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Euro-Islam – A Constructivist Idea or a Concept of the English School?

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EUMA

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Euro-Islam – A Constructivist Idea
or a Concept of the English School?

Astrid B. Boening[♦]

Introduction

 "Us against Them". Is that really the socio-political discourse we want to choose in a region, such as Europe and the Mediterranean? Huntington offered as an approach with "the Other" the one of Clash. Since then not only has fundamentalist Islam been responsible for September 11th but many other terrorist attacks as well all over the world. However, not all Muslims are fundamentalist terrorists. How then can Islam live in peace with Europe[1] and vice versa?

Bassam Tibi (1999, 16) writes that the socio-political evolution of Europe is closely connected with the appearance of Islam in the Mediterranean region, the fascination and threat it represented and the Medieval crusades in opposition to Jihad (i.e. by definition, the defense of Islam). Since then, neither politics nor socio-cultural studies have found a successful constructive and peaceful approach of dealing with Islam in Europe or the Euro-Mediterranean region-wide.

Especially in 19th century Europe, the boundaries of existing states were re-drawn to reflect nation-states based on the relative homogeneity of each population's unique culture, history and unity of language and to some extent, religion. While these may have recognized regionalism, they did not accept "foreignness". From the 1970s on, some European countries, such as Holland, were multicultural as official policy for a variety of reasons. William James (1909) believed that plural society is crucial to the formation of philosophical and social humanism to help build a better, more egalitarian society. Opponents of multiculturalism view it as contributing to cultural ghettos, undermining national unity and identity, and, in terms of Islam, as an attempt to Islamise Europe. European anxiety towards Islam and the Middle East was criticized by Edward Said (1979) in his book analyzing the prevailing Orientalism in the 20th century in the West for the inaccuracies of a wide variety of (postcolonial) assumptions about the Middle East and its cultures.

Arthur Schlesinger (1998) proposed a new perspective in this debate, one which celebrates difference and abandons assimilation to replace the classic image of the melting pot in the U.S., in which differences are submerged to democracy in order to end a history of prejudice, which may in the end endanger the unity of a society. In Europe today, however, the debate rages over the optimal approach of integrating Muslims. Some authors, such as Paul Cliteur (1999), argue that western culture, the Rechtsstaat (the rule of secular law, in contrast to a theocracy) and human rights are superior to non-western cultures, since cultural relativism would leads to the acceptance of "barbaric" practices such as honor killings, anti-Semitism or discrimination *by* immigrants. Into this debate, starting from his perspective within Germany, Tibi interjected the concept of Leitkultur. By this he refers to a form of multiculturalism comparable to Habermas'

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[1] Here I am intentionally referring to the "geo-(post-)state" identity of Europe, rather than in religious terms because my argument will developed in this context

constitutional patriotism, which refers to the cultural assimilation of the many Muslim residents and citizens into German culture (almost leading to the opposite, monoculturalism). By comparison, on the EU-level today social cohesion, integration and assimilation policies are to some extent reversing previous multicultural policies – towards a post-multicultural society (rather than mono-culturalism)?

Against this debate Tibi (2005, 206) proposes EuroIslam[2], an awareness at the IR level, for Europeans

> to develop an awareness of the increasing resistance to Western hegemony over the rest of the world … A value-based consensus needs to be found with a cross-cultural underpinning for establishing world peace among civilizations on new grounds. Straight dialogue is here the best instrument for conflict resolution and establishing peace.

Tibi (Ibid.) considers the de-Westernization currently taking place globally with the possibility of making the dar al-Islam (the House of Peace, i.e. Islam society) at the societal level through migration into Europe detrimental. Since the conflict of norms, values and the related worldviews are not resolved in a pluralist society, but, as indicated above, could (and in fact, have already) led to hostility within Muslim-ghettos in western Europe. Rather, Tibi advocates focusing on the development of "Muslim citizenship" (beyond a passport) in Western (e.g. German) society, in terms of a sense of belonging vs. being the "foreign Other" (who does not belong) or that of an alien minority. The clear implication is "*one* law for all"[3] (e.g. no shari'a in Europe for the Islamic minorities in any area of law, including family law) (Ibid.), without providing minority privileges, but *also`* seeking individual integration (and keeping the Muslim "culture-politics lens" out of the European discourse).

