

The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions

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Introduction

The past three decades have produced a considerable increase in scientific and journalistic publications about Islam, the Muslim World, and the position of Muslims in Western Europe. This considerable growth has mainly been prompted by national and international developments, such as the Iranian Revolution, the Rushdie Affair, the Gulf War, the war in former Yugoslavia, the revolution in Afghanistan and the growing significance of Islam as a political factor in the Muslim World. Another factor of great importance which should not be overlooked is the significant spurt in the migration of Muslims to countries of the European Union. It has only recently dawned on the governments of these countries that their societies will be permanently confronted with a significant number of Muslims and with their different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Daily events in which both the relationship between the Western and Muslim World and between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe and North America is a central issue when combined with various publications on this topic show that the relationship between the groups concerned is a tense one. Mutual contacts are based mainly on stereotypes and prejudice, which are clearly observable in the various reports in the media in which Muslims are described as fanatics, irrational, primitive, belligerent, and dangerous. Such generalisations and simplifications indicate that where expertise is lacking, fantasy surges ahead and where knowledge is faulty, emotion plays a central role in the regulation of the course of mutual relationships. Dating back to the eighties up to the present day, the media frequently refer to the alleged danger of Islam.

Warning against the threat of the Muslim enemy is not new in the Western world. Since the eighties some scientists, politicians and journalists have given such warnings continuously without presenting any substantial evidence to back up their concern. In this regard reference can be made to statements of the Chairman of the Club of Rome, the former Secretary General of the NATO, and of ministers and leaders of right-wing political parties in Western Europe and North America. These remarkable public facts are well known and indicative of the intensity of the negative attitude of the West towards Islam and Muslims. Essentially this negative attitude is undeserved and is not based on solid facts. As people become more aware of this, the number of

publications in which the alleged threat of Islam to the West is analysed and assigned to the realms of myth is steadily increasing (see Esposito, 1992; Hadar, 1993; Shadid en van Koningsveld, 1995; Halliday, 1995; Lawrence, 1998).

Shadid and Van Koningsveld (1995: 4-5) argue that the so-called Islamic threat should be considered a myth for a number of reasons. First of all, Muslims have never carried out any significant militant action in the West. On the contrary, Muslims in Europe have more frequently fallen victim to terrorist actions carried out by right-extremist groups, rejecting them and wanting to expel them from their countries. Besides this, the allegations that Islamic and Western culture are not compatible and that Muslims cannot fit into European societies are generated by an unfounded prejudice towards this religion and its followers. The heated debates which have taken place in a number of countries of the European Union on such issues as for example polygamy, veiling school girls, the circumcision of girls, and on the negative influence of Islamic religious education, can be traced back to a number of cases which were exaggerated by politicians and the press. Another argument which is adduced by the aforementioned authors to illustrate the mythical character of the Islamic threat to the West concerns the false assumption of Western authorities that Muslim minorities are more loyal to the governments of their countries of origin and to the Muslim World in general than to their host societies. This assumption came to the surface clearly during the Gulf War and the Rushdie Affair.

Other experts, for instance Halliday (1995), consider the Islamic threat to the West to be an illusion. Not only does a unified Islamic World not exist, even were such a World to exist, it would fall far short of the economic and military power to compete with, let alone risk confrontation with the West. The hostility of the West towards Islam and Muslims therefore encompasses racist, xenophobic, and stereotypical elements, a phenomenon which Halliday calls anti-Muslimism. This terminology is based on the thesis that the hostility voiced against Muslims is directed mainly against Muslims as a group of people and not against Islam as such, and that the anti-propaganda does not consist of strictly religious elements, but is mixed with spurious rhetoric and other murky ideologies (see Halliday, 1995: 113, 160)

Halliday distinguishes two types of anti-Muslimism: a 'strategic' and a 'populist' variant. The first mentioned originates in the United States and is related to and fed by issues such as oil supplies, nuclear weapons, and terrorism. It dates from the 1970s and is primarily the result of the OPEC price rises, the Iranian revolution and the hostages crises of the US diplomatic personnel in Tehran, the bombing of the World Trade Centre in 1993, and the subsequent prejudiced analysis of these events by the press. Although this type of anti-Muslimism can also be found in Western Europe, the populist anti-Muslimism is the predominant type in this part of the world. It has emerged as a reaction to and is concerned with issues related to the presence of Muslims in Western societies such as assimilation, integration, race, veiling and so forth. Halliday stresses the assumption that since the 1980s, this populist anti-

Muslimism has become a part of the general anti-immigrant attitude in Western Europe. These negative sentiments have been directed towards the rejection of veiling, the foundation of Islamic schools and mosques, most conspicuously in programmes of right-wing and racist political parties.

Islamologists and social scientists have not seen it as their duty to correct the myth of the threat posed by Islam and Muslims, as the majority of these experts predominantly seek their source in classical religious publications in order to understand and to explain modern developments in contemporary Muslim societies. Their ivory-tower approach fails to comprehend that such complex socio-economic and political developments cannot be explained by reference to the Koran, the Sunna, or the views of Ulamas only. Inexorably, this approach creates new stereotypes and fails to cast doubts on the existing ones, leaving the prejudice against Islam and the Muslim World unscathed. Some authors (see Muños, 1999: 5) therefore say that the methodology used by experts to analyse such developments in the Muslim World can be characterised by two misleading tendencies.

First of all there is the persistent inclination to assume that Western norms and values are the sole points of reference in any analysis and to regard these as incompatible with those of Islam. Such an approach focuses mainly on analysing points of conflicts between Islam and Western culture, simultaneously ignoring all existing similarities between the two cultures. Remarkably, the search for points of conflict is not carried out in order to understand the behaviour of Muslims but mainly in order to stress differences and distinctiveness, implicitly emphasising the superiority of Western culture. In this regard Hippler & Lueg (1995: 156) are of the opinion that such an approach is mainly used by those who want to maintain the hostile image of Islam in the West: “[They] do not compare like with like: Christianity with Islam, or the realities of Europe with those of the Middle East. As a rule they are prone to comparing a *religion* (Islam) with a *region* (or *society*) (the west). And if you ask the wrong questions you do not get the right answers”.

