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**THE REPRESENTATION OF ISLAM AND MUSLIMS IN WESTERN
SOCIETY AND MEDIA**

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Introduction

What is the path that international relations are taking to face the new challenges of our era? Nowadays, the world asset is at a turning point. Many conflicts and new globalized problems emerged and each continent is trying to find the way to address these new barriers and issues. The world is acclimatizing between the new clashes, the old ones never solved, the new international morality and norms, the point of stall reached by the United Nations, the recapitulation of the European Union process and how to face the intangible war made by terrorism. In all this tangle, Middle East is one of the most relevant protagonist. However, how are we facing the challenges coming from this vast geographic area, of social, political and cultural kind, if not even religious and economical ones? The Arab world and the Islam is posing serious dilemmas. However, in order to solve a problem, first it is needed to understand what the problem is, and who and why is causing it. Moreover, it should be important to detect if the problem is one, of a series of problems to be solved differently. Are we having a proper understanding of these challenges? Are we sustaining the proper attitude towards the problem/problems?

The argument of this dissertation is about the thesis that “our” western society perceives the Muslim and the Arab World on the basis of its own historical and cultural experience. This work wants to simply explain and raise awareness about the existence of a particular perspective and attitude that Westerners assume when talking about Islam, and how this constitutes a huge obstacle in the tackling of the social challenges posed by the Arab World nowadays. However, it will not be expressed any judgement of value on how wrong or right this behavior is, but it will be considered only as a given fact of our culture. Moreover, a particular focus that will be further discussed is the relevant role that Mass Media had in the propagation and settlement of biased ideas in the mindset of Western people.

Western attitude has been shaped in the decades by historical events, political and social

developments and a contrasted relationship with the Middle East, based even on religious grounds. The West saw the East as the symbol of the “Different”, such extreme to become the representation of the “Opposite”. Feared and distant, the East acquired specific connotations, that with the time became prejudices, stereotypes and *a priori* judgments. The West, sometimes conscious but most of times unconsciously, acted and express opinions affected by this bias.

The European Union (EU) is born as a very slow and long development, and before the EU, the European states had to find and define their identities through historical struggles and sometimes suffered processes. The European nation-states rooted their identities in the history, social and ideological changes and conquered their national sentiments sometimes through agony and hope. Such deep sentiments are difficult to neglect, and each state went through a different process of formation, that even if gave the same result in many cases as liberal and democratic values, as the formation of republican systems, the path still count and influence differently each national view, values and ideals. This historical construction came to threat the Europe itself. A very recent example is given by all the implications that led to the so-called Brexit, through referendum in June 2016.

The challenge for Europe is evident. As it is evident that if European integration itself arrived to a point of stall, it is hard to conceive how the “different” Muslims could be easily integrated in the European societies. Anyway, willingly or not, Islam is part of our society and it is imposing several challenges to our Western world and also to the existence of the EU itself. Extremism, fundamentalism, the “crisis of migrants”, Muslim secularism, Muslim religious norms creating ethical problems with liberal and democratic values: these are the arguments that are more discussed nowadays, and these are the arguments that need to receive proper attention, even from a social perspective.

In fact, speaking about concrete examples of how society is affected we witnessed recent events confirming that the West should try to revise its strategy in dealing with the Muslim community. One of these examples is the “burkini case” in Nice, France. Possibly touched by the recent terrorist attack that took place in the same city, in July 2016, where around 84 people have been killed and many other severally injured, the mayor of the city banned

women from wearing a the burkini¹ on public beaches. The ban spread to other French coastal cities but it has been finally judged unconstitutional by the National Court since breaching fundamental freedoms. This law was clearly made to target Muslims. It is human to think that the terrorist action that had taken place recently enhanced xenophobic sentiments, and fear. At the same time, it is unacceptable to get to the point of breaking national norms, values and ideals to contrast an Islamic entity as a whole, in a such imprecise attitude. It is evident, that the mayor's decision is based on grounds and reasons. At the same time, the inclination of westerners is to treat the Islam and Muslim as a unique entity.