Euro-Islam as a cosmopolitan discourse?

EuroIslam is conceptually related to Beck's and Grande's (2004) definition of a "cosmopolitan Europe". They state that the cosmopolitan Europe which can be found within and around the EU is a state- and society mosaic with its origins in the radical dialectic of mobility and immobility (Beck and Grande 2004, 277 – translated and para-phrased by this author). The national boundaries (e.g. of France, England) are static. Yet European countries (especially EU member states) are (often unconsciously) "totally" "mobile". Understanding this paradox and viewing it as "*the* solution" (to multi-ethnicity within European borders and its neighborhood) and to making it livable, represents the IR "invention" (translated from Ibid.) of Europe and represents the European miracle: a reconciliation of traditional enemies (translated from Ibid.). Viewing this type of "enemy-integration"[4] into a peaceful and cooperative political network of states, into a "consensual empire", is completely different from a multi-national, multi-cultural, or a poly-ethnic state concept, such as the U.S., Canada or Switzerland (translated from Ibid., p. 178).[5] While some authors (e.g. Stevenson, 2005, 46) have infered that the concept of a cosmopolitan Europe is simplistic and utopian, I would argue that, in fact, it is *not* ignoring "the chequered history of civil society in the European context" (Ibid.), but could represent one *answer* to it (a full discussion not being within the scope of this paper). Stevenson (Ibid.) also points out that

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[2] I am consciously not insinuating a eurocentrism with this term: While I believe that Tibi has coined this term, I am not only accepting it for consistency with the literature, or to privilege "Euro" with a "first mover advantage" in the term, but because linguistically it is easier pronounced than e.g. "IslEuro" for example – and because this particular discourse originated in Europe, to address at first a European problem

[3] This concept bears some similarity with the *res publica* of the Romans, but I hesitate to make this comparison for its possible "imperialist" interpretation (and place this footnote purely as a pedagogic note in a student paper)

[4] pardon the speech act, but it is based on the neo-functionalism "invented" by Jean Monnet (or at least leading to the speech acts in the Schuman Declaration) for the integration of France and Germany, as long-time enemies, into the European Coal and Steel Community "to make war unthinkable and materially impossible".

[5] The institutions of the EU could/would then be (one of) the institutional super-structure(s) for this concept at this stage of their evolution in Tibi's proposal

such a liberal cosmopolitanism "calls for different political principles that are more receptive towards the 'Other'… and require both a complex vocabulary of cultural identity and more genuinely multicultural politics" (Ibid.). This cosmopolitanism (Habermas 1997) locates ideas of cosmopolitan democracy in Kant's (1970) wish to replace national law with a genuinely morally binding international law, enhanced by liberal commercial exchanges. Stevenson (Ibid.) takes the debate to the level of the globalization of the public sphere and the recognition that individuals and citizens, and not (only) collectivities, need to become sovereign. This incorporates Habermasian discourse logic, which, in fact, underlies the *process* of the EU, and in the end contributes to the transparency, understanding and sovereignty of all peoples to contribute to peace, while the legal and institutional aspects of the supranational functions of the EU (in terms of "beyond nationality"[6]) address some of the normative "beyond-citizenship" measures which Tibi had suggested as an approach to EuroIslam.

Hoping to have positioned EuroIslam in a context of "regional law" (EU as well as European member *state* for those Muslims living in Europe), the discourse logic of cosmopolitan Europeanism, and (less so) in terms of multi-culturalism vs. monoculturalism or assimilation, I will now change my analytical lens from the "cosmopolitan Europe" approach to one of "ethnic" diversity (in its broadest sense), and turn to the relevance of a constructivist discussion of EuroIslam.

EuroIslam as Constructivism?

Having discussed above the Habermasian cosmopolitan Europe as a philosophical approach to a peaceful EuroIslam as Tibi coined this term, as well as some overall socio-political mechanisms to accompany this process in the previous sections, I will now discuss EuroIslam as a constructivist concept. Although this also represents a sociological approach to political science, its utility in international relations, I suggest here, is its significance to EuroIslam as one of offering an option of dealing with controversial arguments in its constellation as a potential abode of peace both for European (Judeo-) Christians and Muslims in the Euro-Mediterranean region-wide.