The second misleading tendency concerns approaching all developments in the Muslim World as signals of extreme religiosity. In this regard Muños (1999: 5) states that, for example, the Iranian revolution has been characterised in the Western historical imagination only as a fanatical expression of religious fervour, ignoring all the social, political, and economic factors which gave rise to the revolutionary movement.

These and other such ideas easily lead to the deduction that there are various sources which contribute to the negative image of Islam and to the myth of the Islamic threat to the Western World. With this in mind, some authors speak of anti-Islamism as a collage. Every actor involved acts and is motivated by his or her own personal interest. The reporter accentuates sensational and exotic news in order to attract attention, the politician uses demagogic statements in order to attract voters, and the scientist generalises, thereby violating the ethical rules of science, to enlarge his influence outside the scientific community. In other words, when the societal reality demands a negative attitude towards a certain ethnic or cultural group, the

aforementioned actors stand ready to fulfil that demand, fuelling more propagation of the negative attitude in society to the group concerned (Shadid & Van Koningsveld, 1994; 1995)

Needless to say, presenting Islam as a threat to the Western World will instigate negative effects in the intercultural relations between the groups concerned. For these reasons such attitudes are based mainly on stereotypes and prejudice, thereby sharpening the differentiation between the 'we' and the 'them', leading to a vicious circle in the relationship between the Western and Muslim World and between Muslims and non-Muslims in general. It is well known that stereotypes and prejudice function as filters for the observation and interpretation of the behaviour of others and at the same time create self fulfilling prophecies. In other words, because of the prejudice towards others, people see in their behaviour what they expect to see on the basis of their prejudice, with the result that they inevitably will make wrong predictions concerning the behaviour of members of the other group.

In this contribution we will not refer to either new or old negative statements on Islam and Muslims in Western countries, but will focus on the causes of and possible solutions to the hostility between both worlds.

In any search for the origins of this negative attitude, countless causes can be found in the literature, which we categorise under the following models of explanation: (1) the model of the changing power relationship; (2) the model of the clash of civilisations and the indispensable enemy; (3) the model of political Islam; (4) the model of oversimplified information; and (5) The model of the increased Muslim immigration to the Western World.

The model of the changing power relationship

In explaining the negative attitude of the West towards Islam and the Muslim World, the first step is to look for the historical origin of the rivalry between the two and to their changed power relationship. Many authors divide this relevant history into four periods. First of all the period of the hegemony of the Muslim World which began in 622 and lasted until 1492, the year of the fall of Granada. In this period the Muslim World experienced an enormous expansion, with Islam spreading from the Arabian peninsula to North Africa and some parts of Asia and Europe.

The second period, partially overlapping the first one, represents the Western counter-attack by means of the Christian Crusades, which started in the eleventh century and lasted until 1683, the year in which the expansion of the last Muslim empire into Europe was stopped at Vienna. The end of the Crusades marked the beginning of the third period which eventually resulted in the fourth period, that of the Western hegemony and the colonisation of the Muslim World in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see Tehranian, 2000: 204). Other scholars like Halliday (1995: 108) and Shadid and Van Koningsveld (1994) also make such a classification.

The last two authors state that initially the negative image of Islam in Europe was religiously inspired. It was launched by the Christian theologians

of the early middle ages in the Near East and Islamic Spain. After the occupation of their countries by the Muslims, these theologians tried to raise a barrier against any attraction of Islam may have exercised over their ruling elite, by delivering convincing evidence of the superiority of Christianity to Islam. One of the obstacles they met was providing explanation for the fact that after the apotheosis of God's revelation by Christ's crucifixion, a new prophet called Mohammad arose. The widespread Christian view on Islam as the work of the devil originated from efforts to provide an answer to the question posed by the theologians concerned. In their answer to the conundrum they emphasised the idea that God permitted the devil to produce such a new 'religion' in order to put Christians to the proof and to punish them for their disobedience. In such a context, the Prophet of Islam functioned as a pseudo-prophet, as an instrument of the devil, and was characterised as an unscrupulous impostor, greedy for power and as the predecessor of the Antichrist.

The interest of Europe in Islam really began much later, namely at the end of the eleventh century. This was the period in which major shifts took place in the international power relationships between the Christian and the Muslim World. Christian armies made their first conquests in Islamic Spain and undertook their Crusades to Syria Palestine. These were purely military expeditions directed by motives of economic expansion and as an adjunct the emotional appeal of the eviction of Islam out the Holy Land. The information on Islam offered by European authorities to their subjects was derived exclusively from the Christian polemics against this religion. Military developments in the relationship between the Christian and the Muslim Worlds which followed later, such as the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the march of the Turks to the heart of Europe, were used to reconfirm the (forgotten) former image of the Muslim enemy, leading simultaneously to its revival.

During the colonial period, this negative historical image of Islam in Europe gained an important new function, when it was used to legitimise the subjection of almost the entire Muslim World by a few European superpowers. In their legitimisation of the subjection, the superpowers refrained from using the historical Christian attacks on Islam which were directed towards the foundation of its religious validity. Instead, their attacks were built on modern, Darwinist foundations. In this context, world religions were put in an evolutionary framework with the upshot that Islam was considered to be a degeneration of the ultimate truth and Christianity was paraded as the ultimate end of the evolutionary process (see also Esposito, 1992: 37-42).

Such historically rooted prejudices are transmitted through education, especially through children's and schoolbooks. In order to correct the present shortcomings in the education sector in Europe concerning Islam and Muslims, the books concerned can be adjusted in various ways. First of all, all the negative information about Islam can be erased from such literature designed for the youth and at the same time objective and complete information about Islam and Muslims can be added to these books.

Furthermore, schoolbooks can be screened according to the extent of ethnocentrism they display. In any such exercise it is of paramount importance that texts that directly or indirectly stress on the superiority of the own culture and the inferiority of the culture of others, in this case the Muslim culture, should be avoided.

