

Research paper on common misperceptions, prejudices, and misunderstandings between...

[Parts of the World](#), [European Union](#)



Throughout history, notable wars and events have been recorded showing the animosity between the Muslims and the Western nations. On one end, both groups had aided in developing the other's history, may it be as a partner in trade, culture and development or a nemesis due to their conflicting belief and disagreements regarding how politics and social context are viewed by both parties. On the other end, however, both groups' diversity is actually beneficial as it allowed diversity and co-existence to flourish between the Muslims and the Westerners, allowing information and culture to be enmeshed to their communities, and as they interacted with each other. While the relationship of both groups is similar to that of cat and mouse throughout the early histories, this somewhat idle and sometimes antagonistic relationship had been tainted with further conflict and prejudice due to the influence of recent events such as 9/11 and the increasing conflict throughout the Middle East. The misconceptions on both Islam and the West clearly disable them from understanding each other's traditions and sentiments and prevent the onset of war.

History narrated that both the Muslims and the West had a somewhat docile relationship before the conflicts even arose in the later centuries. Historians note that the spread of Islam in the early history was somewhat similar to how Christianity and other Western religions grew throughout the Middle Ages and the Modern times. Islam is also the only one that was able to influence masses of followers throughout the world similar to Christianity. Historians had also noted that the Islamic-Western relations in the past is unique in its own way as it is nothing like any other relationship seen in other civilizations, a love-hate relationship. Both groups continued to compete

against the other for the sake of territory and influence as seen in the early centuries. Europe is the first Western nation that had competed with Islam in the 13th century, seeing it as a threat. However, the conceived threat could be attributed to the fact that the Europeans and the rest of the Western nations did not have a slight understanding or background as to how Islam was developed. As history progressed, both the West (under the banner of Christianity) and the Muslims (under the banner of Islam) competed to remove the other as it blocks followers from practicing their faith. Islam is seen as the greatest Christian problem as it attempts to provide its own solution regarding a person's character and differentiation. Many even got mad at Islam because they could not convert others into Christianity.

Christianity is seen by Islam as a fellow religion trying to provide its own interpretation of life. Muslims never actually boasted over their victories in converting people into Islam, which clearly shows there was no reason for both parties to argue. The resentment of the West in Islam continued to intensify throughout the years, fostering the age-old conflict between the two parties. According to Bernard Lewis in his 1990 analysis of both parties, Islam saw the West, especially the United States, as the archenemy and the incarnation of evil for all Muslims. Lewis cited that this view of Islam to the West is not very new as the West had continued to resent Islam due to its "despotic" nature. The West also continued to see Islam as the "world of war" to their goal on forming the "world of peace" for the entire globe.

Given the conflicting nature of both Islam and the West, one can question if both groups are incompatible with each other and has no means to agree on brokering a truce. Experts have explained that one reason why both Islam

and the West continue to meet in conflict because both groups follow two different beliefs that are incompatible with the other. Islam is based from a divine system of belief and values that would clash against the West's liberal ideology which supports secularism. Neo-Orientalists explained that since Islam bases its teachings and doctrines from a "divine inspired" system, it would clash immediately to secularism, which supports and sustains an individual's human rights. Another notable reason to why both the West and Islam fail to meet in a compromise and become compatible is the fact that the worldviews of each belief is different. The Westerners mostly advocate individualism that pushes for the improvement of one's personal situation, and promote the individual's rights over the development of their moral dispositions and responsibilities. In this end, experts have cited that this advocacy of the Westerners prevents them from understanding the supernatural nature of what the Muslims hold close to their faith. The inclination to advocate individualism is also the West's way to replace the Christian notion of heaven, and create their own version of a paradise that would remove injustice and allow people of all standing and race to practice their human rights.

In contrast to this Western outlook, the Muslims aim to create a world order that would mirror the Islamic law or the sharia that would bestow to people a moral code that can guide a person to his probable future and entering the heavenly afterlife. Islam also fosters the belief that its followers should put in favor the rights of God first and become subordinate to his will before wishing for a heavenly reward. This conflict on worldviews, as noted by many historians and experts in the issue of the Western and Islamic differences,

was not clearly explained and described by commentators as they tend to discuss the economic and political nature of both group's positions.