While Wendt (1992, 391 – emphasis mine) explores social constructivism in terms of "the extent to which *state* action is influenced by 'structure' (anarchy and the distribution of power) versus 'process' (interaction and learning) and institutions", the present paper has been gingerly exploring not only post-international concepts in terms of "cosmopolitan Europe", but also the post-multicultural society aspects of EuroIslam via the integration of the "sovereign" individual. Since the purpose of this paper is i.a. to investigate new concepts for developing peace between Europe and the Muslim Middle East, how could Wendt's approach be useful in deciding how anarchy could be shaped in this post-international/post-multicultural society at least in the EU and Mediterranean neighbors?

Jervis (1988) (quoted in Wendt 1992, 393) speaks of "changing conceptions of self and interest" in international relations and Keohane of 'sociological' conceptions of interest in the liberal research program and, by extension, a potentially much stronger conception of process and institutions in world politics" (quoted in Wendt 1992, 393). This concept of *process* in the individual integration of Muslims in Europe as well as the discourse of EuroIslam as "their/our" "identity" transposed from Europe (since Tibi is writing from Europe and this debate is current there) to the Mediterranean, as anchored in secular institutions, with mutually constructed norms to permit socio-political relationships not as with the "Other", but that "other" being "one of us" – the "being" European *as well as* Muslim, but really neither, *but* something **new** which does not differentiate any longer between the religions (and regional origin).

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[6] Refer to footnote 5: the "EU" is used simply as an example, since Tibi's EuroIslam discussion originated in Europe and it is simply one option, more realistic than some other institutional option, e.g. ASEAN

The structurationist and symbolic interactionist sociology of the liberal claim is significant in recognizing the important role which international institutions play in transforming state identities and interests (Ibid., 394) in the present context of supranational institutions such as the EU (and even to some extent national institutions as mentioned at the beginning of this paper) in contributing to bridging the divide between Muslims and Europeans by establishing (through democratic processes/institutions, i.e. representative of the population) uniform laws and institutions[7] throughout the EU, decreasing transaction costs (e.g. by reducing suspicion) and increasing transparency (e.g. trust). This is confirmed by Wendt (Ibid.) who states that "process and institutions are not subordinated to structure", i.e. it is the *process*, rather than simply the structure which affects anarchy (or, in this case, the past "strained" relationship between Muslims and Europeans). Hence I propose that EuroIslam as a concept *and* a process can contribute greatly to more harmonious relationships beyond Europe to all borders of the Mediterranean also.

The approach Wendt (1992, 405) proposes for this "process" is one of creating intersubjective meanings through a mechanism of reinforcement

> interaction [here in terms of "citizenship" as referenced above in Tibi's usage] rewards actors for holding certain ideas about each other and discouraging them from holding others. If repeated long enough, these 'reciprocal typifications' will create relatively stable concepts of self and other regarding the issue at stake in the interaction.

Wendt's approach, as a *via media* constructivist, contrasts e.g. with the postmodern constructivism of Richard Ashley, James DerDerian and Spike Peterson, as well as Beck and Grande's (2004) analyses, the latter of which correlate to some extent with the ontology of Cosmopolitan Europe, referred to in the beginning of this paper. The "mechanics" of evaluating the linguistic construction are hence significant to the present "construction" of EuroIslam beyond only a linguistic concept but also as a process, affecting agents and structures in a post-national construct (as we need to remember that Wendt applied this "process" only to traditional inter*national* relations, not post-national/post-multiculturalist developments).

One could extrapolating from socio-political construction to the next level of post-international "structures" through *process* in order to increase one's understanding of identity vis-á-vis interest formation and transformation and structural and institutional constitution as unique re-conceptions of power, as well as an ontology and construction of the social world and how social change happens within it. From this angle, he application of constructivism to EuroIslam would then be as a process for developing the structure of "peace" by the creation of new intersubjective meanings, e.g. EuroIslam, as a single identity which does not need to be suspicious of "itself" (Wendt 1999).