The model of the clash of civilisations and the indispensable enemy

Another model used by scientists, politicians, journalists, and strategists in order to explain the negative image of Islam and Muslims in the Western world is constructed on the assumption of the clash of civilisations and the assumption of the indispensable enemy. The notion of the clash of civilisations concentrates on the differences between both cultures. Samuel Huntington, a professor at Harvard University, is considered to have been the first to draw attention to the phenomenon he designated the 'clash of civilisations'. Others claim that it was Buzan, a professor in international studies at the University of Warwick, when looking to the fatal consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The key changes which occurred at the 'Centre' (industrialised world) would directly and indirectly have consequences for the political, military, and economic security of the Periphery (non-industrialised world). One of these consequences would be what he called 'the clash of rival civilizational identities' which in his view exist mainly between the West and Muslim World. According to Buzan: "in the case of Islam, this threat is compounded by geographical adjacency and historical antagonism and also the overtly political role that Islam plays in the lives of its followers. Rivalry with the West is made more potent by the fact that Islam is still itself a vigorous and expanding collective identity". The combination between the clash of civilisations and the steadily mounting immigration to Europe will, Buzan claims, produce a kind of 'societal cold war' between the centre and a part of the periphery, the Muslim World. "Europe, we are told, will occupy a prominent position in such a war which, Buzan says, 'would help European political integration, by providing a common foreign policy issue on which a strong consensus would be easy to find'" (see Al-Jabri, 1999: 67).

Whoever may claim to having conceived the idea, it is Huntington's article which has struck the greatest resonance in scientific and journalist discussions all over the world. Huntington (1993: 45 ff) argues that, the clash of civilisations will be the major source of conflict in the New World Order, in which seven or eight cultures are represented. The clash of civilisation will be largely restricted to that between Western culture on the one hand and Islamic and Confucian cultures (in China and Korea) on the other. This assumption is based on the expectation that the last-mentioned cultures for reasons of culture and power "do not wish to, or cannot, join the West compete with the West by developing their own economic, military and political power. They do this by promoting their internal development and by co-operating with other non-Western countries. The most prominent form of this cooperation is the Confucian-Islamic connection that has emerged to challenge Western

interests, values and power". This in contrast to other civilisations, such as the Japanese, Hindu, Latin American and possibly African, which, Huntington assumes, will eventually choose to join the West.

In order to face the threat of the Islamic-Confucian cultures, Huntington (1993: 49-49) suggests that the West should take short- and long-term measures. "In the short term it is clearly in the interest of the West to promote greater cooperation and unity within its own civilization, particularly between its European and North American components, to incorporate into the West societies in Eastern Europe and Latin America whose cultures are close to those of the West, [...], to limit the expansion of the military strength of Confucian and Islamic states, to moderate the reduction of Western military capabilities and maintain military superiority in East and Southwest Asia, [...], to strengthen international institutions that reflect and legitimate Western interests and values and to promote the involvement of non-Western states in those institutions".

In the long term the West has "to maintain the economic and military power necessary to protect its interest in relation to these civilizations. It will also, however, require the West to develop a more profound understanding of the basic religious and philosophical assumptions underlying other civilizations and the ways in which people in those civilizations see their interests".

Other experts consider the hostility between the Muslim world and the West to have been caused by the similarities rather than the differences between both cultures. First of all, both civilisations claim to possess an ideology that is universal in nature. Moreover, Muslims are convinced that their religious system offers an adequate alternative to Western liberalism and democracy.

A completely different perspective is represented by those experts who explain the hostility of the West towards Islam not from the clash of civilisations, but from the need of the West to have an indispensable enemy in order to affirm and define its own identity. They argue that this explains why, since the collapse of the former Soviet Union, Western strategists have continuously discussed the question of what, after communism, will be the new enemy of the West? Al-Jabri (1999: 66) states that "It is as if the end of one war, in this case the Cold War, only served to unleash another or, in philosophical terms, as if the Western ego could only assert itself in the negation of 'the other'". In this context, other experts such as Hippler & Lueg (1995: 24) state that by a negative presentation of Islam "We [the West] invent an Islam that suits us, that best fulfils our politico-psychological needs. This is exactly how we arrive at a clean separation between 'us' and 'them' (the Other), between inside and outside that are never supposed to meet and we thus succeed in fencing off and fortifying our own Western identity. Similarities and parallels between the cultures would only disturb this image, because it would mean recognising ourselves in the Other and blur the distinction. Indeed, we stress the differences of Islamic countries and Islamic culture, and 'the Orient' is stylised as the antithesis to the West. We thus create a polar opposite against which we can assure ourselves of our 'self' and of our values, and against which we can shape our perception of our Western world".

Yet other authors, (Al-Jabri, 1999: 71; Muñoz, 1999: 20) argue that, the need of the West for an indispensable enemy is based mainly on an epistemological model which has dominated its thought for centuries. “It is the model of a subject, an ‘I’ which knows and recognizes itself through ‘the other’, an ‘other’ which it selects and shapes to fulfil the assigned function, that of confirming the ‘I’ and structuring its ‘being’”. Such a model is most obvious in the works of classical as well as modern Western philosophers. Al-Jabri mentions philosophers such as Parmenides, Hegel, and Sartre. The last stated that: “To obtain any truth about myself, I need the other. The other is indispensable for my existence and for the awareness I have of myself”.

Some authors contend that the notion of the so-called indispensable enemy is deliberately upheld by bureaucracies, i.e. the administrative and the military apparatus. During the Cold War period especially, military bureaucracies were necessary to protect the West from the threat of communism in the Soviet Union and China. In the wake of the collapse of the communist block and in order to legitimise their own existence, these bureaucracies had to create a new enemy. So, the ‘red’ danger was replaced by the ‘green’ danger, green being the colour of Islam. Hippler (2000: 70-71), for example, states that: “Well-funded bureaucracies hardly ever consider themselves useless. They tend to pretend either that nothing fundamental has changed, or that some new reason for their existence has taken the place of the old one. [...]. Bureaucracies do not reform easily. But even if they do change, very often the tendency is to preserve as much as possible from old times, and form the previous bureaucratic mentality”.

Others, such as Halliday (1995, 113) reject the assumption that the West needs an enemy in order to affirm its identity. According to this author, such an assumption is a myth, “... as the liberal internationalists of the nineteenth century and Karl Marx himself saw clearly, capitalism is an expansionary force that seeks to subject the whole world to its domination and force it to imitate the West in key areas of social, economic and political activity. Its main conflictual drive is competition within itself – for profit, markets, power”. This argument lacks conviction as it is based on the assumption of the expansionary character of capitalism and it seems quite plausible that the West needs some other part of the world, especially one that presents a challenge, with which to compete. In this sense, that part of the world is considered to be the enemy.

