Imaging The Arab Other

How Arabs an Non-Arabs View Each Other

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Marlene Nasr, author of a well-known book about the *image* of Arabs and Muslims in French school textbooks, here describes ... For *Sigurd Skirbekk*, there is rather an exchange of two types of fear: with its modernity, the West creates fear in a ...

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The Image of Others - False and Real Fears in Arab-European Relations.

"We" and "they"

Man is a social being. We all need interaction with other people, we all need communities and we need belongingness to a culture of collective identities.

This social dependency is quite obvious, but we are not only depending upon others in positive ways. We also have negative relations, and negative dependencies, to other people. We might have personal enemies, or people we believe to be enemies. The communities we belong to, might also have enemies on a collective level. A strong and inclusive belongingness - a "we" - presuppose in some way a limitation in relation to a "not-we", a "they".

Our division of other people between those belonging to a "we" and those belonging to "them" may be as old as humanity. What has changed during history is perhaps first of all the limits of the "we", or rather of the different circles for including a "we", and the way in which we are suspicious or hostile against those regarded as "they".

During most of human history the limits between "we" and "they" has generally run parallel to the division between those we knew and those we did not knew - by direct contact, by reputation or by common symbols.

In addition to the community based upon blood and land, family and own territory, we have had a distinction between trust and mistrust based upon religion, culture, codes and customs. The reasons for this distinctions are seldom only mythological. We can usually find examples in real historical events and in concrete references to justify our judgements.

However, we should not be satisfied with examples and certain historical interpretations as a final justification. What we perceive as experienced history is always interpreted history, and interpretations can usually be made different. Concrete examples in favor of an interpretation can usually be contradicted by other examples pointing in another direction.

This leads logically to the conclusion that common attitudes very often have the character of prejudice. A prejudice, making one see mainly negative traits among people categorized as "them", and positive characteristics among people categorized as "we", may have several causes, both for being invented and for being preserved. Psychologically a prejudice of this kind might serve the function of creating a simple moral order in a complicated world, the prejudice might strengthen a need for feeling superior in relation to other people, and it may also function to strengthen the cohesive bonds within one´s own community.

Most, if not all, people are etnocentric in their perception of others. The collective culture of codes and categories to which we belong may dispose for certain cognitive categories of recognizing the world around us, and these categories may appear natural or as universally valid, with all the moral authority that can give. Specially in traditional societies most people will use measures of judgement developed in their own society even when they judge other people and other societies. For this reason most people will feel best about their own kind.

In the following paper I intend to say something about cultural conflicts which are to be expected as normal when people from different cultures come in contact. I will discuss whether this should be seen as the grave problem for Arab and European civilization; and if not, whether there are other fears related to our cultures which their may be greater reason to worry about.

The Supposed Danger of European and Arab "Nationalism"

When social scientists talk about etnocentrism and prejudice, they/we very often relate this "nationalism", which is then supposed to be the big danger for peaceful relations among people. Analytically speaking this is not at all an obvious connection; even if we can find a specific historic reason for this associations.

The division between "we" and "they", and the prejudice which might follow, can just as well be related to identifications with units of "we-ness" on a family level, on a local level, or on a regional or supra-national level as to units on a national level. We develop our identity, or identities, i relation to several circles for inclusiveness, and it is not at all obvious that an identity related to a national collectivity should be more peace-disturbing than other forms of identities. - If someone will use World War II as an example to illustrate the danger of nationalism, others could point to the 19th century, or the decades between 1814 and 1914, as an example of a combination at the same time of the most nationalistic century in Europe, and internally also the most peaceful.

The interpretation of Hitler´s imperialism as being "nationalistic", is by the way very dubious. His policy should not be used as an example of nationalistic policy, not in the 1940´s anyhow - not if we interpret nationalism as a program for combining state and cultural national identity. As for instance the British historian Anthony D. Smith has pointed out, Hitler´s war was not nationalistic on behalf of other people´s nationalism, he was rather an anti-nationalistic imperialist. But from dominant post war interpretations of Word War II, fascism and nazism has been explained as nationalistic, even if this holds more true for the nazi ideology than for nazi policy. The connection of fascism with nationalism and nationalism with dangerous prejudice has probably had its foremost intellectual spokesmen in Adorno, Levinson, Frenkl-Brunstein and Sanford´s book "The Authoritarian Personality" from 1949/1950.

