CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE CLASH OR COMPLEMENTARITY OF CULTURES?
RESEARCH POLITICAL PROBLEM USING THE EXAMPLE OF POLAND AND THE ARAB COUNTRIES

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Abstract

“The clash of cultures” – this slogan, brought to life in the late 20th century by S. Huntington, has become today's reality. It revealed to the world the open borders of realism focused on the phenomenon of multiculturalism, the diffusion of cultures and the omnipresent clash of modernity and tradition. The massive expansion of foreign cultures into the European continent seems to confirm this theory; however, the question must be asked of whether this expansion is symptomatic of the clash and confrontation of cultures, or whether a meeting of different cultures in one cultural environment – usually unfamiliar to one of them – must entail only negative consequences. Are cultural modifications by any chance a blessing, a specific supplement to the population deficit and the need inscribed in the natural civilization cycles? Though bold in relation to contemporary realities, however well-founded the thesis that the expansion of foreign cultures, including Muslims and Arabs moving to Europe, seems to be, it has become a kind of alternative that is achievable only
under the condition of mutual acceptance, tolerance, respect, understanding and knowledge of cultural peculiarities of “both worlds”. This article, based on empirical research conducted over the course of over 10 years within the student community at Wroclaw and Arab universities, is dedicated to the understanding of the differences between the Polish and Arabic cultures and presenting the similarities of the two.

Keywords: clash of cultures, conflict of cultures, cultural values, stereotypes, prejudices, cultural competence

**Introduction**

When Samuel Huntington wrote his publication “The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order”, pioneering at that time, a wide public debate was launched in the scientific world regarding whether the world after 1990 would be characterized by constant conflict and the confrontation between East and West (Huntington, 2006). In Huntington’s opinion, uncontrolled migration from the poorer regions of the world into territories inhabited for centuries by representatives of western civilization was to become one of the major problems of the contemporary world. The main opponents of this vision of the clash of civilizations (Edward Said, Robert Kaplan and Thomas Friedman) questioned the theory that conflicts with unforeseen consequences and scale would break out on the cultural borderlines. They did not realize, however, the scale of the problem or the effects of changing the social order in the world. Currently, facing the increasing expansion of other civilizations on the European continent (and in other places), which largely entails negative effects resulting from fairly drastic cultural differences, Huntington’s approach can be evaluated as true.

As well as S. Huntington’s theory of the clash of civilizations, it is worthwhile reflecting on the title of the article, which appears to contain two opposing areas of inquiry. On the one hand, we deal with the clash of cultures – a negative phenomenon resulting from cultural differences and a lack of willingness to culturally assimilate, whilst on the other hand, we enter into the ground of a serious dilemma of a demographic and ethnic nature. The latter issue is also important because the expansion of foreign civilizations may become a breeding ground for cultural conflicts, but at

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1 The most conflicting borderlines between civilizations at the micro level are those that separate the world of Islam from its Orthodox, Hindu, African and Christian (western) neighbours. At the macro level, however, the main division is between the West and the rest, and the most violent conflicts will erupt between Muslim and Asian countries on one side and the West on the other.
the same time provide a kind of development opportunity for “dying western civilization” (Bodziany, 2010). Taking into account the persistent tendency of the decline in the European population, the expansion of foreign civilizations is of a complementary nature – it is a kind of measure to fulfill the “population deficit” between the actual quantitative indicators of the population and the required indicator of fertility in the countries of the so-called “old democracy”. Evaluated in this perspective, it seems to be a kind of blessing for Europe. However, the question then arises of the chances of foreigners' full participation in all forms of social life in host states and the example that is interesting to us, i.e. the cultural (and non-cultural) integration of representatives of the Arab world (Bezat, 2004) and Islam (Huntington, 2006) with western civilization.

It seems, however, that in the face of ailing migration policy of European countries and huge negligence in the development of cultural competence among Europeans as well as immigrant nations, the integration of cultural representatives of the two culturally extreme civilizations is currently impossible (Bodziany & Gwiazda – Rzepecka, 2014). Therefore, the educational factor is of key importance and it ought to be regarded as one of the most significant aspects in shaping relations between the West and the Arab world, as it allows the weakening of national stereotypes, the overcoming of cultural prejudices and the holding back at the source of negative phenomena arising from intolerance, national chauvinism, xenophobia, ethnocentrism and other attitudes of destructive force.

Referring to anthropological integration factors, one inevitably enters the ground of cultural competence, which also has a different value, as it allows us to answer the fundamental question which is the article’s keynote: *What differs and what connects the two worlds? How can one get to know and understand their mentalities, customs, and emotions?* A prerequisite for understanding differences is knowledge about the culture of the “other” nation and its components, as well as the application of the principles of tolerance and cultural relativism in mutual contact. This, in turn, is based on the conviction that assessment of the “other” culture should be anchored in the reality of the evaluated culture and carried out in accordance with the applicable standards and criteria. But there is no justification for the advantage of “endo-knowledge”. Is not this attitude crypto-subjective? Here is a question that, in the current circumstances, cannot be answered.
Snow and Sand – the cultural diversity metaphor

An analysis of the cultural characteristics of both “worlds” also entails the need to clarify a number of issues concerning the identification of Arab and Islamic countries, namely that they cannot be equated, since not all Islamic countries are Arab states. The Arab states were formed much earlier, in a variety of cultural realities and by many religions. There are 22 of them, and they represent only 15-20% of all Islamic countries. While speaking about cultural differentiations, one must bear in mind not only the religious factor, but many other cultural components that diversify the peoples and communities of this part of the world. Thus, we inevitably enter the ground of national identity, value systems, institutions and laws, which seem to be the most significant in the analysis of cultural diversity (Hofstede, 2008).