In order to improve the image of Islam in the West, Western politicians, scientists, and the media have to acquire more adequate knowledge of Islam in general and on modern developments in the Muslim World in particular. Preserving tense relationships based on assumptions such as the clash of civilisations, the incompatibility of Islam and democracy, and the *a priori* rejection of Islamic political movements does not bode well for the realisation of good international understanding between both parts of the world and between Muslims and non-Muslims in general.

A general strategy for the realisation of mutual understanding and acceptance between the Muslim and the Western world is presented by Al-

Jabri (1999: 77). He suggests using the axiomatic method of Ibn Rushd's (Averroes), the Euro-Arabic (Andalusian) philosopher, who applied this method in order to bridge the gap between religious leaders and philosophers created by their different interpretations of both religious and secular matters. The first principle implies the recognition of the 'other' within its own system. For example, Salamé (1993: 32) argues that Western states should ought "to acknowledge that democracy is not necessarily built upon a one-person, one-vote system. [...]. Individualism is not a universal, nor a morally superior, philosophy; communitarianism is still valid as a shield against authoritarianism and arbitrary rule. Hence, the protection of minorities must be part of any approach to the Middle East. Islam has historically provided formulas for maintaining several bodies of legislation within the same polity that apply to individuals on the basis of their religious affiliation. If Muslims are to be ruled according to the sharia, non-Muslims need the right to be ruled according to their own legislation and customs. Returning to those unique forms of legal and social plurality is easier, and possibly more urgent, than creating Western-style pluralism. [..]"

The second principle of the axiomatic method implies the recognition of the 'other's' right to be different. Therefore, Islam as a religion, should not to be continuously compared with the Western secular system. In this context Salla (1997: 740) argues that "Finding the likely points of convergence between Western liberal democratic norms and political Islam (as with any regional variation of the global religious revival) is likely to be just as controversial and difficult as it was between Western liberal democracy and Marxism-Leninism. For example, there will be no easy solution to the problem of how secularism can accommodate religious normative frameworks. Despite these difficulties, the appropriate response to political Islam lies not in a renewed Western policy of 'containment', which opposes this 'threat' wherever and whenever it raises its head, and which posits a clear conceptual divide between two irreconcilable political forces; but in a genuine attempt to recognise how Islamist critiques of the West's liberal democratic norms represent a legitimate reopening of questions concerning the appropriate political framework for (post)modern societies. Islamist critiques are essentially attempts to reopen the 'end of history' debate through the notion of a 'new convergence thesis'. Such efforts will not be easy, given the triumphalist cold war assumptions that underpin Western foreign policy making".

Finally, the axiomatic method implies the principle of tolerance and indulgence. This principle corresponds to the ideology of cultural relativism. Matters of interpretation within the context, tolerance and indulgence towards dissidents or those who possess different cultural views, nowadays play an important role in the debates on the position of Muslims in the West. These debates are directed mainly towards finding a social basis and juridical possibilities for the acceptance of some of their cultural norms and values which are indispensable to fulfilling of religious duties and the preservation of their cultural identity.

The model of the political Islam

Without any doubt whatsoever, one of the main factors which negatively influence the image of Islam and Muslims in the West is the acts of violence of members of some extreme Muslim political movements, the so-called 'fundamentalist movements'. In this regard, reference can be made to some violent events which have predominated the media in the last thirty years, such as the Iranian revolution in 1978-79, the Rushdie affair, the revolution in Afghanistan, the attack on the World Trade Centre, and the Algerian civil war.

The term Muslim fundamentalism is nowadays used inadequately as a label to designate every movement with a religious Islamic signature. However, the vagueness of the term combined to its negative connotation, militates against acquiring adequate insight into the nature, aims, and activities of the various movements which are generally categorised under this denominator. Despite the fact that many experts have formulated their objections to this concept, it is obviously difficult to replace because of its widespread usage. Other concepts such as Islamism and political Islam are also used in this context.

It is of great importance to emphasise that the resurgence of Islam is a very complex phenomenon and that its evolution and any scientific evaluation of it can only adequately be carried out by taking both its context and the circumstances under which it appears into consideration.

Examining the methodological approaches to be used for the explanation of the Islamic resurgence, a distinction can be made between the ethnocentrists and the cultural relativists. Other authors also make a dichotomy in this context. Hunter (1998: 71), for example distinguishes the 'neo-orientalist interpretation' and the 'neo-Third Worldist interpretation', while Halliday (see Salla 1997: 729) distinguishes the 'essentialists' or 'orientalists' on the one hand and the 'contingencists' on the other.

The ethnocentrists attribute the emergence of Islamic political movements mainly to the Islam as a religion, completely neglecting the influence of the social, economic, political and cultural conditions in the Muslim world. Furthermore, they consider Islam to be the dominant ideology in the Muslim world, and that it is a rigid, immutable system which is incompatible with modernism. Perilously, they emphasise that understanding this part of the world and both its socio-economic and its political development only requires studying and analysing Islamic texts and the 'fatwas' issued of religious leaders. The supporters of this approach advise Western governments to fight against Islamic political movements, among other means by providing assistance to the secular regimes in those countries, already engaged in this combat (see Hunter, 1998: 71; Halliday, 1995: 128).

Their view is opposed by the cultural relativists who argue that some aspects of Islam have made it very suitable as an instrument for correcting existing social, economic, and political inequalities in the societies concerned. Islamic political movements which are supported by a significant part of the population have emerged as cultural and nationalist manifestations and that these are directed towards combating the social, economic, and political

problems with which their societies have been confronted. Their emergence was not for the purpose of fighting foreign domination, which was the goal of nationalist movements as such. On the contrary, the programmes they have developed have aimed to overcome the underdevelopment of their societies which they have attributed to the inadequacy of their ruling governments (see Halliday, 1995: 128)

Cogently, the supporters of this approach disagree notably with the idea of any existing clash of civilisations between the West and Islam. They argue that Islamic ideology is consistent with the ideologies of liberalism and democracy, referring to Islamic terms such as 'Shura' and 'Mubaya'a' in order to illustrate this compatibility.

The debates between the followers of both approaches are not merely of an academic nature, but have political consequences as well, namely for the relationship between the countries in the two parts of the world. Both methodological camps are engaged in a competition, trying to attract the attention of foreign policy makers in Western countries and to convince them of their perspectives (see Salla, 1997: 731).