In our days I think the mass media give a distorted picture of the dangers of tomorrow when they continue to interpret every instance of conflict and violence between people of different ethnic stock as being a symptom of dangerous "nationalism". The terms is misused. For instance, example of some German actions against foreigners should rather be interpreted as a form of local protest, or "tribalism" as Zigmund Baumann has called it, may be also as expression of frustration over unexpected unemployment and as a protest against more competitors on the labour market rather than as ideologically transmitted ideologies of fascistic nationalism. Incidents of violent unrest and anti-liberal

actions in Arab countries, in Western newspapers often interpreted as examples of a dangerous "Arab nationalism", could also be given many other interpretations.

There are certainly forms of "nationalism" which might become dangerous. But there are also reasons to say that a lack of loyalty to national culture can be dangerous. In Europe we have for some decade been witnessing a collective decay of national pride. What has come in its place has not been an altruistic and universalistic individual, but rather a narrow minded selfishness, organizational identities and materialistic value-orientation. I can understand those people from the Near and Far East who regard this as a sign of cultural decadence.

Even in the North Africa we can find examples of militarism and nationalism going together. But I would not use these observations as a justification for regarding "Arab Nationalism" to be something Europeans should be particularly afraid of. Neither will I see movements for an Arab Nationalism on a political basis, Islamic fundamentalism on a religious basis and plans for a Maghreb union on an economic basis as being examples of one and the same thing.

In short, I think many of those who speak about the danger of nationalism in Europe and in the Arab world are generally promoting a false fear.

Some culturally related challenges which deserve a concern

But this is not to say that there are not grave challenges related to as well European and to Arab cultures, and to the images these cultures may dispose for.

If we should judge the adequacy or inadequacy of a culture, we need some sort of intellectual platform. Otherwise the judgements may become too private. It is certainly not sufficient just to use particular etnocentric measures to judge others - that is what this conference is about. Neither can we just proclaim some dominant values in the richest countries as expressions of modernity, and use these as a universal measure.

Modernity may however, have a deeper meaning. The philosophy of the so called Age of Enlightenment presupposed that rationality was universally common and accessible to all men. That meant it would be possible, by education and the right use of reason, to arrive at one universal set of opinions about an objective reality. From this rational and universally objective position it should be possible to analyse and unmask all ideologies based upon particular interests and perspectives. The conviction of representing objective reason made it lenient for many people to disregard both religion and metaphysics, as well as all kinds of moral with a particular psychological and social background. They relied upon objective science and rational man, plus some conventions about individual human dignity. - In this respect the program for modernity was to develop rational theories that could replace tradition.

Universal rationalism has led to some forms of arrogance. This may be one of the reasons for the popularity of cultural relativism, particularly among social anthropologists. Each culture should be understood on its own terms; no culture is superior to any other. This program might sound democratic, but in its consequences is is rather absurd. Not all cultures do have the same potentiality for responding adequately to different challenges.

The best trans-cultural measures for judging different cultures are probably scientific tools for analyzing consequences, or relations between structural characters of cultures and the kind of orientation and behaviour they are disposing for. If we, with some relation to Parsonean sociology, state that every sustaining society is depending upon a culture structured for solving the tasks of production and reproduction, integration and government, we could at least say something about what kind of cultural patterns that are not functional, even if we cannot point to one single culture and say that is the only functional one. This leads to functional analysis as a measure for judging cultures, different from both an etnocentric and a supposed rational universalistic perspective and from cultural relativism.

On this background we could say a great deal about inadequacies in most contemporary cultures. If we talk about a present European culture in general terms - for instance as cognitive, ethical and emotional patterns used for common references in media and politics - we could certainly say that European culture in many ways appeal dysfunctional. In spite of our great productive capacities, and also our policy for social welfare, we have hardly succeeded in creating lasting patterns for a meaningful integration of society. The dysfunctionality of the integrative aspect of Western Culture should, however, not so much be related to traditional christian culture, nor to the rationalistic culture of the west, but rather to a third and newer cultural pattern of the West, the media transformed patterns of entertainment culture.

Contemporary Europe has neither managed to create and uphold family patterns that could lead to a stability necessary for an adequate reproduction. Most European countries have today a reproduction rate below zero-growth; for the EC area as a whole we can measure 1,6 children per women in average. From a strict functional point of view, and functionality should be related to surviving capacities, this is quite obviously not functional.

If Europe have its strength in the area of technical productivity and political systems for distribution, and its weakness on the moral integrative and reproductive area, the Arab world may look quite different as seen from the same measures of functional analysis.

Among educated people in Europe there has been some concerned about what could be called non-European varieties of modernity: Several Europeans will have asked: Can this in the long run function? Are we facing culture with the necessary requirements for a modernization process? In this respect modernity is meant to be more than just big cars and big houses.