The general background of cultural differences reflects the diversity of typologies of culture. One of these is the typology of Edward Hall, dividing them into high and low contexts, where the Arabic culture is classified as a highly contextual one based on tradition, mutual relations and expression (Hall, 1984). Another typology, that of four dimensions by G. Hofstede, classifies it as a culture of male superiority, with a high level of power distance, moderate collectivism and a moderate degree of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2008). This is only a part of the general cultural differences between the Arab world and the West, a part which ignores cultural peculiarities of specific nations. The conventional division into eastern and western cultures and the indiscriminate placement of them between two typological extremes seems to be an oversimplification. It is justified, for example, by the cultural diversity of the Arab world as well as the Polish cultural diversity among the cultures of European nations. The eastern cultural traits of the Poles make them endemic even among other Slavic nations. Therefore, in spite of the "closeness" of its cultural characteristics with the peoples of Europe, Polish culture should be considered in relation to national characteristics, not only to generalized features of the European culture, which do not reflect the traditions of the peoples or their customs and beliefs, and also ignore the diversity in the axionormative order (system of norms and values) of the nation.

It is worth considering how much these general characteristics of the Arabic culture differ from those represented by the Poles. As it turns out, we have a lot in common, despite being located in other cultural realities (traditions). The Poles largely belong to high-context cultures, are collective, avoid uncertainty to a moderate degree and express a moderate power distance. What unites us is the attachment to traditions, which can
be reflected by a persistent trend of male superiority over women. Religion makes us different in a significant way, and seems to constitute an important but largely subjective contribution to fear, intolerance and negative attitudes. The attachment to faith, however, is a common feature.

The cultural diversity of both “worlds” is shown in a figurative way by the metaphor of confronting “hot sand” with “cold snow”, which seems to be a natural opposition. This directs our attention to the problem of (im)possible coexistence. We might attempt to extend the metaphor of the process of connecting sand with water (melted snow). Therefore, let it be a symbol of the cultural assimilation process – a stage in the integration of the two cultures. One could say that this combination will create “cultural mud” that will bring about nothing good for any of the parties involved. Is it really true that, as Pascal Bruckner wrote, European moral categories fade in the sun and sand of the desert? Or, might the opposite happen, as a result of the diffusion of cultures, namely the formation of “the third culture” (Casmir, 1996) as a kind of a mix of both cultures’ characteristics? This leads us briefly to the issues concerning the question are these two natural phenomena really so different that they cannot form a relatively consistent entirety together? We do not yet know; nevertheless, it is real, since in such a way the nucleus of civilization arose. At this point, it is worth recalling the words of Pierre Chaunu: in both cultures there are existing so many values checked by history that in the age of the communication revolution these two worlds can enrich one another (Chaunu, 1989). Jerzy Nikitorowicz might have been right when he said the fear of the Arab world pushes aside understanding and agreement, more and more opinions have been heard that this cannot be understood in European terms (Nikitorowicz, 2011). Here is the dilemma of modernity focused on two extreme perspectives, the first of which is based on respect and tolerance, mutual coexistence and multiculturalism, and the other on the preservation of national identity and the traditions and values inscribed in the syntagma of national cultures.

**A few words about Muslims in Europe**

If one wants to talk about the Arab community living on our continent, including in Poland, a broader spectrum of considerations, namely of the problem of Muslims, cannot be avoided. These considerations are based on an overall analysis of the European population and demographic spread out. Apart from the issue of the so-called *old Muslims*, who have been inhabiting European countries for centuries, those who came to Europe as part of the new wave of migration deserve attention. In the 1990s, the
population of Muslims in Western Europe was estimated at approximately seven million. By the year 2000, their number had increased to 13 million (Angendent, 2007). Currently there are about 21 million Muslims living in Europe. Including Muslims in Russia, where another approximately 16 million of them live, this constitutes only 2% of the entire Muslim population in the world (Mapping the global Muslim population, 2009). 7.5 million European Muslims live in the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (mainly in Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia). They are called old Muslims. An estimated 13.5 million Muslims live within Western Europe itself (new Muslims). This population consists mainly of Turks (approx. three million, two million of that in Germany) and Muslims from the Maghreb countries (approx. four million).