While this may sound utopian to some, issues such as mutual suspicion are significant stumbling blocks in bringing peace to the EuroMed (both among the populations internally of the EU and between those from countries along the northern and the southern borders of the Mediterranean), a conceptualization of common identity might be a start in "imagining" an alternative which would lead to a solution to these "perceptual" and structural obstacles[8].

However, the structure should not be constrictive of agency. Onuf(1989) gives primacy to agency who are active, knowledgeable participants in social relations and in the reproduction of rules (i.e. of society), whether individual or collective. Hence, while European governments may (struggle to) apply the (national, supra-national and intergovernmental) structures of a Rechtsstaat (including the EU context) as discussed above, countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean apply theirs. This does not imply the need along either shore of the Mediterranean to necessarily abrogate individual or social agency in promulgating an identity of EuroIslam, i.e.

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[7] "Institution" as a "relatively stable set or 'structure' of identities and interests", and "institutionalization a process of internalizing new identities and interests" (Wendt 1992, 399)

[8] While many examples exist of this, they are mostly state and/or empire-centric and would conjure the wrong image to parties who are already unsure of each other's intentions, and I will hence refrain from naming them.

of empathy and identity with (and mutual responsibility for?) "the Other" (Wendt 1999). In fact, I argue that the elements Onuf identifies to delineate agency in the construction of the social world through language (e.g. the identity of "EuroIslam"), namely practices (the way people deal with rules, e.g. accepting the concept of EuroIslam), conventions (those repeated speech acts which lead people to believe in their "agency" to bring about outcomes) (Ibid.), institutions (those stable patterns which suit agents in rational actions in their environment) (Ibid.), and regimes (that web of (commitment) rules or balance of power)(Ibid.,) are exactly the "constructs" which I suggest to conceptualize as a *speech act, consciousness and practice* for "peace" in the EuroMed, as they offer "post-national" "flexibility" for exploring new constructs which "straight" social constructivism a la Wendt might not be able to completely outline (i.e. Onuf's deep constructivism may offer to overcome exactly that mental plethora of religious, national and geographic boundaries, which has made it difficult to bridge the crusade/Jihad divide in every sense so far).

This is an alternative to Buzan's and Waever's (2003, 257) prognosis for the Middle East Regional Security complex

> that *any* [original emphasis] development in the region would change its character as a classic conflict formation. The failure of the peace process cements Arab-Israeli hostility into place for many more years, now with the additional burdens and complications created by the 'war against terrorism' (Ibid.).

My argument points to starting the development of a "EuroIslam" peace discourse outside of the Middle East (i.e. in Europe, which is dealing with some related issues) and then hope for, even anticipate, "spillover" to the Southern borders of the Mediterranean as E. Haas (1964) would predict.

EuroIslam: Just a regional Arabic International Society, a Euro-Mediterranean International Society or a post-national constellation?

In this section I am extrapolating from EuroIslam beyond the EU/European region to include the broader region ("EuroMed") encompassing those neighbors surrounding the Mediterranean in its broadest "strokes"[9] for the purpose of evaluating the possibility of the EuroIslam concept as one of peace to potentially extend from that of "theory" to one possibly as a "prescriptive" socio-political mechanism of a (regional) international society, i.e. the Mediterranean.

Buzan (2001, 471) states that "the English School is an underutilized research resource and deserves a larger role in IR than it currently has. Its distinctive elements are its methodological pluralism, its historicism, and its interlinking of three key concepts: international system, international society and world society". The English School maintains that despite anarchy a "society of states" exists. This can be detected in the ideas animating institutions of war, the great powers, diplomacy, the balance of power, international commerce and law – and in the mutual recognition of sovereignty of states. While some aspects of the concept of EuroIslam, as I indicated in previous sections, could be envisioned in post-national terms, its essential "legal" as well as "citizenship" aspect in Tibi's usage does, in fact, encourage *some* "state-related-ness" (but not state-centrism, though).