A modern occupational structure requires for instance both an adequate education and a system for differentiation. It requires allocation to jobs according to certain qualifications - the principle of the right man in the right place. This requirement is not easily solved by a traditional social hierarchy, where people were appointed to their social positions according to friendship and ascribed status, such as family background. The feudal social system has to be replaced by a more open system of education and appointment according to formal achievements.

A modern political system has to take many more considerations into account than traditional regimes. Therefore there must be formal systems for the changing of leaders, and for this tasks some sort of democratic choice and alternatives seems functional. A functioning democracy needs people with education and a certain amount of political pluralism. Open discussions are necessary for intellectual analysis and selection of the best alternatives. This, in turn, requires a tradition for scientifically based intellectual debate, where some arguments can be said to be the most valid, regardless of popularity among leaders or majority. The democratic choice comes important when we are facing alternatives that cannot be decided by experts alone.

A modern, dynamic and differentiated, economy depends on political structures with some functional requirements. A modern political system depends in turn upon a modern cultural system. Differentiation makes it difficult to preserve the internal cohesion based upon equality. An adequate culture has to assure both differentiation and integration on another level for cohesion than sheer equality. Such a culture cannot only be institutionaly based, it must also be part of the mental habitus of individual participating actors. For this reason several sociologists have suggested that a culture, and a religion, supporting the development of individuals with a strong consciousness and moral self-discipline will be the most functional. Moral consciousness of the kind here discussed may depend upon some sort of individualistic consciousness, which is also a cultural product.

The differences in notions of individuality may also be a basis for conflict when people from different civilizations meet. Morality may take different forms in an individualistic and a more collectivistic culture, but this does not necessarily mean that some cultures have "less morality" than others. All functional societies have norms for limiting anti-social and destructive behaviour, but the system of sanctions may vary. In some parts of the world negative sanctions will be based upon a social threat of loosing status and social belongingness, the antisocial deviant has no honor. In other parts of the world, particularly in Northern America and Europe, the sanctions has been strongly internalized as bad consciousness, the destructive deviant has no self respect. Both kinds of moral, both kinds of culture may function. But if we mix them, for instance if young men who are accustomed to be guided by codes of social control, come to countries where this form of sanctions are very weak, and he (aggressive deviants are usually men) has not internalized the bad-conscious morale of the new country, we can expect to see many forms of deviance. A deviance that by some people may be interpreted in racial terms.

Individual incidences of prejudice will usually diminish as people get better knowledge of each others. But the differences in cultural structure will not so easily be changed, and this is fields that should concern not least social scientist.

Ecology and Demography

The most dangerous challenges ahead of us is probably not much related to confrontations of cultures, but rather to the confrontation of man and nature. Ecology is the challenge of tomorrow which no known contemporary culture should be judged as adequate to meet.

The Western world is strong when it is judged according to measures of production, perhaps too strong for a lasting adjustment to limited natural resources and ecological conditions.

If the West is characterized by high rates production and low rates of reproduction, the rates for the Arab world, and many other regions in the so called third world, may be characterized by an opposite situation. Here a varied infrastructure for modern production may be partly missing, at least if we put aside the temporary blooming oil-industry. The rates for fertility is, on the other side, quite high, specially in areas with endogame marriage patterns.

If an increase or a decrease in population could be seen just as a matter of internal choice for the different nations, I would not have mentioned this. We could then have said that different populations on this earth have inherited different regions of land as their land, and it would have been a matter of national culture whether one chose to inhabit many people and relatively little consumption per individual, or one chose to have fewer people and relatively high consumption rates per individual, as long as the total sum of consumption did not surpass the limits of natural resources and the conditions for ecological renewal.

However, neither the production rates in the West not the reproductive rates in the East seems to be adjusted to these kind of ecological limits. Neither do I believe that traditional Arab culture nor commercial Western culture have the qualities necessary for being regarded as prototypes of long lasting modern culture. The rational philosophy of what has been regarded as modernity, has so far been one-sidedly anthropocentric rather than egocentric. It is no solution to the ecological challenge to say that the West should produce more to fulfill all needs of all people around the world, or to say that the East should export their children to the West when the recourses are scarce at home.

Demographers have estimated that some North African nations might double their population in 20 to 25 years of time. If so, this is certainly more than what these nations can naturally absorb with their own resources, specially if they should also build a foundation of a wealthier future for its habitants. Historical demographers have figured

out that after having passed its first billion individuals in the 1790´s the human species on this earth doubled its number in the 1930´s. A new doubling was passed in the 1970´s when four billion was passed. Still another two billions is expected to come before the end of this century. And now the ecologists say that we are approaching an ecological limit. This planet cannot take another doubling, specially not if the human beings also should enjoy a living standard adequate for social security and thereby for a trust in the adequacy in small families.