Despite the plethora of scientific discussions and political debates on Islam in the West, the knowledge of both the religion itself and of Islamic movements in particular may be fairly described as superficial. Nearly every Islamic movement is characterised as fundamentalist, with merely a distinction between militant and non-militant movements at best. The reality is that such movements are much more complex and deserve more scientific and political attention in order to understand their motivations and ideologies. Islamic religious political movements differ, among other points, in their goals, degrees of organisation, militancy, political involvement and the international character of their support.

Apart from these differences, there are indubitably similarities. Some authors (see Esposito, 1992: 14) mention a number of similarities which can be found within their programmes of action. Among other things there is "a sense that existing political, economic, and social systems had failed; a disenchantment with, and at times a rejection of, the West; a quest for identity and greater authenticity; and the conviction that Islam provides a self-sufficient ideology for state and society, a valid alternative to secular nationalism, socialism and capitalism".

Regarding their ultimate objectives, it is important to note that the majority of Islamic movements have defined the psychological, social and political goals which they want to achieve.

At the psychological level they emphasise Islamic identity, which has largely been lost as a result of colonialism and the continuing process of Westernisation. In their programmes they argue that decolonisation has not yet been realised, as the secular political elite in their countries are considered the henchmen of former colonial superpowers. For this reason their propaganda stresses the glorious past of Islam, including the historical conquests of important parts of Europe, the contribution of Islam to science and art and its influence on Europe, which at that time was underdeveloped.

The assumption that Islam is not capable of offering a self-sufficient ideology for state and society is also rejected, and emphasis is laid on the fact that Islam is not merely a religion but a dynamic socio-economic, political, and juridical system as well. In defending this assumption reference is made to the numerous ongoing debates between scientists and between Ulama in the Muslim World on matters like the position of the 'sharia' in the juridical system, marriage and divorce, democracy, and organ donations.

Some authors (see Esposito, 1992: 19; 55) state that Islamic movements, though rejecting Westernising tendencies and secularism, do accept modernism, science, and technology as such. Cogently, they find that the pace, direction, and extent of change as well need to be subordinated to the Islamic ideology as a safeguard against the penetration of Western values. In their justifications, they refer to Muslim reformers and modernists of the twentieth century, who admired Europe for its strength, technology, and political ideals of freedom, justice, and equality, but at the same time often rejected its imperialist goals and policies. (Note: Some of these reformers are Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh in Egypt, Morocco's Allal al-Fasi, Tunisia's Abd al-Aziz al-Thalabi, Algeria's Abd al-Hamid Ibn Badis, and Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Iqbal in the Indian Subcontinent). Muslim reformers argued the compatibility of Islam with modern science and with the best of Western thought. "They preached the need and acceptability of a selective synthesis of Islam and modern Western thought; condemned unquestioned veneration and imitation of the past; reasserted their right to reinterpret (*ijtihad*) Islam in light of modern conditions; and sought to provide an Islamically based rationale for educational, legal, and social reform to revitalize a dormant and impotent Muslim community".

The psychological goal in general and Muslim identity in particular are very important issues in their campaign, as it became clear that the majority of the people, especially the youth, lack identification with Western ideologies like socialism, communism, and liberalism. They emphasise the fact that by using these ideologies, the ruling political elite in their countries failed to accomplish much needed socio-economic development. As a result, the people in general, and the young in particular, were driven in search of a new ideology. The leaders of Islamic movements present Islam as a new ideology of resistance, expecting it to be more successful, because as a religion Islam is closer to the people than the imported Western ideologies. Therefore, nowadays the social debate is not merely directed towards matters of modernity as such, but implies discussions on identity, culture, and religion as well.

Islamic movements also have socio-economic goals, as the countries concerned are suffering from poverty, corruption, dictatorship, unemployment, and very high national debts. Sometimes more than half of the population lives below the subsistence level. The origins of extreme poverty and of many other social problems in society are sought in the attempts made by the secular regimes to develop their countries on the basis of Western socio-economic and cultural models. The fact is stressed that communism, for example, has

actually proven to be a failure, and that nationalism, which played a central role in the liberation of the countries in the Muslim World from colonisation, is nowadays considered to be instrumental in the Western pursuit of division among the countries concerned.

Islamic movements reject the criticism of their opponents saying that because of their religious orientation they will inevitably follow a traditionalistic and theocratic strategy in the struggle to overcome the socio-economic problems dogging their societies. In their reply to such criticism they refer to the fact that many of their followers are university graduates with liberal ideas, and that when they come to power they will deal pragmatically with the political reality. This means that they have to present long-term economic plans, have to form political coalition with other political parties in order to stay in power, and have to trade with other, including non-Muslim, countries and to make treaties with them.

Finally, Islamic movements have political goals. Various strategies are used in order to reach these aims, the first one being participation in the existing political system. In this way, many Islamic parties such as the Muslim Brothers, the Liberation Party and the FIS (Islamic Salvation Party in Algiers) are part and parcel of the existing political structure. Some of such parties have managed to be represented in the parliaments of their countries. In most countries Islamic parties preponderantly tend to operate as pacifistic opposition groups, thus trying to achieve the aimed socio-economic and political changes.

Although Islamic movements have not generally succeeded in ushering in dramatic changes such as significant political upheavals in their countries, they have been effective in placing Islam and its relevance on national and international political and social agendas. Over and above this, they have broken the seemingly inextricable relationship between religiosity and traditionalism, have succeeded in increasing people's interest to politics, and directed their attention to the lack of democracy and to the corruption of the secular political elite. Nowadays, religious people need not to be ashamed of their religious commitment, as a large number of their followers consists of students and university graduates.

Undeniably, some of these Islamic movements or some splinter groups do use violence in order to achieve their political goals. Extremist groups in particular which cannot wait to achieve the desired changes by peaceful means, or those who participate in the liberation of occupied territories, make use of attacks on government buildings and officials. The Islamic movement of Hamas has been the dynamic factor behind the 'Intifadah' (the Palestinian National Revolution) and Hezboallah successfully achieved the liberation of the occupied territories in South Lebanon (See Esposito, 1992: 119-167 for a comprehensive discussion on Islamic movements).