Barry Buzan and Anna Gonzalez-Pelaez (2005 – permission to quote obtained from jr. author) have undertaken a study

> to sketch out the theoretical … elements of a research project which would seek to apply social structural concepts from English school theory to the Middle East … [with] the specific aim … to investigate whether or not significant, distinct international social

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[9] This is a somewhat arbitrary decision made as a geographical delimitation for this paper, based partially on a political institution, the "EuroMed Partnership" (and its political significance to "Europe" as well as the, somewhat gingerly established, "regionalism"/security community-like grouping), as well as historical socio-economic significance of Muslim countries neighboring Europe, compared to those that don't border the Mediterranean.

structures exist at the regional level represented by the Middle East in either or both of the forms identified by the English school: a *society of states*, or a *'world' society* rooted in the peoples and non-state actors of the region.

Neither the discussion of the English School in terms of Middle East International Society nor my comparison with it of EuroIslam privileges *prima facie* between the English School Pluralists or the Solidarists. I would argue that some aspects of both are applicable to the EuroIslam concept in that the solidarity and emancipatory aspects of the Solidarists, as well as the Pluralists' concept of international society for the greatest independence for states, are relevant to the analysis of EuroIslam as a (post-national) construct for a peace process. One of Pluralistm's relevant to this discussion is its state-centricity (which, although I am not criticizing it or find it limiting per se, this analysis focuses in part on the supra-national aspects of the EU as they relate to "legal-ness" in the EuroIslam context) as well as, significantly, the regionality ("EuroMed-ness" of EuroIslam). One limitation of Solidarist English School, pertaining to its relevance to EuroIslam, is its "messianic" aspect, which in my opinion slants too much in terms of "us vs. them" ontologically, while in my analysis of EuroIslam I am specifically seeking the "bridging" aspect - like the Mediterranean itself[10] - as one of unity. Others might interpret this "empathetic" aspect of the Solidarists as one of "identifying with", and hence unity, however.

Hedley Bull (1977, 279), quoted in Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez (2005, 5), explains that "by a world society we understand not merely a degree of interaction linking all parts of the human community to one another, but a sense of common interest and common values on the basis of which common rules and institutions may be built". Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez (Ibid.) argue that within the English School there are also sub-global interstate societies, which are "firmly occupied in the interstate and inter-human domains and perhaps in the transnational one …reflecting concerns with more political and/or cultural values" (Ibid.). This inter-human society is largely about collective identity (Buzan 2004), some overlapping, such as religious identities in relation to ethno-national ones, as is the case with EuroIslam. These authors argue that the global level is predominantly developed in the interstate domain (Ibid.), while I would argue in this paper that there can also be a trans-national cultural-normative process, such as EuroIslam as a Soft Power, which could (in fact needs to) play a significant role regionally (i.e. in the EuroMed).

I concur with Buzan and Gonzales-Pelaez that "by marginalising subglobal developments, the English school has sustained an emaciated conceptualization of what the whole idea of international/world society is about". I would add that in the case of EuroIslam it adds another layer of density to the security significance of "region" in international- and global society. Applying English School concepts of social structure at the subglobal level involves an analysis of 1. the local relationship between the interstate and nonstate-domains, an important analysis in the dynamics of the concept of EuroIslam as Tibi proposed and one which seems to be playing out in practice in Europe. 2. the interplay of social structures at the regional or subglobal and the global level derives from Weller (2002, 64-8, quoted in Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2005, 7) in terms of the degree of their dependence on shared geographical boundaries. This aspect, I maintain, is of lesser relevance in the discussion of EuroIslam "regionalism" along English School parameters. And 3. the interplay between "different social structures at the regional/subglobal level" (Ibid.), is an epistemologically significant process in my opinion in analyzing EuroIslam because it is exactly this process between the socio-religious traditions of Islam and their interplay on the subglobal scale with European/EU notions of "belonging" which is necessary to give emphasis to the development of alternative processes and discourses for peace in the Euro-Mediterranean.

Analyzing EuroIslam from these perspectives indicates that it is more than just an Arabic regional international society, but potentially a Euro-Mediterranean International Society

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[10] Although this is a geographic concept, perhaps it can serve as a focus in "visualizing" the intellectual concept of togetherness rather than of divisiveness in EuroIslam.

emanating from a post-national constructivist constellation. Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez (Ibid., 8) question that "subglobal international societies must automatically be in rivalry for global status" as the traditional English School discourse traditionally predicted in the Cold War context of Eastern and Western subglobal international societies to "almost inevitably fall… into struggle for universal dominion, in the process wrecking international society at the global level until one of them emerged victorious". Today "there are clearly no grounds (other than an ideological commitment to a *Machtpolitik* view of the world) for any automatic assumption that subglobal developments must fall into such rivalry (Ibid., 9).