The prospects for an unbalanced ecological development is what I will call the rational reasons for a fear for the future, and this fear also concerns Arab-European relations. There are many Europeans who have nothing against individual Arabs, but who are reluctant to a possible immigration wave in millions, even in a hundred million size. This would completely change the character of the European civilization, and even an sacrifice of own civilization would not lead to more than a postponement of the challenge for reaching a balance of human consumption (ie. average individual consumption times number of individuals) in different parts of the world to the ecological limits in these regions. We do not solve the ecological challenge by calling all European fear for mass immigration of people from other civilizations for prejudice or racism.

I do not say that the task of limiting the population growth is only a responsibility for people in the Arab world or more generally in the third world.The industrialized countries have a great responsibility for the debts, economic dependencies and for the political incapacities in many part of the underdeveloped world. I neither say that the task of regulating the production and consumption pattern of the developed countries, is solely a responsibility for people of the West. The ecological adjustment of the human specie is actually a task for all of us. The fear that this task should not be solved in due time, should also be a reality for all of us.

During the last two hundred years this program might partly have proved correct as a possibility for progress. The political and cultural leadership in modern societies have really overcome many forms of previous prejudice. Ordinary people of our age can travel relatively safe to more places than before, and in different manners make positive contact with formerly unknown people. On the other hand do we all know that this development is not in itself a guarantee for the develop-ment of peaceful relations between men, societies and civilizations.

There are obviously many reasons fo conflicts between people and nations. Some may be caused by material conditions, as conflicting interests with regard to resources and to the distribution of goods. Others are more based upon immaterial or cultural contradictions. As I understand it, this conference should primarily concentrate on the latter. We should here concentrate on what conditions connected to the modern technological world that are creating conflicts and prejudice among people.

It is certainly too simple to say that prejudice is primarily based upon ignorance. Ignorance, or no knowledge at all, was more typical for the relations between traditional societies, societies where knowledge and information was based upon personal

experience and personal contacts. Under these conditions, ignorance could, however, just as well lead to indifference as to active hostility.

Under modern conditions, formed by modern mass media, educated people can seldom be regarded as ignorant. Modern people think they know something about nearly everything. But typical for this knowledge is that it is not based upon personal experience, it is rather based upon media information and media interpretation. That means we cannot personally control everything that is presented for us, except for the information interfering with our own frame of experience. We have to accept the selection of information made by the media and by the channels of mass information. We have to base our world views upon a lot of "black boxes", whose content is known only by experts.

The mediation of information and interpretation in TV, radio, newspapers and magazines is in this respect the new element in modern societies. The radio and the TV is not only an extension of the range of our ears and eyes. The mass media has a power of its own. It is not only a mediator of everything going on, nor is it simply an instrument for political governments or capital interests.

Media editors and media owners do not want to lie, the process of selection cannot be understood on that level. The owners and the editors want, first of all, to survive in a world of competition. They want to reach great audiences. They therefore want to appeal to something that appear understandable, familiar or popular for large groups of potential listeners, readers, watchers. This apparently un-political motives can, however, in practical life have several political consequences. A selling of the popular, the sensational, the simple and the familiar may lead to a selling of prejudice.

What we call "news" is a certain selection of daily events. What is selected as "news", is often new events that can be interpreted according to old frames of interpretations. "News" are confirmation of the old. Seen in this perspective the understanding of the power of the media require an understanding of the common culture of the people and of the activated ideologies of the period of concern.

Different cultures - different perceptions

A culture is a collective system of symbols, inherited over generations. Various cultures are different, but not totally different. A local culture is a variant of a national culture, which in turn is a variant of greater cultural circles, on the level of a civilizations. Even different civilizations, like European and Arabic, have many characteristics in common.

These differences have their roots in cultural history. Europe has been a civilization trying to combine the heritage from ancient Palestine, Greece and Rome, the heritage of Christianity, analytical philosophy and supranational administration. The Arabic civilization has its spiritual basis in Islam, and is perhaps spritually more unified than its

European counterpart. The differences between civilizations have also linguistic roots; and by that I do not only mean that the North African arab world have more words for "sand" than we have, while we who come from Northern Europe have many more words for "snow". The difference goes to the structure of the language, the ways of categorizing the natural as well as the social world, and to the mental dispositions which easily follows the structure of the language.