An example of the expansion of Muslims are the Scandinavian countries where, according to statistics from before the Second World War, in Denmark, Norway and Sweden there were no Muslims at all. Today, among Scandinavians, there are over 10,000 of them (Smirnov, 2007). Current estimates concerning the population of Muslims are very inaccurate, as not all countries conduct a population census that takes religion into account. The least accurate data relates to France – the country in Western Europe where the most Muslims live. The massive influx of Muslims to this country was a consequence of the economic boom in the years of 1945-1974. Most of them were Arab males who, under the family reunification policy, brought their families into the country. In 1964, France signed an agreement with Algeria which obliged it to accept 12,000 workers from Algeria per year. In fact, the number of emigrants was much larger (Zdanowski, 2005, p. 432), thus the limit was soon increased soon to 35,000 people. The influx decreased during the economic recession in the 1970s. At the turn of the 1980s, the French authorities co-financed foreigners’ return to their countries of origin (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco), hoping that approximately a million people would benefit from it. However, the plan failed (Pędziwiatr, 2007, p. 50) and in 1986, for example, the Arab population in France was estimated at 2.5 million. Four years later, it was calculated at approximately four million people, with only half of them having French citizenship (Zdanowski, 2005, p. 433). At present the Muslim community in France consists of four to six million people, which constitutes about 6-9% of the total population of the country (Pędziwiatr, 2007, p. 51). A characteristic feature of the French Muslim population is the age structure, which includes a substantial percentage (30%) of young people aged up to 20, while for the whole of France the figure is 21% (Angendent, 2007). What
is important to note is that only one in five Muslims in Europe originates from the Arab states.

The second largest Muslim population in Western Europe lives in Germany. They arrived in the 1950s and 1960s (Gallis, 2005) due to the shortage of employees during the German economic boom. In 1962, the governments of Germany and Turkey signed a bilateral agreement under which the German labor market was opened to Turkish workers. The massive influx of Turks came after the construction of the Berlin Wall (1961), and the influx of workers from East Germany (GDR) was blocked. Similar agreements were signed later on with Morocco and Tunisia (Pędziwiatr, 2007, p. 64), then Yugoslavia (Nalborczyk, 2005, p. 329). It is worth noting that Arabs make up only a small percentage of German Muslims.

According to demographic forecasts, the number of Muslims in the world will increase by 35% in the next 20 years (from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.2 billion in 2030). In contrast, the Muslim population in Europe is likely to double by 2025 (Gallis, 2005). Importantly, the process is not possible to inhibit and migration will become a steady tendency. On the one hand, it is quite obviously filling a demographic gap in Europe, however, on the other hand, it destroys the current “cultural landscape” (quite heterogeneous so far).

Against this background, how is the Muslim population in Poland shaped? Their presence dates back to the turn of the 15th century, when the Tatars settled in areas of Poland. As a result of cultural assimilation they began to use the Polish language, but without losing their traditions or religion. In the second half of the 17th century the Tatars received lands in the Podlasie region. In the 1970s, Muslim students (such as Palestinians, Iraqis, Syrians, and Muslims from the Balkans) began to arrive. Some of them remained in the country. Another group are refugees (Chechens, Afghans, Iraqis). The data on the number of Muslims in Poland are only estimates, but the available information indicates that there are from 15,000 to 30,000 of them, which represents only 0.04-0.08% of the total population (Nielsen, 2009, p. 267). Other sources speak of 48,000 (Mapping the global Muslim population, 2011). It is estimated that in 2002, about 3,500 of them were of Arab origin (Polish citizenship was

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2 It is noteworthy that almost half of French Muslims were born in the country (48% of them are immigrants’ children, and 9% their grandchildren); immigrants from the “first wave” constitute about 43%. It is also worth mentioning that France has one of the highest rates of conversion to Islam (it is estimated that the number of converts is between 50,000 and 100,000, many of whom are eminent figures from the world of politics and culture).
held by every second person) (Świat, 2011, p. 181). As we can see, the group of migrants from Islamic states is small in Poland, and therefore it does not create – in contrast to the situation in Germany and France – any considerable social, political or even research problems. It is difficult to estimate the real number of Arabs, which, according to various data, ranges from 2,500 to 3,000.

It is worth noting that Muslims in Europe are not a homogeneous – ethnic as well as cultural entity. They are highly differentiated in origin (identity), residence time in a culturally unfamiliar environment, and degree of religious orthodoxy. The criterion of origin is the basis for the division of Muslims in Europe into the indigenous (e.g. Albanians, Bosnians, Tatars), converts (those who have converted to Islam), Muslim immigrants (employees, students, refugees) and the offspring of Muslim immigrants. This division, however, does not account for the diversity of Muslims in terms of attachment to the traditional values of Islam or a sense of identity with the Umma. According to Konrad Pędziwiatr, Muslim identity can be categorized as follows (Pędziwiatr, 2007, p. 44):

- Ethnic Muslims – characterized by the loosest linkage with Islam. These are people who normally do not practice Islam, but they come from Muslim families and are given Muslim names pointing to their roots;
- Cultural Muslims – whose level of assimilation of Islamic cultural traditions is much higher compared to ethnic Muslims, but who share with them the common feature of the failure to adhere to religious orders. A link can be established between shared values and those characteristic of Islam (an example of such a group is 48% – 64% of the Algerians who arrived in France);
- Religious Muslims – characterized by a strong sense of commitment to the Umma, they are practitioners who in daily life comply with rules and bans of Islam.

Taking account of the enormous ethnic and cultural diversity of the Muslim world and the different levels of identification and religious orthodoxy, one should realize that the generalized cultural profile of a Muslim, including an Arab, in social perception, will always have a stereotyped character. The characteristics of cultural features cannot be identified without ethnic references, without distinctions between the Islamic and Arab worlds.
Poland and the Arab world – confrontation or coexistence? The analysis of selected examples of our own research

“‘Biculturalism’ primarily enhances visual acuity. Sometimes it is difficult, unpleasant and even one can sometimes suffer serious harm. However, it makes it possible to recognize more intensively social and cultural differences between countries which one bound his/her life with. One may become convinced that gained the ability of very careful describing experience (...). Seeking beautiful places and kind people in both close to my heart countries leans towards reflections to what extent they could be connected. Even if only in thoughts and emotions of people who decided to emigrate years ago. In real life, the idea of such a synthesis is so absurd that even if it was able to accomplish, the effect would probably be very disappointing.”