Islam is fragmented, and it represents a very complex picture of cultures, ethnicities, geographical areas, practices, interpretations, dimensions, orientations and degrees of adherence. It cannot be reduced to a single, simple, common entity. We cannot talk about Europe as talking about Christianity, and at the same time talking about Islam is not the same as talking about the Muslim community overall.

Another example is about the many critics that the magazine of Charlie Hebdo received after publishing a drawing about the Italian catastrophic earthquake that hit Amatrice and surroundings in August 2016. The cartoon depicts the Italians as different kind of pasta, one image in particular shows dead Italians under layers of rubbles. Evidently, this picture of the situation raised disappointment, disgust and attacks to the satiric journal. A debate about the correctness and the actual right of expression of Charlie Hebdo to publish such offensive drawings has been raised and touched public opinion. Without spending time on judging the ethic, the freedom of expression or the actual target of the cartoon and the morality behind these kind of publishings; this event clearly put in evidence our different is the attitude in treating and expressing opinions on matters dealing with the West conversely to the East.

Indeed, Charlie Hebdo has been victim of a terrorist attack perpetrated by Muslim fundamentalists in January 2015. This attack has been fomented by the offending cartoons towards Muslims, the prophet Mohammad, Allah and Islam published by the journal. After the event, the public opinion has been reassumed against the Muslim community and no evidence of actual offence has been raised by the general public opinion that did not focus

¹ A swimsuit for women initially presented in Australia by the designer A. Zanetti. This clothing item covers the entire body, leaving uncovered hands, face and feet. This swimsuit has been used by Muslim women, since created according to Islamic traditions.

on the inappropriateness of these sketches but only on the horrible killings and the threat represented by fundamental Islam. Westerners mobilized to blame, with the stereotypical traits associated to Muslims, the aggressiveness, violence, and extremism; but no serious blame has been particularly put in evidence around the disturbing attitude of Charlie Hebdo.

Many Muslims probably have been offended by such satiric attacks, but not all the Muslims concluded that killing the cartoonists was an option. As no Italian attacked Charlie Hebdo's seat this time. It must be noticed that even if any Italian would have perpetrated such terroristic action, the blame would probably not be carried out by all the Italian community overall. The two situations are evidently not precisely comparable. However, in this context, the "Charlie Hebdo case" is an evident example of the different attitude of Westerners in the treatment and evaluation reserved to Muslim issues.

In this framework, Medias have a great influence and play a fundamental role. Due to historical biases, Medias are influencing our thoughts and attitude towards Islam, and spreading a misrepresentation of the Muslim world. Indeed, Mass Medias have a great responsibility on how the Westerners see Islam and even if this phenomenon sometimes happens non-voluntary, it affects our societal representations and constructions.

Clarification of terminology is needed. Therefore, with the terms, "we", "our" and "us", I intend the West, the Europeans, and the Westerners as I actually am. Indeed, my thesis is about that we have a particular inclination when evaluating facts and events about the Arab world, and we express ourselves with a biased attitude on Muslims and Islam. Therefore, while my intention is to be impartial as possible, and my theory is that of the existence of this attitude of which I am aware of, then I have to admit that I cannot be completely unbiased and do not always be proper when defining or talking about Islam. By the way, starting to look at it from this point of view, with awareness and more acquaintance, is a step closer in the understanding of this matter.

While with the word "West", I refer mostly to Europe and North America, otherwise specified. On the other hand, with the term "East", I intend most of time the entire area of Middle East and Asia, of course, enhancing the connection with the Arabic countries. Evidently, I might be imprecise, and abuse of generalizations either. While I will try to be as clear as possible about my reference. "Arab" and "Muslim" are most of times used with

two different conceptions, as it actually should be. Anyway, in the society we live, an average person might use these terms indifferently. In the end, with “Islam” is intended a very complex entity, that we will better explained in the course of the text.