In addition to the differences which are more or less given by history, or by our way of understanding history, we can find active attempts to interpret representatives of other civilizations in ways that are not determined by a certain cultural tradition. The media interpretation of the Gulf War in 1991, for instance, cannot be completely understood as a result of cultural determinism. Here we have to look after alternative frames of interpretations, and to more contemporary reasons for why one type of interpretations became predominant.

In some Arabic countries this war was to a large extent seen as a new conflict between "The Occident" and "The Orient", even if many Arabic countries joined the anti-Iraqian alliance. Even in Europe this war was sometimes seen as a conflict between certain rulers in the West and rulers in the Middle East. But the conflict was not generally interpreted as a new variation of the century old conflict between Islam and Christianity. It was then rather seen as a conflict between some UN principles of justice and democracy on the one side and a feudal ruler on the other side. Some newspapers saw the war as a conflict between representatives for universalistic ethical principles and representatives for a particularistic principles of prime concern for the wealth of ones own state. Other saw it as a conflict over oil control or as a conflict over the principles for national balance in the Middle East.

It is typical for contemporary Western culture that even a conflict where ones own country is participating, can be interpreted in different ways by different newspapers. Contemporary Europe is quite pluralistic. We can hardly talk about one Western perspective on the conflict, even if the different perspectives presented might all have some common denominator in Western ideas about modernity. And these ideas have not developed independently of a particular cultural history.

No culture is universal. Therefore no culture should claim absolute superiority over others. But this does not mean that all cultures are equal, or that all culturally dependent perspectives are equally correct or false, or equally functional. Even if it is difficult to find one position for the absolute adequate and functional culture, it is relatively easy to see that many cultures are inadequate and dysfunctional in relation to serious challenges.

Arab images of Europe

On the background of these rather general considerations of cultural conditions for our images of others, and of the possibilities for prejudiced and false perceptions, let me for a

moment turn to the central issue for this conference: The Arabic images of the West and the Western images of the Arabic World.

Those of you who are from the Arabic World have certainly better qualifications than I have for telling what the images of the Arabic world are, particularly in connection to the Gulf War confrontation. But, for the sake of comparisons, I will nevertheless present some guesses about what I think is Arabic Images, even if I am well aware that these images differ tremendously from country to country and between educated and less educated groups.

From reading, watching and talking to people I have got the impression that this war is quite often interpreted within frames that are partly historically given and partly given by other contemporary Arab attitudes toward the West. For this reason I think it is possible with some generalizations. First of all my impression is that the Arabic image of Europe is quite divided. Particularly among young people, who have watched much television, Europe might be seen as a very attractive place. The European countries might look rich, the social customs appear very free, the possibilities for individual achievements seem big.

This picture is somewhat parallel to the picture many Europeans for a long time have had of America, specially of America in the Californian/Hollywood area. After the riots in Los Angeles many people might have realized that the gloomy picture war primarily a picture, but I still thing it has its appeal as an ideal. And, in spite of all reports about conflicts between immigrants and natives in Europe, I still think the gloomy picture of Europe has its attractiveness among many young Arabs.

On the other hand, and this is were the division come in, I think many people in this part of the world, especially the more grown up, will regard Europe in negative terms, as materialistic, egoistic, partly hostile against foreigners and as quite decadent in cultural consumption and in family matters. At the same time I think that even elderly Arabs regard Europe as progressive in productive capacities and in technological and military capacity.

Furthermore I guess many Arabs feel some sort of ambiguous rivalry with the West. America and Europe is at the same time seen as a part of the world that has a leadership in development, something one has to keep up with to secure own dominance, and a part of the world that is potentially threatening the Arab civilization. By "threat" in this respect I think of a profound challenge to the traditional culture in the Arab region rather than a direct threat to political or economic power. A cultural threat does not only come from abroad, it may be caused by own difficulties in handling new impressions, and from an appeal among one´s own citizens, and thereby become a threat from within. It is much more difficult to defend oneself against this kind of challenges than to against concrete and external threats.

All this I think is themes in many Arabs images of the West. We can see many contemporary Arabic reactions, from the building of supra-impressive buildings and

buying of big cars to a dream of the Arab Nation and a return to islamic laws in several countries, as expressions of a somewhat confused Arabic self-image, swinging between a wish to be even more Western than the Europeans and a wish to be more Arab than one´s parents and to turn one´s back to the Western ideas of modernity.

If this is an approximate description of common Arab attitudes, we could start asking many questions. First, are the Arab images of the West correct? Are all Europeans so rich and so free as many young people in North Africa think? And, are common Europeans so materialistic and cold, or so calculating imperialistic, as some Arabs seem to believe? Furthermore, is the perceived European challenge really a challenge coming from the West or is it rather a challenge of Modernity?