—Ziad Abou Saleh

The theoretical considerations of the scale of Muslims’ (including Arabs’) expansion to the European continent that we have just discussed are only a prelude to the analysis of the results of empirical research which have been conducted for many years amongst a population of nearly 2,000 Polish students, from universities in Wroclaw, and Arab students from Tunisia, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. For the purposes of this article, only some parts of the study have been selected, originating from several projects that relate to values, identity, mutual perceptions between the two nations, stereotypes and prejudices. In most cases, the study used quantitative research. The method of measurement was the survey method; questionnaires were distributed, aiming at a comparative analysis of basic concepts, behaviors, experiences and emotions in the Arab world and in Poland. The survey was performed in the years of 1992-2014 on a sample of 1,778 people in the Middle East, Poland and other European countries.

For analysis purposes, the main research problem adopted was on the basis of the question What differs and what connects the two worlds? This was compiled into the following questions and issues:

1. Is there really such a thing (taking into account the size of the Arab minority) as the civilizational and cultural clash of the Arab and Polish worlds?
2. Do Poles have reasonable grounds for radicalizing their attitudes towards Arabs and their culture?
3. To what extent does the lack of a Polish colonial background affect Poland’s current relationship with the Arab world? Is colonial trauma a sufficient explanation of failures?

4. Should Poland be criticized for the lack of peaceful solutions in the Middle East?

5. Do both sides have the views and knowledge sufficient to work out a genuine dialogue regarding Polish-Arab relations?

6. Are Polish culture and traditions positive models for the residents of the Arab world?

7. Is “Arabism” a step too far for the western world and does it preclude its acceptance?

8. To what extent are we the witnesses of the Europeanization of Islam, and to what extent the Islamization of Europe?

9. Did the Poles have reason for concern about the influx of Islamic immigrants after Poland’s accession to the EU? Can Arab immigrants change the image of Polish cities?

10. Do we think that the Polish identity is at risk in the new political reality?

11. What are the reasons for and effects (including economic) of the anti-Muslim attitude of the Polish media?

12. Change in attitudes towards the Arabs and intensifying emigration from the Middle East to the EU. The characteristics of Arab immigrants.

The above raised questions/research micro-problems are closely and methodologically linked to the subsequent hypotheses:

1. The current relations between the Polish and Arab worlds are considered exceptionally bad. This is a kind of reflection of the crisis in the mutual relations between Islam and the West after the attack on the World Trade Center. Based on research conducted among Poles and Arabs, one can conclude that agreement and dialogue between representatives of these nations are – despite many difficulties – possible.

2. The way to peaceful coexistence is long and a lot of issues still remain in building mutual respect, learning about each other’s cultures, and gaining practical knowledge about each other that would be helpful for both parties’ business activities.

3. For years, the Arabs have been consistently emphasizing their openness to the West and its inhabitants, and the desire and ability
to establish and deepen the dialogue, but also to develop economic relations.

4. The factors of integration and disintegration between the two cultures are direct relationships, mutual knowledge and common expectations that offer an opportunity to understand each other better. This, in turn, reinforces the resistance to random media messages guiding our attention to theories about the clash of cultures and civilizations. In the era of globalization, it is no longer possible to determine sharp boundaries between cultures.

Let the author's proprietary quotation be an introduction to the analysis of the test results. It states that a sense of exclusion or marginalization, or even the pressure of a foreign cultural environment coexists with cultural competence that allows an objective assessment of cultural differences between the Arab world and the Polish reality implicated in the historical chains of intolerance, ethnocentrism and national chauvinism. Yet, this environment, so “difficult” for “the others”, not only in terms of culture, but also social, geographical, administrative and legal aspects, became home for about 3,000 Arabs who, for many reasons, despite many limitations, became co-creators of the Polish cultural landscape. Therefore we have attempted to put forward a thesis: “Biculturalism enhances primarily visual acuity.” Coexistence – understood as a mutual “learning each other”, each familiarizing itself with cultural peculiarities and establishing the principles of respect and tolerance towards diversity – provides opportunities for both cultures. In this case, visual acuity is reduced to the principles of cultural relativism, which actually require the evaluation of foreign cultures on the basis of applicable standards.

Let us start the presentation with the study results showing the state of Poles’ knowledge about Arabs and their mutual opinions about each other contained in the profile of stereotypical perception. The level of cultural competence and knowledge of the Arab countries is presented in the study, conducted on a population of 1,788 students from Poland and Arab states. The negligible level of young Poles' knowledge on the subject is apparent. Only four respondents from the whole sample showed a sufficient level of knowledge about Arabs, and only 17 indicated that they personally know a representative of the Arab world. Assessment of the knowledge level was based on the analysis of the issues contained in Table 3.2.
Chapter Nineteen

Research questions

1. What associations do you have with the word “Arab”?  
2. Do you personally know an Arab living in Poland?  
4. What characterizes an ordinary Arab?  
5. Is every Muslim an Arab?  
6. Is every Arab a Muslim?  
7. Is every Arab a terrorist?  
8. Can a Pole become an Arab?  
9. Can an Arab become a Pole?  
10. If I wasn't a Pole/an Arab, who would I be (who?/what?)  
11. Stereotypes about the Poles/the Arabs.  
12. Would you go on a blind date with a person with an Arab cultural background?