Such behaviour in particular has provided the political leaders of the countries concerned and Western media with a more than adequate opportunity to present a negative image, not only of the groups themselves but also of their religion in general. According to Halliday (1995: 110), the

rhetoric of Muslim leaders such as Khomeini in Iran, Ghannouchi in Tunisia or Al-madani in Algeria has equally contributed to such a negative image. In the propaganda, these religious leaders emphasise their rejection of Western secular values, democracy and the equality between man and women, and in some cases even claim that Islamising the West is their goal. The call for jihad, support of violence, and other such rhetoric all strengthen the spectre of the 'Islamic threat' and make its refutation extremely difficult as well. Speaking about this Halliday says: "The opponents and proponents of the Islamic movement were in agreement that the 'Islam' itself was a total, unchanging, system, that its precepts operated over centuries, in all kinds of societies, and determined the attitude of diverse peoples towards politics, sexuality and society. Both sides share the view of a historically determined, essential 'Islam', which is supposedly able to account for all that Muslims say, do and should say and should do. Komeini, Turabi, The Muslim Brothers and the rest are as insistent on this score as any anti-Islamic bigot in the West".

In this field much remains to be done in order to improve the mutual relationship between the Western and Muslim world. Salamé (1993: 32) for example, places emphasis on the following points among others:

(1) The importance of the dissemination of knowledge about Islamic movements in the West and the recognition of the existing religious and ideological diversity in the Muslim world. He states that Western governments should seek to know what the Islamist groups are and what their activities consist of. This cannot be achieved "if the West views the Islamist challenge solely from the perspective of a security threat, nor if it is preoccupied with content analysis of the Islamists' frequently contradictory statements. Too often, Islamist groups are lumped together as a single threat to Western interest. That is both unfair and self-deluding; it ignores the diversity among Islamists and implicitly assumes that they are the only anti-Western force in their societies. [...] More generally, the West has to learn that its model of the secular nation-state is not as universal as it presumes, and other forms of political organization may be as valid. [...] Western attacks on Islam and negative media stereotypes of Muslims help confirm Islamist paranoia about supposed Western plot to eradicate Islam".

(2) Next Salamé argues that the West should encourage the present regimes to associate moderate Islamist forces with their governments gradually. The Islamist ideological trend can no longer be ignored; Islamists should participate in the legislative bodies of the states and later in the executive branches. As a beginning, pre-electoral pacts should be negotiated between the government and other political forces, including the Islamists.

(3) The West should also criticise human rights violations and cheating in the electoral process whenever they occur. The West's discourse on human rights and democracy always seems to have been conditioned by strategic considerations. The West is selective indeed in its choice of enemies as well as in the United Nations resolutions it wishes to see implemented. For this reason it should come as no surprise if its moral discourse is ridiculed in the Third World.

Noticeably the negative image of Islam in the West has authorised the international community to deny the movements concerned their elementary human rights and to refrain from criticising the political elite in the Muslim world for denying their people their democratic rights. This explains why it was possible that no critics of name in the West raised their voice when the elections in Algeria were cancelled and the religious movement prohibited, nor were criticisms heard when the expatriation of Muslim activists by Israel took place in 1992.

The model of the unnuanced information service

In explaining the causes of the negative image of Islam and Muslims in the West another model, one which refers to the oversimplified information services on this religion and its followers, and especially the role of the media, can be distinguished. Although education and socialisation in general are extremely important in the transmission of stereotypes and prejudices from generation to generation, the media play a significant role in the creation of new ones if they oversimplify the presentation of the actual developments in the groups concerned. People in the West are daily confronted with news both on television and in newspapers in which Muslims and Islam are the main topics. Research from various sources indicates that the way in which Western media report about Muslims, Islam, and ethnic minorities in general leaves much to be desired (see Said, 1981; Van Dijk, 1991; Noakes, 1998; Hafez, 2000; Poole, 2000). Poole (2000: 162) for example, studied the role of the British media in spreading negative images on Islam and Muslims and concluded that the media overwhelmingly generalise about these groups. Islam is considered to be obsolete and a threat to British society. In addition, Muslims are described as divergent, irrational, and unable to integrate in society.

The general conclusion of these publications is that the Western media both directly and indirectly play a central role in the spreading and preserving of negative images of Islam and its followers. Even more alarming is the suggestion made by some authors accusing reporters of contributing significantly to the production and reproduction of racism (see Van Dijk, 1991). Journalists react offended and argue that in their reporting they only present the facts, events, and opinions that exist in society.

But in what way do Western media contribute to the creation of such a negative image of the groups concerned?

First of all and especially in relation to these groups, the Western media present an oversimplified and static cultural concept. They refer facilely to classical Islamic culture in order to explain the behaviour and assumptions of Muslims in the modern world. In this way, they quite wrongly spread the assumption that every individual with an Islamic background is religious and practising and that religion only accounts for such aspects as the inequality of women and the lack of democracy in the Muslim World. Other factors are seldom taken into consideration. Muños (1999: 13) states in relation to the

position of women in Muslim countries that: “secular Western societies have been misinformed and become biased to such an extent that they cannot or will not understand that the problem of women in Islam is not a religious but a social issue – i.e. religion being used by a patriarchal society – and, therefore, Islamist militancy may actually allow women to develop a modern relationship with Islam and open up breaches in the existing patriarchal order, regardless of whether this complies with the ideology of Islamist males or not”.

Secondly, the Western media contribute to the negative image of Islam and Muslims by the choice of the content and lay-out of their articles and radio and TV programmes, especially by mentioning the ethnic origin or religious affiliation of those who commit a crime, or by classifying present regional and ethnic conflicts as religious. In cases where Muslims or the Muslim World is concerned images of aggressive shouting men with beards are often shown in order to accentuate their anger and to emphasise their eccentricity.

It cannot be denied that the news concerned is based on ‘facts’. Those presenting a negative image of Islam and its alleged incompatibility with Western culture are mostly politicians, civil servants and researchers. The media contributes to shaping the myth of threat by presenting such statements uncritically. Compounding their error, the media hardly ever compare the deviant fanatical behaviour of some Muslim fundamentalists to similar behaviour of members of other religious movements, such as in Northern Ireland, India or Israel, to point out the relativity of the picture presented.

Another striking shortcoming of the Western media in relation to Muslims concerns the position of the latter in the presentation of news and commentaries. Reporters display a tendency to present the views of any given layman as being formally representative of the religion as such, wrongly assuming that such a person possesses sufficient knowledge of or expresses representative views about that religion.