I will not go further into this, I will just say that I think many common images of Western Man are false, at least not correct. But, even if many Arab images could be labeled as prejudiced - judgements based upon preconceived ideas about the Europe, they do not have to be completely wrong. Not all prejudices have to be completely wrong. For instance, even if the West have a high morale for productivity, we do not have the same high morale for the reproductive institutions of society, first of all for the institution of marriage and its functions. As a consequence, family disruption is quite high in Europe, with many social and economic consequences. With the consequences of too few children born per woman, the European population may run into problems with regard to replacement over generations. I will return to this problem later.

But first let me say something on the same level of generality about European images of the Arab world.

European images of the Arabic World

For Western Man the Arabic world has also had a double value, as both adventurous and as dangerous. This kind of double judgements we can find in historical documents and in contemporary expessions.

I shall not here try to comprehend all I have read about Europen views upon the lands around Sahara and its people. Nor shall I try to differentiate between the ideas about Arabs among Europeans from the far north, who until recemntly had hardly met an Arab in their whole life, and the images of the Europeans around the Mediterranean Ocean who have had more direct contact. I will just say that the traditional images very often reveal quite exaggerating ideas, whether they focus in admiration of attitudes of tribe cohesion and family loyalty or it is colored by fear of non-Christian worshipers or of aggressive warriors.

In more recent days the attitudes among relatively educated people in Europe has been more concerned about what could be called an Arabic variety of modernity: Does this represent an alternative to the Western pattern, or are we rather facing a hampered half-

way modernity? What I am referring to is what might appear as an unbalance between technological advancement, in some part of the Arabic world, and a cultural tradition that might appear as traditional and anti-modern. Sevela Europeans will then ask: Can this in the long run function?

The reason for why this question is being asked, must, as I have already mentioned, be understood on the background of the programs for modernity, developed during the European Age of the Enlightenment, assumed to be universally valid. But there is more to the question than just a reflection of a particular cultural history. There can also be given sociological reasons for why technological modernity will require, if not one particular culture, so at least a cultural adjustment within certain functional frames.

For instance, a modern occupational structure requires differentiation and it requires allocation to jobs according to certain qualifications - the principle of the right man in the right place. This requirement is not easily solved by a traditional social hierarchy, where people were appointed to their social positions according to friendship and ascribed status, such as family background. The feudal social system has to be replaced by a more open system of education and appointment according to formal achievements.

A modern political system has to take many more considerations into account than traditional regimes. Therefore there must be formal systems for the changing of leaders, and for this tasks some sort of democratic choice and alternatives seems functional. A functioning democracy needs people with education and a certain amount of political pluralism. Open discussions are necessary for intellectual analysis and selection of the best alternatives. This, in turn, requires a tradition for scientifically based intellectual debate, where some arguments can be said to be the most valid, regardless of popularity among leaders or majority. The democratic choice comes important whe we are facing alternatives that cannot be decided by expertice alone.

A modern, dynamic and differentiated, economy depends on political structures with some functional requirements. A modern political system depends in turn upon a modern cultural system. Differentiation makes it difficult to preserve the internal cohesion based upon equality. An adequate culture has to assure both differentiation and integration on another level for cohesion than sheer equality. Such a culture cannot only be institutionaly based, it must also be part of the mental habitus of individual participating actors. For this reason several sociologists have suggested that a culture, and a religion, supporting the development of individuals with a strong consciousness and moral self-discipline will be the most functional. Moral consciousness of the kind here discussed may depend upon some sort of individualistic consciousness, which is also a cultural product.

This is part of the intellectual background for the Western scepticism about the adequacy of many traditional non-Western cultures for dealing with the challenges of modernity, and this scepticism may also influence attitudes to the Arabic World: Modernity is a challenge that may be felt threatening, and a feeling of threat may lead to some sort of cultural entrenchment. From a Western point of view this is often how the recent progress

of Islamic fundamentalism is explained. Intellectual Westerners will therefore deny that the widespread scepticism about non-western cultures is a mere expression of etnocentric arrogance or the result of cultural imperialism.

Among ordinary people the scepticism against Arabic culture may not be so sophisticated. The man in the street can have observed a few cased of aggressive behavior of, say, young men from Morocco, and he might have drawn general conclusions about "them" on this basis. If he is unemployed, or if his daughter has been unproperly approached by foreigners, he might even consider to give his vote for a right wing party.