Source: authors’ own study.

Table 3.2. Research questions describing the state of Poles’ knowledge about Arabs. N=1,225.

In the theoretical part of the study, particular attention was drawn to the widespread view that all Islamic states are Arab states. As it turns out, this answer appeared in the opinions of the respondents. The respondents included Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and even Israel in the Arab states. These responses indicate a very minimal level of knowledge about Arabs and Islam.

Research questions

1. What characterizes an average Pole in the perception of the Arabs?  
2. What is the current image of Arab women in the perception of the Poles?  
3. What is the profile of the stereotypical perception of women in the Arab opinion?  
4. What is level of Poles’ and the Arabs’ prejudices towards “others” (obesity, disability, old age, but also the approach to racism and homosexuality).  
5. What is the level of tolerance of Arabs and Poles towards each other?  
6. Is it possible to influence socio-cultural stereotypes and their scope?

Source: authors’ own study.

Table 3.3. Research questions describing mutual stereotypes and prejudices. N=1,225.

In order to illustrate the associations referring to Arabs in the opinion of Poles, the authors provide the results of tests carried out on a sample of
1,225 respondents – students of Polish and Arab nationalities. As a preliminary point, we show a stereotype of an Arab in the opinion of the respondents. The results indicate that the vast majority of Poles equate Arabs with negative phenomena, including, among others, war (324 respondents). In addition, 166 respondents indicated that religion – Islam – is a characteristic of Arabs. The responses presented in Graph 3.1 show the tendency to assign characteristics, both subjective and objective, to Arabs. Identifying them with war confirms the widespread stereotype of a fighter involved in a holy war against the infidels. In contrast, the association of the characteristics of Arabs with religion is objective.

Graph 3.1. The stereotype of an Arab in the perception of the Poles (N=1,225).

In the next step we show is how the self-stereotype of a Pole is shaped in the opinion of Polish respondents. The test results seem to confirm the widespread stereotype of a Pole in the perception of other nationalities. In the vast majority, we identify ourselves with alcohol abuse, as indicated by 279 respondents, theft – 108, the church – 107, and beautiful women – 104.
respondents. Another interesting observation is that of certain cultural stigmas like sandals and socks or the attachment to religion, as well as national defeatism and the propensity for complaining. Thus we see that respondents of Polish nationality confirm the profile of the stereotypical perception of a Pole in the opinion of other nationalities. We are indentified, based on the categories of characteristics, with:

- mental – faith;
- cultural and social – alcoholism;
- moral – thievery (Bluszkowski, 2005).

If we analyze the characteristics of the stereotype of an Arab and the self-stereotype of a Pole, in both cases one can notice a common denominator, i.e. religious values, which were given great importance, and to a lesser degree, hospitality. Detailed quantitative data is shown in Graph 3.2.

![Graph 3.2. The stereotype of a Pole (N=1,225).](image)

*Source: authors’ own study.*

**Graph 3.2. The stereotype of a Pole (N=1,225).**

In order to deepen the analysis of Poles’ perceptions of Arab stereotypes, we can compare responses concerning the characteristics of an Arab, a Muslim and the Arab culture. Answers on associations with the word “Arab” were divided into overt and covert features. This evidences a
tendency to give them positive and neutral characteristics that are explicit, while features considered pejorative or occurring in a negative context are seen as hidden. It is significant that the overt features (with a few exceptions) evoked positive associations, whilst the covert features – mostly negative ones included among others a terrorist, Jihad, aggression, blood, war and the lack of respect for women (Table 3.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overt features</th>
<th>Covert features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talkativeness</td>
<td>A terrorist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of merchant sense</td>
<td>Jihad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The wealth</td>
<td>Aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great sexual temperament</td>
<td>Blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark skin</td>
<td>A war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beard</td>
<td>Beard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A horse</td>
<td>Kebab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kebab</td>
<td>Hijab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different styles of dressing</td>
<td>A camel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desert nature, a camel</td>
<td>The lack of respect for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious fanaticism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors’ own study.

Table 3.4 What associations do you have with the word “Arab”? (N=1,225)

Another question concerned associations with the word “Muslim” (again, features were divided into overt and covert ones). As in the previous question, respondents pointed to negative traits in relation to hidden features and relatively positive ones in regard to open characteristics. It is interesting that associations with the words “Muslim” and “Arab” share a common component, which boils down to the fact that the respondents do not perceive any difference between them. For the research group, the terms “a Muslim” and “an Arab” exist interchangeably in relation to associations such as war, a terrorist, Jihad, blood, aggression, and lack of respect for women. Many common references also appear in the field of religion (Table 3.5).
### Table 3.5. What associations do you have with the word “Muslim”? (N=1,225)