Conclusion

Moravcsik (1999, 264) writes:

> Does informal intervention by high officials of international organizations decisively influence the outcomes of multilateral negotiations? … can 'faceless international bureaucrats, unelected and without power of purse or sword' really influence the decisions of powerful nation-states?[11] Are we seeing the emergence of a 'new statecaraft' grounded in international networks managed by supranational political entrepreneuers? A nearly unchallenged consensus across theories of international regimes, law, negotiation, and regional integration, answers these questions in the affirmative.

In line with Buzan's (2001, 471) argument that International Society represents the via media between the international system and world society, I find that Tibi's concept of EuroIslam fits very well into the post-national politico-institutional evolution currently taking place, more so in some regions (e.g. the EU) than in others. Buzan (Ibid.) further encourages more research to develop the English School's theoretical position and its relationship between international and world society. I propose to approach EuroIslam as "a way of challenging the theoretical fragmentation that afflicts IR, and of setting up the foundations for a return to grand theory" (Ibid.). EuroIslam, as a perfect example for the English School overall, is so inclusive (critics might say "vague"[12]) that both realist concerns, liberal interests, non-state international actors as well as post-national constellations can be logically integrated.

It is not only a state interest (e.g. Germany vis-à-vis Muslim population), but a transnational concern, hence "EuroIslam" as a regional security community in the age of globalization is everyone's concern: this particular issue is securitized in particular post- 9/11 as well as the expected blowback in terms of regional destabilization "towards" Europe from the Iraq War. It should be near the top of the agenda at least among countries/post-national regions such as the EU which border the Mediterranean on all sides. In the present paper I examined Bassam Tibi's concept of EuroIslam as an intellectual (in historical, sociological and IR theory terms) and a practical (in terms of its applicability to domestic and foreign policy) approach, supported in particular by social as well as "deep" constructivism and the English School, including aspects from both the Pluralists and Solidarists. EuroIslam can also be considered as a concept of "*ultra*-complex interdependency" (Keohance and Nye, 2001) or analyzed in terms of its foreign policy softpower potential. EuroIslam is about "giving a stake" to all concerned (e.g. Muslims and non-Muslim Europeans) in a peaceful "international society" in the EuroMed, encouraging cooperation and the ability to create long-term alliances rather than accentuating the status quo of ancient hostilities in the regions bordering the Mediterranean).

Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez (2005, 10) identify the vanguard potential of the English School's "international regional society" as a leading element playing a crucial role in how a

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[11] referring to Chayes and Chayes 1995, 271-272

[12] Buzan (2001, 273/4) refers to this as treating the English School as "as a zone of intellectual activity whose frontiers are extensive and fuzzy enough to avoid most disputes about ins and outs"

social movement unfolds. They state that "a vanguard theory of how interstate society expanded is implicit in the way the English School has presented the story of the European/Western interstate society becoming global". In this paper I tried to explicitly distance myself from this traditional ethnocentrism, and propose a "counter vanguard theory" of regional international society of which the EuroIslam social movement would be exemplary.

At the end of the day, is the process of EuroIslam just a fluffy utopia? I would say that vestiges of EuroIslam are in fact starting to manifest, e.g. in "Fusion Muslim chic" (Steigrad 2007) trend among young women in Europe. While one bird not spring make, the hypothesis is plausible that EuroIslam and the ideational dimension of this discourse represent significant soft power in starting to affect behaviors, values, culture, policies, institutions and public diplomacy for a shared, peaceful future rather than a clashing future (Nye 2004).

To quote Jolyon Howorth (2004, 211. Italics original): "We became so accustomed to the prison that history had built for us that, like recidivists or long-term hospital patients, we became almost incapable of visualizing any other kind of existence. No other world, it seemed, *could* exist."

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