Considerably, the clash of values and the lack of information regarding the spiritual aspect of these beliefs and worldviews added more animosity to the rift between Islam and the West.

The increasing conflict and continuous misunderstanding between the Muslims and the West could be blamed mostly on how the media portrays either group. In one end, the media has greatly influenced the concept of the West-Islamic divide and added more animosity to the gradually growing flame between the two groups. Numerous media outfits and sometimes entertainment spiels tend to draw Islam as a religion that teaches war and conflict to its followers. Some media platforms even draw Islam as a religion that contradicts all forms of faith, tradition, and social norms that contradict the teachings of religions and standards seen in the West. Given this end, the Muslims try their own means to retaliate against this smear campaign through their own regional media networks and social networking sites. In the end of these Muslims, especially the extremists and the other sects of Islam, they showcase the West as the terrorists who would stop nothing to destroy the lifestyle of the Muslims and threaten their countries. The West is also depicted by Muslim Media as the villains. However, unlike the reach of Western media, the Muslim media could not smear the name of the West completely as they can only reach within their region. It is safe to say that thanks to media, Islam is a notorious religion for any person and mislead into a conflict against religions .

The media also tend to present fiction-inflicted facts regarding Islam, which

eventually paved the way to the “Islamic threats” against the West. Of course, since the Muslims were considered threats by the West, it added to the present prejudice and the resentment the West felt against the Muslims. However, considering the position of the Muslims regarding the matter, they have not done anything that could constitute as a declaration of war against the West as there isn’t any justifiable basis for proclaiming such act. The media also portrays the Islamic threat as a means to overpower the West to create a “unified Islamic World”, a world that follows the teachings of Allah and the traditions the Prophet Mohammad taught to his followers. Some experts believe that this “unified Islamic world” concept is the media’s way to provoke either group to re-engage in conflict. However, even if both groups would go to war because of this “Islamic world”, the probability of founding such is difficult as the Muslims would need to a means to sustain a war against the West and build the nation. At the other end, the West would have to utilize their advantage to the Muslims and perform stronger anti-Islamists stances to ensure no Muslims would retaliate. One example of anti-Islamist stances is the anti-immigrant outlook of some Westerners to Muslims, condemning several Islamic traditions such as “veiling” of women to preserve their purity and the creation of Muslims institutions in Western communities.

It can also be attributed to the media’s impact to cause conflict between Islam and the West that it only presents one side of the story, mostly the Western point of view. Since both groups differ in tradition, it builds a window of opportunity to cause conflict. Experts have noted that, due to the media’s insistence to broadcast one side, it fosters discord and additional

hostility and prejudice to the other party. The media also tends to create confusion especially in interpreting religious sentiments and traditions. Sometimes, it becomes misleading that eventually leads to misconceptions as to how these traditions and sentiments have been based upon by the leaders. With all these means on how media creates confusion and misunderstanding to come forth, the divide between Islam and the West still remains deep. Media's influence to this divide can be seen right after the notorious 9/11 attacks in the United States as the hijackers were identified members of the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda, based in the Middle East. The media then stressed and generalized that Muslims were " Terrorists" and said that Islam was a religion fit for the fundamentalists and radicals. As a result of this imaging, " Islamophobia" became prominent in the West and Anti-Western sentiments were fostering in the Islamic communities .

As the misconceptions, prejudices and misunderstandings between Muslims and the West continue to worsen, it is likely that the rift between the two groups would continue and present troubles in creating peace between the parties. Although there are a few who would try to bridge this differences, the already embedded misconceptions and prejudice over Islam or the West is already created a reservation in the minds of these groups. It is crucial that the misnomer on both Islam and the West is settled and clarified. This will open the eyes of both groups as to their similarities and fix the divide that separates them from each other. Technically speaking, Islam and the Western ideals are the same in essence, from its history up to its teachings. Clearing out these common misconceptions, prejudices, and misunderstandings would enable both the West and the Muslims to settle a

century or more problem of fostering understanding and peaceful co-existence of both groups with each other.

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