
12. As an aside, we should note that the focus on catastrophic events is a general characteristic of the modern mass media, through which they can gain attention among a wide public.
13. The centre for Arab Studies in Beirut also edited a book on *The Arabs and Globalization* in 1998 (quoted in Aretin and Wannenmacher, 2002, pp. 92, 101).
14. For a concise summary of these and further stereotypes and prejudices, see Hunke (1990).
15. A series of short, introductory books about Islam has appeared in recent years in Germany, all of which try to provide objective and reliable information (see *Der Islam*, 1996; Halm, 2000; Ruthven, 2000).
16. There are a few exceptions in this regard. In Paris, for instance, Arab music is growing in popularity (see the report entitled "Paris moves to Arab rhythms" in *Arabias Trends*, September 1998, pp. 52–53). See Irabi (1989) for the achievements of Arab sociology.
17. Freeman (1997) argues convincingly that the advantages of immigration have been overstated in Western Europe during recent decades and that the mass immigration since the early 1960s in France, Germany and other Central European countries has been initiated by a coalition between politicians and employers, without serious public consultation.
18. Saudi Arabia alone, for instance, bought arms worth \$93.8 billion from the USA between 1950–1997. (CRS Issue Brief for Congress, <http://cnie.org/NLE/CRSreports/international>).
19. A shameful fact for the West, and several European countries (especially France), was the courting of the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in the 1970s and 1980s. Saddam Hussein was supported by the West, particularly during the Iran–Iraq war, as the lesser evil compared to the fundamentalist regime of the Shiite Ayatollahs in Iran (Timmermann, 1988).
20. Iranian Prime Minister Rasmara was killed in 1951 and the Persian Shah was overthrown in 1979; an assassination attempt was made on Egyptian President Nasser in 1954; his successor, President Anwar Sadat, was assassinated in 1980.
21. In the 1970s, the American ambassadors in Sudan, Lebanon and Kabul were killed; in the 1980s, terrorist attacks resulting in dozens of victims were directed against the American embassy and a military barracks in Beirut; in the 1990s, attacks were made against the World Trade Center in New York, the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-salam, and against a hotel and military facilities in Saudi Arabia; and in 2000 the aircraft carrier USS *Cole* was attacked in the port of Aden.
22. The USA supported the overthrow of the elected Persian minister Mossadegh in 1941 and brought the Pahlawi dynasty to power; it supported the *coup d'état* of the Indonesian army in 1965 which led to bloodshed by Suharto in subsequent years; the US secret service supported an attack on a mosque in Beirut in 1985 in which 80 civilians were killed; in 1998, a terrorist attack on a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan was made with devastating consequences for the civilian population since urgent pharmaceuticals were running out; American governments have supported fundamentalist regimes in the area (like the Saudi Arabian), or regimes which suppress their own minorities by means of brute force (as Turkey does with the Kurds and, in former times, the white South African regimes did with the blacks).
23. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was an exception in this regard when he stated that Western culture is superior to Muslim culture—a statement later revoked.
24. As reported by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia; see < [www.eumc.eu.in/publications/terror-report/national-reports-291101/rtf](http://www.eumc.eu.in/publications/terror-report/national-reports-291101/rtf) > .

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