Poles’ ignorance about the Arabs becomes increasingly evident when we consider the study of the characteristics of the Arabic culture. In this case too, the respondents pointed to religion, war and lack of respect for women as fundamental characteristics of this culture. This means that the Arabic culture is identified once again only with Islam and the negative phenomena linked to the religion in the respondents’ opinions. While the overt characteristics of the Arabic culture are positive and neutral, the covert features are almost exclusively negative. Table 3.6 shows the selected associations Poles make with the Arab culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overt features</th>
<th>Covert features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Allah</td>
<td>• A terrorist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Koran</td>
<td>• A jihadist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prayer</td>
<td>• Aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Love of God</td>
<td>• Blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Faith</td>
<td>• A war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hijab</td>
<td>• Religious fanaticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dark skin</td>
<td>• Beard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Beard</td>
<td>• Hijab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jihad</td>
<td>• A camel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Different styles of dressing</td>
<td>• The lack of respect for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Desert nature, a camel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The lack of respect for women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: author’s own study.*

### Table 3.6. What associations do you have with the Arabic culture? (N=1,225)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overt features</th>
<th>Covert features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Exoticism</td>
<td>• Religious fanaticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prayer, Allah, the Koran, Faith</td>
<td>• A desert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Singing, belly dance, Sufism</td>
<td>• An Arab woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Curiosity</td>
<td>• Hijab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mathematics, Physics, the Alphabet, Numbers</td>
<td>• A camel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Music</td>
<td>• Jihad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hijab</td>
<td>• A lack of respect for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Family, lots of children</td>
<td>• Different styles of dressing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A Bedouin</td>
<td>• Dark skin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: author’s own study.*
We may wonder what contributes to such a low level of knowledge about Arabs among Poles. The first reason lies in education, and the second in the perpetuating of stereotypes by the media, politicians, and the world of science. Let us therefore use the proprietary quotation:

“In the mass media the image of an Arab as well as a Pole is largely shaped by self-proclaimed experts, journalists and writers who scouring storage rooms of uniqueness and extremes look for sensational stories to make them more attractive by adding a pinch of extra spice, add some color with well-known paint of stereotypes and prejudices. This is high-quality paint, not easy to be repainted or changed into another.”

—Ziad Abou Saleh

So is it possible, in the absence of sufficient cultural competence, surrounded by the propaganda and disinformation that comes from the media, to limit the stereotypes and prejudices about Arabs? Is it possible to accept them in the demanding Polish cultural environment?

Further studies show common denominators in several categories of responses (Figure 3). Both the Poles and the Arabs were asked about the same issues, and the most significant – in the sense of difference – turned out to be affirmative indicators about homosexuality (14 and 78 responses respectively), the Muslim identity (3 and 47 responses), and the possibility of changing one’s nationality to Arabian (37 and 21 responses).

The data presented in Graph 3.3 confirms that there are areas which significantly separate the cultures. In the Polish culture, the issue of homosexuality seems to be an example of mental and cultural dichotomy that will never achieve social acceptance in the Arab world. Homosexuality is only part of reality dividing the two worlds. The differences in the approach to certain issues, such as the Arabs' religious identity, are interesting. At this point, the Poles answered positively – thereby proving their low level of knowledge about the Arab world while the Arabs (oddly enough) mostly gave negative answers. The Poles and Arabs' common features remain in the economic sphere; this is confirmed in a general way by the answers to questions about getting back change at a shop.
Another question concerned features common to both cultures. Apart from anthropological differences, worthy of note are positive attributes such as the sense of national pride and peaceful coexistence, while negative qualities in relation to the Poles and Arabs are hypocrisy and stereotypical thinking. The approach to male-female relationships is a relatively interesting matter. The Poles and the Arabs have a similar approach to so-called blind meetings with a representative of a different culture. This issue also seems to refer to the popular opinion of the Poles and the Arabs as very open to “quick” and random acquaintances and romances. Also fairly interesting turned out to be indications of the tendency of being someone else who represents a different culture. Neither the Poles nor the Arabs, generally, have a problem with “superficial” change. Moreover, attention should be paid to the answers destroying the stereotype of an Arab as an aggressive and fanatical fighter caught up in a
holy war. The tendency to peaceful coexistence is evidence of this (Graph 3.4).

![Graph 3.4. Similarities between Poles and Arabs (%) (N=1,225).](image)

Graph 3.4. Similarities between Poles and Arabs (%) (N=1,225).

Another study, using a sample of 610 Arab students in Poland, shows the characteristics of the Poles when it comes to sex. Graphs 3.5 and 3.6 show the responses; the opinions of the Poles on the Arabs are marked in blue and those of the Arabs on the Arabs in red. The test results among Arab respondents indicate that men in both cultures share a high level of pride and diligence, appearance (a handsome silhouette), dedication and a sense of humor. Quite a different level of perception relates to their level of religiosity, fidelity, stubbornness, and obedience. A statistically average Arab, in the opinion of Arabs, is religious, proud, stubborn, loyal, handsome and attentive, while an average Pole, in the opinion of Arabs, is obedient, loyal, hard-working and cheerful.
Graph 3.5. Characteristics of an average Pole/Arab in the eyes of the Arabs.