The question of what purpose do these media present such a negative image of Islam and Muslims remain? The proposition here is that media do not deliberately do so, but that such shortcomings are caused by a number of structural factors related to reporters and to the methods they apply to news gathering in general.

First among these are the prejudices reporters nurture as members of society and then direct towards the groups concerned. These inevitably play an important role in this process. The logical conclusion is that news coverage will undoubtedly be negatively influenced. The communications theory indicates that opinion leaders are inclined to present the news in such a way that it corresponds to their own views and to the norms and values of the groups to which they belong. In addition and resulting their prejudices, reporters tend to refrain from searching for a second opinion on a certain topic, mainly because the information gathered and the negative statements by significant persons coincide predominantly with their own perception of the groups concerned.

Secondly, the negative presentation of news about Muslims is also influenced by the so-called 'news value', meaning the extent to which the message differs from what is currently prevailing in society. In order to render a higher 'news value' to messages so as to attract the attention of the media user, reporters are inclined to lay a heavy emphasis on the differences between Islam and Muslims on the one hand and Christianity and Western society on the other. For example, the news value increases when a reporter postulates in his message that female circumcision is incompatible with Western views on the equality of men and women, while the opposite happens when he postulates that such practice is forbidden by law in most Muslim countries. News value also depends on the 'social weight' of the message, i.e. the extent to which the media user thinks that the message concerns him or her personally. In order to increase the 'social weight' of messages, the reporter is inclined to present deviant behaviour of Muslims in such a way that it appears to have many consequences for every single person in society. This could explain why the media make eager and uncritical use of negative statements about the groups concerned when these are expressed by politicians and other important persons in society.

Thirdly, negative news presentation about Muslims in the media is also indubitably caused by the fact that reporters generally lack the specific knowledge which is needed in order to cover the groups concerned. The maximum effect of this lack of information is discerned when background articles are produced. Because of this deficiency, the reporter will quite often omit consulting the most suitable expert on the topic and consequently makes a mass of his critical analysis of the negative and inaccurate information gathered. The time-pressure under which reporters constantly have to operate quite often forces them to turn to the most accessible, mostly secondary, sources which are already replete with prejudices about the groups concerned. This will result in an increasing amount of the same negative news.

In order to avoid the development of new prejudices about Islam and Muslims, it is necessary for the media to adjust their existing incorrect views and procedures and adopt a preventive strategy, i.e. a well-balanced and prejudice-sensitive approach. This can only be realised, if the responsible framework of the media becomes convinced of the fact that they are indeed contributing to this stigmatising process and recognise the necessity for change as well. Such a preventive strategy can be effectuated if reporters start differentiating between the different Muslim movements and streams in their messages and emphasise the existing diversity of opinions in the Muslim World. Improving the knowledge of reporters on this topic during their vocational training would greatly assist this process. In addition, such knowledge will be of use to the reporter in the critical evaluation of statements made by important persons concerning these groups, and consequently enable them to place question marks if necessary or look for a second opinion on the topic.

Next, reporters should pay considerable attention to preventing both selectivity in their news coverage and emphasising of exotic events in the Muslim world. In short, oversimplification and generalisation should be avoided as much as possible while at the same time the stress should be put on the socio-economic and religious diversity within as well as between the groups and countries concerned. The Muslim world consists of thousands of groups living in hundreds of countries that lie on five continents, which represent various religious streams and law schools and possess various levels of education as well. Generalised news on Islam and Muslims especially by negative messages, strengthens the presumed relationship between the reported deviant behaviour and the central characteristics of the group concerned. The consequence of selective information is strikingly phrased by Esposito (1992: 173). He argues that "A 'selective' presentation and analysis of Islam and events in the Muslim world by prominent scholars and political commentators too often inform articles and editorials on the Muslim world. This selective analysis fails to tell the whole story, to provide the full context for Muslim attitudes, events, and actions, or fails to account for the diversity of Muslim practice. While it sheds some light, it is a partial light that obscures or distorts the full picture. As a result, Islam and Islamic revivalism are easily reduced to stereotypes of Islam against the West, Islam's war with modernity, or Muslim rage, extremism, fanaticism, terrorism. The 'f' and 't' words, 'fundamentalism' and 'terrorism', have become linked in the minds of many. Selective and therefore biased analysis adds to our ignorance rather than our knowledge, narrows our perspective rather than broadening our understanding, reinforces the problem rather than opening the way to new solutions."

The model of increased Muslim-immigration to the West

Another model created to explain the existence of the so-called Islamic threat relates to the increased immigration to the West of people with an Islamic background. The presence of relatively large groups of Muslims residing in countries of the European Union is of fairly recent date. The majority of Muslim immigrants have settled in Europe only since the Second World War, either by spontaneous migration during the 1960s and 1970s, or as a result of recruitment by European governments. Recently, immigration has been restricted to family reunions and the search for political asylum. Generally speaking, the pattern of immigration of each of these countries reflects their colonial past. In the United Kingdom for instance, a relatively large number of immigrants come from the British Commonwealth, in the Netherlands they originate from Indonesia, Surinam, and the Netherlands Antilles. In France, primarily North Africans comprise the majority of the Islamic immigrants.

Whatever their origin it is an irrefutable fact that in the post-war periods, especially during the 1960s, a considerable increase took place in the migration to Western Europe of people with an Islamic background. Strikingly, public debates on this phenomenon were initially mainly centred on socio-economic factors. Since the beginning of the 1980s, however, both

the media and public conception have drawn an inextricable link between these debates and the culture and religion of those immigrants. It was only then, the debate about the importance of the norms and values of Muslims and about whether or not their culture is compatible with Western culture was initiated. As an example, the so-called 'headscarf-incident' can be mentioned. It played a significant role in the public debates in the Netherlands, Belgium, as well as in France. Other aspects of Islamic culture, like mixed swimming, female circumcision, polygamy, and the foundation of Islamic schools, also became focal issues in public debates.