The various images between Arabic and European people may be part of a occidental-oriental cultural conflict. A social anthropologist will perhaps interpret this kind of conflicts as an example of a cultural confrontation. All functional societies have norms for limiting anti-social and destructive behaviour, but the system of sanctions may vary. In some parts of the world negative sanctions will be based upon a social threat of loosing status and social belongingness, the antisocial deviant has no honor. In other parts of the world, particularly in Northern America and Europe, the sanctions has been strongly internalized as bad consciousness, the destructive deviant has no self respect. Both kinds of moral, both kinds of culture may function. But if we mix them, for instance if young men who are accustomed to be guided by codes of social control, come to countries where this form of sanctions are very weak, and he (aggressive deviants are usually men) has not internalized the bad-conscious morale of the new country, we can expect to see many forms of deviance. A deviance that by some people may be interpreted in racial terms.

False and Real Fears

An overview over common accusations from Arabs against Europeans and from Europeans against Arabs could have been made much longer, and also more precise. But this is not the place to say all that could be said about the matter. I will, however, draw a few temporary generalizations about some common characteristics of mutual complains:

First of all I think that many of the more mysterious and antagonistic images of "them" are false, whether "they" are Arabs or Europeans. Ordinary people may be narrow-minded, in thoughts and in experience, but seldom directly evil. And not even the leaders are led by evil dreams and motives. Many of the images of the intentions of "them" can be labeled as prejudices, whether these images make us believe that people on the other side of the ocean want to take over our wealth or our land. Accusations of intentional evilness are usually wrong, from whatever part they come from.

Still, there are reasons for rational fear for forms of Euro-Arabian contact in the future. But these fears should be seen on a structural rather than on an intentional level. What I am thinking about is a kind of cultural threat from the West that Arab countries should be

careful about. I also think about a kind of demographic development in North Africa that Europe should be concerned about.

By the term "cultural threat from the West" I do not think about Christianity, which for centuries has been seen as the faith for unbelievers in several Arabic countries. Nor do I think about classical Western ideas about modernity, formed by rationalistic philosophers of the Enlightenment two hundred years ago. In some way we all have to change traditions to adopt to a modern and differentiated world, and the more rational we are able to behave, the better we will probably adjust to the world around us. What I am thinking about is rather a third cultural tradition which have spread from centers in the Western world. I am thinking about the kind of culture dominating mass media, the entertainment industry and a philosophy of self centered consumerism. Some call it "the commercial culture of the West", but it is actually based upon much more than commercialism, and it is not being limited to the West - take a trip to Japan!

This culture, in many ways quite different from the moral and rational philosophy of the Enlightenment, may give money to the sellers and enjoyment for the consumers, but it is hardly functional for modern differentiated societies in the long run. A warning is therefore appropriate, and I understand quite well those Arabs, and other Orientals, who regard the dominand culture in contemporary Europe and America as "decadent".

Some scholars har tried to classify this kind of culture as "modern", since it is typical for our time. But that is hardly an appropriate classification. Modernity means adjustment to a differentiated world, a culture charachterized by simple symbols for arousing psychological states of exitements cannot fullfil those functions. Nor should it be dismissed as "anomic" or normless. Sociologists can find many norms in the culture of entertainment, but the implicit norms are generally adjusted to a marked for selling and buying symbols of exitements - particularly comic, crime and sex - not to the various challenges in the real world around us.

It can be argued that the dominance of this kind of culture some Western countries are gradually adjusting themselves to non-functionality: The religious and ethical heritage of Western civilization are being transmitted as all a matter of individual taste and temperament. Matrimonial morality and family stability become weak; and as a consequence of these conditions women will not give birth to the number of children they in the first hand preferred. We get too few children to reproduce the former generation, and those born are inadequately motivated and trained to face the challenges of tomorrow.

The Western world is strong when it is judged according to measures of production, perhaps too strong for a lasting adjustment to natural resources and ecological conditions. The West is definitely not so strong when it comes to measures of reproduction, even if part of the low child birth rate can be seen as an adjustment to new ecological knowledge.

If the West is characterized by high rates production and low rates of reproduction, the rates for the Arab world, and many other regions in the so called third world, may be

characterized by an opposite situation. Here a varied infrastructure for modern production may be partly missing, at least if we put aside the temporary glooming oil-industry. The rates for fertility is, on the other side, quite high, much higher than what is needed for a replacement of the present size of the population.

If an increase or a decrease in population could be seen just as a matter of internal choice for the different nations, I would not have mentioned this. We could then have said that different populations on this earth have inherited different regions of land as their land, and it would have been a matter of national culture whether one chose to inhabit many people and relatively little consumption per individual, or one chose to have fewer people and relatively high consumption rates per individual, as long as the total sum of consumption did not surpass the limits of natural resources and the conditions for ecological renewal.