The same question was asked to Arab students in relation to Polish women. In this case, the Arabs' opinions of Polish women are marked in blue, while Arabs' of Arab women are marked in red. Among the common features of women from both cultures are pride, beauty, passion and devotions. To the category of characteristics differentiating the women of the two cultures belong levels of religiosity, obedience, faithfulness, diligence, laziness and level of requirement, as well as the conservative attitude to sex (they are not promiscuous).
Graph 3.6. Characteristics of an average Polish/Arab woman in the eyes of the Arabs.

According to the Arabs, an Arab woman shows a high level of religiosity, is proud, obedient (to her husband), devoted, faithful, nice and passionate, although she demonstrates limitations in sexual relations (is promiscuous), is not hard-working, but rather lazy and undemanding. In contrast, the Arabs state that a Polish woman is nice and passionate, quite flexible in terms of sex, proud, demanding, rather stubborn, not obedient or hard-working enough and relatively religious.

Comparing the characteristics of men and women of both cultures, one can notice some gender differences. In the opinions of the Arabs, in the Polish culture, passion, beauty (appearance), devotion, diligence and stubbornness distinguish a woman from a man (in favor of women). However, in the Arabic culture, a man is distinguished from a woman (in
favor of men) by obedience and less requirements, and in favor of women by pride, diligence, beauty, passion, a sense of humor, and stubbornness.

At this point it is worth referring to the aforementioned typology of four dimensions by G. Hofstede, where both the Arabic and Polish cultures are counted as cultures of male qualities, while in the second, a tendency towards sex egalitarianism was indicated. When analyzing these results, the general conclusion can be drawn that in the Polish culture, a trend towards a balance of culture is visible, whereas in the Arabic culture, a traditional society model based on the patriarchal family structure still persists.

Let us look at the gender issue from the perspective of studies conducted on a sample of 1,225 Polish students, where the characteristics detailed by B. Wojciszke were applied (Wojciszke, 2009, pp. 93-94). The point of the question was to determine the features of a potential future wife in the opinions of Poles and Arabs. In the opinion of the Poles, a future wife's profile consists of many different characteristics, such as beauty, virginity, attractive appearance, large breasts and a lack of addictions, relative tolerance, the tendency to motherhood and intelligence (Graph 3.7), yet in the Arabic culture all these characteristics are of little significance if a woman is not a virgin, as 95% of respondents identified the latter feature as an essential (Graph 3.8).

![Graph 3.7](image)

Source: authors’ own study, based on Wojciszke, B. (2009). Psychologia miłości (The psychology of love), p. 93-94.

**Graph 3.7. Watch for good advice: the virtues of a future wife in the opinion of Poles N=1,225.**
What views do women in the western and the Arab world hold about their own gender? These women believe that the life of European women is enviable; however, they are strongly tied to their own culture, as evidenced by the following responses: I thank God that I am an Arab; I would prefer to be the second or the fourth wife than a mistress; European women live without a sense of mission; I don't know and it's hard for me to imagine how a betrayed wife feels, etc. The opinion of Arab women stands in opposition to European women's responses, which clearly demonstrate that they would not reverse roles. Here are some European women's opinions on Arab women: the life of Arab women is not enviable; I thank God that I am an European woman; I'd rather be a lover than the second or fourth wife of an Arab; in their life, there is hope; I do not know if any of them is doing well; I wonder how women who share a husband feel, etc. The responses unequivocally indicate that the western world is radically different from the Arab one with respect to women, their social status, the family (and other) roles they fulfill, attitudes to the institution of marriage and married life.

Source: authors' own study, based on Wojciszke, B. (2009). Psychologia miłości (The psychology of love), pp. 93-94.

Graph 3.8. Watch for good advice: the virtues of a future wife N=445 Syria, Jordan.
The next stage analyzes the test results on the level of acceptance and sympathy for Arabs and their identity and suitability in Poland (Graph 3.9). Some of the results are quite surprising, because they undermine the general opinion about Poles’ high level of national chauvinism and intolerance, as well as indicating the acceptance of Arabs in Poland – 78%, and departing from identifying them with terrorists – 83%. Despite this, there is still a tendency to lack sympathy for Arabs in Poland, as evidenced by the 41% of respondents who proved this state of affairs, and the lack of their usefulness in Poland – 44% of the responses.

Source: own study

Graph 3.9. Levels of acceptance and sympathy towards Arabs (%) (N=1,225).

The next graph presents the results of research describing Poles’ willingness to make friends with a person of Arab origin. The survey was based on open and anonymous answers. The results show that of those who answered openly, 70.2% of respondents expressed a desire to make friends with someone from the Arab world, however of those who answered anonymously, such a wish was expressed by just over half of them.
Graph 3.10. Would you like to make friends with a person from the Arab world? (%) (N=1,225).

The responses to the following question indicate a positive change in the attitude of Poles towards Arabs when it comes to the desire to marry a person from the Arab world. The vast majority of respondents would reject the opportunity to be in a relationship with an Arab, both in open responses (56%) and anonymous ones (77%). It is difficult to make an objective assessment of the fact that Poles are not interested in relationships of this type, although they tend toward random meetings with a culturally alien person. It can be assumed that this state of affairs results from the significant impact of fear of cultural difference and the Arab stereotype created by the media.