The central topic raised by numerous, including scientific publications, was the question of to what extent the revival of 'political Islam' would influence the development of Islamic groups within the European Union. Neither politicians nor scientists were able to provide an accurate answer, as was clearly demonstrated by the incapability of traditional orientalistis to create a clear picture of Muslim normative views of living as a Muslim, a minority within a non-Islamic proximity. The opinions of medieval Islamic ulama were, and are without correction, cited as the authoritative source of present-day Islamic perspectives. The contemporary and modern ideas which exist on these subjects are either unknown or set aside. As a result of this perceived vacuum, an important task of enlightenment seemed to be reserved for the media, which nevertheless continued to serve the public with out-dated information about Islam, using old sources, in which the influence of the Islamic threat was still very powerful. (see Shadid and Van Koningsveld, 1994).

The same applies to German orientalistis who, until recently equally disregarded present-day developments in the Islamic world. In this respect, Hafez, et al. (2000: 275) state that, only a very short while ago, most specialists in this field did not consider contemporary developments in the Middle East to be subject matter eligible for scientific research. Scientists specialised in Oriental and Islamic Studies seldom showed any initiatives aimed at the improvement of relationships between East and West. Most of them followed, consciously or subconsciously, the Eurocentric, theoretical, and methodological paradigms.

The negative attitude of the West towards Islamic immigrants in Europe became manifest only during the 1980s, which may be explained roughly by two causes. First and foremost there is the *ethnicity argument*. Part of the steadily mounting opposition to Muslims may be explained by the refusal of certain groups to accept the fact that various West European countries became immigration-countries and that nowadays a considerable number of their population has a different physical appearances and cultural background, but at the same time identify themselves with these societies as well. Consequently, the autochthonous groups are daily confronted with a relentless multicultural reality, thus gradually losing their cultural frame of reference. In the Netherlands, for instance, the number of mosques and prayer rooms as well as the number of Islamic schools has been increasing noticeably in the past few decades. Pertinently, the majority of immigrant groups are

concentrated in the old neighbourhoods of the cities and a large part of their children visits the so-called 'black schools', in which the majority of pupils originates from migrant families. These facts lead to the further accentuation and visibility of their ethnic and cultural differences. It is essential to understand that this segregation is not the result of the wish of the Muslims to isolate themselves from the society at large, but should be attributed mainly to municipal policy combined with the departure of the autochthonous inhabitants from these neighbourhoods and schools. Because of they settle longer stay in West European countries, more and more of these immigrants get to know the languages of the countries concerned as well as becoming acquainted with their rights and duties, which has encouraged their social emancipation compared to their condition in the 1970s. This applies especially to the second and later generations, which are better equipped to stand up for their rights and are more capable of resisting the neglect which characterises their social reality. Statements by politicians, journalists, and scientists, demanding the assimilation of immigrants, while using the term 'Muslims' as an ethnic label, may be interpreted as attempts to maintain the mono-ethnic and mono-cultural character of these societies.

In this respect, Halliday (1995: 115) considers the use of the term 'Muslims' indicates an ethnic identity as a stereotypical projection which is used especially by those who intend to exclude people with an Islamic background, as well as by those who, within an Islamic community itself lay a false claim to authority over the group concerned and who consider their interpretation of the Islam to be the only right one.

Another cause of the deterioration of the Western attitude towards Muslims in Europe can be attributed to statistical misrepresentation. This is particularly the case in countries where both secularisation and the number of Muslims have shown a considerable increase in reporting on the number of Muslims in countries of the European Union. Scientists, the media, or official institutions base their estimations on the number of immigrants from the Islamic world in general. In contrast, the estimations of Christians are based on the number of church members, while a distinction is made in the various denominations within Christianity. Because of the fact that in practice, the number of church members is decreasing, while the number of immigrants from the Islamic world increases, the statistical misrepresentation of Muslims and non-Muslims becomes ever more disproportional. Such labelling has serious negative consequences for the inter-ethnic relations in the countries involved. Defining one group by religious characteristics (Muslims) and the other by non-religious qualities (Dutchmen, autochthonous), creates a false dichotomy: 'they' the believers and confessors as against 'us' the liberals and seculars. Furthermore, such a presentation intensifies the fear of the population about the alleged Islamisation of the country which is even spread by certain 'scientists' (see Brugman, 1998). Such assumptions are based on the status of Islam in ancient times and not on adequate knowledge of the current situation in the Muslim world.

Also in this field, much needs to be done in order to rectify the mutually negative images. In the search for factors which negatively influence the attitude of Muslims towards the West, non-religious sentiments in the Islamic world should also be taken into account. Hippler & Lueg (1995: 154) believe that the reservations some Muslims have in relation to the West are not necessarily based on religion. Experience in the past with colonial oppression combined with cultural arrogance and the exploitation of the natural resources of the Middle East by the West, as well as the use of double political and military standards in judging political events around the world, may account to an important degree for the sceptical and hostile attitude towards the West.

Rectifying the negative image of Muslims in the European Union may be achieved by means of an 'acceptance-policy' aimed at stimulating the acceptance of these groups by society. This will require more than just providing information about the mutual cultures and the stressing the acquisition of the cognitive skills necessary to associate with them. Acceptance is a process that needs to be internalised by both parties in order to make the essential mental turn: on the part of the Muslims in Europe implying the acceptance of the respective countries as their second homeland and on the part of the autochthons, the readiness to accept these groups as fellow-citizens. At the psychological level, being accepted in Europe would mean to immigrants, among other things, 'feeling at home'. This long-term goal will only be realised if governments apply a multidimensional policy directed towards Muslims as well as towards society at large. Any acceptance-policy for that matter should focus implicitly on increasing their opportunities to participate in society in general and on intensifying their loyalty towards the society concerned. A comparable policy should be formulated for European societies, aiming at the creation of a social climate in which Muslims can in fact be accepted as fellow-citizens with all thereto-inherent rights and duties. This requires a specific policy designed to convince the autochthonous population that a dark fellow citizen, a Muslim, can also be a loyal European citizen. This realisation has not yet fully sunk into the consciousness of society. In everyday practice it appears that the autochthonous citizens of Europe are focused mainly on the preservation of a mono-cultural society based on the Christian tradition. They are obviously not willing to treat 'different' cultural expressions of, for instance, Muslims in the same way as those of autochthonous groups. The last mentioned groups contain people who reject, on religious grounds, preventive vaccinations, the use of contraception, and equal treatment of homosexuals. Deviant though it may be, such behaviour does not lead to vehement discussions in the societies concerned.

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