However, neither the production rates in the West not the reproductive rates in the East seems to be adjusted to these kind of ecological limits. Neither do I believe that traditional Arab culture nor commercial Western culture have the qualities necessary for being regarded as prototypes of long lasting modern culture. The rational philosophy of what has been regarded as modernity, has so far been one-sidedly anthropocentric rather than ecocentric. It is no solution to the ecological challenge to say that the West should produce more to fulfill all needs of all people around the world, or to say that the East should export their children to the West when the recourses are scarce at home.

Demographers have estimated that some North African nations might double their population in 20 to 25 years of time. If so, this is certainly more than what these nations can naturally absorb with their own resources, specially if they should also build a foundation of a wealthier future for its habitants. Historical demographers have figured out that after having passed its first billion individuals in the 1790´s the human species on this earth doubled its number in the 1930´s. A new doubling was passed in the 1970´s when four billion was passed. Still another two billions is expected to come before the end of this century. And now the ecologists say that we are approaching an ecological limit. This planet cannot take another doubling, specially not if the human beings also should enjoy a living standard adequate for social security and thereby for a trust in the adequacy in small families.

The prospects for an unbalanced ecological development is what I will call the rational reasons for a fear for the future, and this fear also concerns Arab-European relations. There are many Europeans who have nothing against individual Arabs, but who are reluctant to a possible immigration wave in millions, even in a hundred million size. This would completely change the character of the European civilization, and even an sacrifice of own civilization would not lead to more than a postponement of the challenge for reacing a balance of human consumption (ie. average individual consumption times number of individuals) in different parts of the world to the ecological limits in these regions. We do not solve the ecological challenge by calling all European fear for mass immigrations of people from other civilizations for prejudice or racism.

I do not say that the task of limiting the population growth is only a responsibility for people in the Arab world or more generally in the third world.The industrialized countries have a great responsibility for the debts, economic dependencies and for the political incapabilities in many part of the underdeveloped world. I neither say that the task of regulating the production and consumption pattern of the developed countries, is solely a responsibility for people of the West. The ecological adjustment of the human specie is actually a task for all of us. The fear that this task should not be solved in due time, should also be a reality for all of us.

A Resume in ca. 500 words

Professor Sigurd N. Skirbekk:

The Image of Others - False and Real Fears in Arab-European Relations.

The paper starts sociologically by stating that man is a social being with needs for social belongingness. We all divide other people into circles of "we" and "them". Some relations are friendly and inclusive, others are hostile. This habit might lead to ethnocentric prejudices. There can nevertheless be given functionalistic arguments for differentiated circles of ascribed inclusiveness.

The philosophy of the European Enlightenment represented a challenge to traditional culture and to many forms of ascribed social status. The program for modernity, formulated by philosophers of the Enlightenment, together with modern forms of mass information, has also represented a challenge to many forms of prejudice. However, this does not mean that the modern mass media are presenting unselected "news" in an objective way.

Different civilizations and various cultural tradition will make us see the world differently. Even in modern time can several Arab images of Europeans and European images of Arabs prove wrong. False images can be strengthened by modern mass media. The commercial culture of the West do not give a correct picture of ordinary life in Europe and in America.

Arabs might have false images of the West, and vise versa. But some suspicions and fears may still be real. A suspicion among many Arabs about the moral health of what might be presented as modern and popular "Western culture" can be well founded. On the other

hand can many Westerners have suspicion about the adequacy of cultural modernization in Arabian countries connected to Islamic traditions. Both sides can have reasopns to ask whether dominant forms of contemporary culture are adequately adjusted to the challenges of the modern world.

Most prevalent in this respect is the ecological challenges facing our generation and the generations to come. Do we develop a world where human consumption is balanced with the recourses on this earth? The productive power of the West and the reproductive pattern of the East is here seen as main challenges. Both over-production and over-reproduction may become threats to the limits of the ecological system. A cruzial value for measuring human threats to limited recourses is total consumption (ie. average individual consumption times number of individuals) in different parts of the world. Mass movements of people can therefore not be seen as a lasting solution to the ecological challenge. We do not solve the ecological challenge by calling all European fear for mass immigrations of people from other civilizations for prejudice or racism.

The task of limiting the population growth is not only a responsibility for people in the Arab world, or more generally for people in the third world. The industrialized countries have a great responsibility for the debts, economic dependencies and political incapabilities in many part of the underdeveloped world. Neither is the task of regulating the production and consumption pattern in the developed countries, solely a responsibility for people of the West. The ecological adjustment of the human species is a task for all of us.

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