Levels of mutual acceptance (or its absence) are also shown in the answers to questions about Poles’ trust in Arabs and vice versa in comparison with other nationalities. Graphs 11a and 11b present the answers to some quite interesting questions about trust and its absence, the anticipation of help and a hypothetical situation regarding the nationality of the pilot of an airplane that crashed (including such nationalities as American, English, French, Iranian, Polish and Turkish). What is the most surprising is the fact that, according to Arabs, Poles are the most trusted among alternative nationalities, although 27% of respondents indicated a total mistrust of the Poles, whereas the balanced distribution of answers concerning Arabs' trust in the English and the French could be noticed.

It can clearly be seen that most Polish respondents declared trust in Iranians and Turks. It is worth noting that this confirms the lack of knowledge about the Arab world, as Iran does not belong to this group of countries, though in the opinion of the Poles, it is identified with them. However, despite common perceptions that Arabs and Muslims are synonymous with terrorism and holy war, the Iranians enjoy the highest
trust from the Poles. They had the lowest levels of confidence in the British, French and Americans.

Source: authors’ own study, based on Wojciszke, B. (2009). Psychologia miłości (The psychology of love), p. 93-94

Graph 11a. An Arab answers: Who in the world/on Earth is it better to be with? (%)(N=1,225) (an American, an Englishman, a Frenchman, an Iranian, a Pole or a Turk).

Note the different characteristics of the two cultures, such as their attitudes towards marital infidelity. In the opinion of the Polish and Lebanese interviewees, in most cases there are various reasons for infidelity. The Poles state that it occurs as a result of: marital problems; boredom; a desire for new sexual experiences; a lack of sensitivity and passion on the part of a wife/husband; the need to broaden one’s experience; the need to feel needed and appreciated, or as retaliation or a way to initiate a divorce. According to the Arabs, sources of adultery include: an improper (i.e. not religious enough) upbringing; lack of responsibility, the disappearance of traditional morality as a result of staying in a mixed society; mistrust; inappropriate company; the impact of the media and the internet; marital routine, and “compensation” for the unavailability of a harem.
Another issue worth highlighting is the respondents' general idea of the cultural characteristics of the Arabs in the opinion of the Poles and vice versa. While analyzing responses on the matter above, one can spot a lot of analogies with the typology of cultures by E. Hall. This is confirmed by the following characteristics relating to the Arabs: collectivism, faith in destiny, the high importance of social position and authority, belonging to a caste and a religion, as well as the prevalence of male dominance. According to Poles, in the Arabic culture, work gives the material basis for life, and one lives in order to work, though promotion is very difficult without connections. Social and family ties are of vital importance. In the Arabic culture, there is a free sense of timing, and people live in the past and the present – the future is not of any greater significance.

Unlike the Arabs, the Poles are characterized by individualism and an emphasis on the freedom of actions, and also the trend towards gender egalitarianism. As in the Arabic culture, work is a means to a decent life, but it is not a condition for fulfilling oneself. Relationships between an employer and an employee based on a contract that gives mutual benefits
are valid. Promotion at work is a result of qualifications and competence rather than connections. It is important to achieve goals, which fulfills ambitions. A vital element of social life is time, which dictates cycles in both work and family life. Poles insist on loyalty and pragmatism, but they are cautious when making decisions and they live in the present and the future.

**Conclusions**

The issues raised in this article are just a part of the reality accompanying contact between the Polish and Arabic cultures. As already stated, they do not have to be confrontational, but may take positive forms without ethnocentric intentions, national chauvinism or intolerance. However, to make this possible, two important factors are required, namely cultural competence and favorable political conditions for creating a bicultural world based on mutual respect and tolerance, formed on the solid pillars of cultural assimilation, the essence of which is dual acceptance. Let us look at the results which show the most important conditions for the cultural assimilation of Arabs into Polish cultural realities indicated by respondents (Graph 3.12).

![Graph 3.12 How can we get/encourage the Arabs to assimilate into Poland? (%) (N=1,225).](source)

*Source: authors’ own study.*

**Analyzing the response percentages, we can see that the interviewees emphasized religion and respect for it, hospitality and the Polish culture, as well as openness to Arabs and the beauty of Polish women.**
Openness, hospitality and a high level of religiosity are national features of both Poles and Arabs, so they can have a positive impact on their mutual relations; in favorable conditions they allow cultural assimilation, but they do not constitute the conditions sufficient for this assimilation. In order to make it possible, Poles need a sense of security and of the lack of risk from this culture, and this is extremely difficult, especially in the realities of constantly emerging terrorist acts. What it demands, therefore, is a deep reflection on whether these qualities are strong enough to alleviate Arab stereotypes or change their identification with terrorism and the Islamic State. Can the widespread fear and Islamophobia among Poles, arising from Islamic fundamentalism and relating to all the negative events in Syria and Tunisia, as well as in Europe, be overcome through better knowledge of the Arab culture? Currently, it is difficult to provide a clear answer to this question; however, the fact is that the lack of knowledge about a foreign culture perpetuates stereotypes, and the terrorism-related media battle further exacerbates them.

It should be explicitly stated that one undeniably positive aspect is that Poland is regarded by Arabs as a relatively friendly country, and Poles are well perceived, whereas the feeling of fear among Poles and the identification of Arabs only with threats of terrorist acts is unjustified in view of both the small population (several thousand) of Arabs in Poland and the absence of any terrorist events. Another issue (to be explored in subsequent empirical research) is that almost none of the Arabs living in Poland identifies him or herself with the Islamic State or approves of terrorist acts.

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