About the structure of the thesis, the first chapter constitutes a sort of introduction to the world of Islam. Many concepts will be clarified and the basis of the religion, but not only. Some elements of the culture will be briefly explained for who knows anything about this reality. In fact, a huge problem influencing Western attitude is the poor knowledge diffused about Islam, intended in every aspect as its history, cultures, religion, societies and geography. Anyway, this first chapter will be very general either, and gives only a first acquaintance to get closer to this multiple entity. About Islam there is much more to say and to deepen. Moreover, this chapter could be useful to better understand how the fundamentalist view originated and to distinguish it from other Muslim inclinations and dimensions.

The second chapter takes into account two realities the Western and the Eastern one. In the chapter it is tried to explain the way Westerners see Islam and the negative connotations that sometimes come from this view. In this part, the work of Edward Said² is fundamental. One of his most famous books, called “Orientalism”, furnish a complex structure of reasons leading to the conclusion that Western world has its own way to see and represent the Oriental, i.e. the East. Even if the term does not apply exclusively to Middle East., Said spent many words on Islam. It will be explained how the “Orientalism” originated and what is the result of this bias of the West and focusing on history, literature, cinema, medias and people and in their contribution in the settlement of certain specific ideas.

The third chapter is dedicated to the Mass Media. In fact, the technological change had a strong impact on globalization and international affairs and reality became strictly dependent from how medias introduce us to the facts. Media has strong responsibility in the diffusion and construction of certain images about Islam. We will see how. The last chapter captures the essence of the others, and tries to apply these concepts in the actual situation ongoing in the European Union about the integration of Muslim communities. Moreover, retracing what said before, in this chapter some possible solutions, and possible

² Edward Wadie Said was a professor of literature, a public intellectual, and a founder of the academic field of postcolonial studies. He has born in Palestine and naturalized American citizen from birth by way of his father.

approaches, to the challenges will be illustrated.

1 Understanding the Basics of Islam

“So tell the tale – perhaps they will reflect.”

Koran 7:176

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington have been crucial events putting the Islamic World in the spotlight of the international affairs. Osama bin Laden, founder of the *jihād* fighters known as *al-Qaida*, claimed to be the perpetrator of these devastating attacks. These Islamic extremists are only a section of the many *jihād* federations and groups trained in Afghanistan or of a variety of sympathizers present in Pakistan, Libya, Sudan and Algeria. Anyway, these extremists represent only a small fraction of the Muslim population of the world, currently estimated at over 1 billion³.

“Bin Laden’s terrorism is not, for example, the expression of an innate Islamic readiness for violence or self-sacrifice, but the expression of his very specific world-view that rhetorically re-creates the meaning of *jihād*, power and sacrifice. His rhetoric is not conditioned by Islam – it is Islam, within his discourse, that is reconditioned by his rhetoric. In consequence, such a discourse is only successful in places where it helps to give meaning to a social reality. (...)”

[In this context], at a time of concern for political correctness, the boundaries of cultural identity are guaranteed. The political culturalization of the world order has created a new explanatory script for social and political events. It is asked whether Islam endorses or promotes suicide attacks, whether Islam unconditionally calls individual Muslims to *jihād* and whether Islam ethically legitimizes the use of violence. Humans do not appear any

³ Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (Hepton Books, Oxford, 2000)

more as responsible for their actions, but as an executive power of Islam – its agents. But their actions were never determined by normative Islamic systems. On the contrary, their interpretations reformulate Islam.”⁴

In order to comprehend Islam and fundamentalism, and understand how the extremist groups differs from the majority of the believers, representing only a niche or a “special” interpretation of it: historic, cultural and religious roots of Islam must be explained. This will show us that Islam is a very complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a simplistic connection between the religion and the fundamentalism. Moreover, it is interlaced with different realities, which the fundamentalist one is only a particular and restricted view, sometimes not even dictated by the religious reasons first⁵.

This chapter will be then dived in three main paragraphs. The first paragraph aim to explain the main aspects of Islam, and most superficial ones. The ones that reaches before our western eye, in order to have at least a basic framework through which understand the successive concepts. There will be talked about the foundation and the roots of Islam and the main pillars from a religious, social and political point of view. It be will be explained how through many divisions and schisms Islam is today a vary vast and fragmented reality that cannot be understood in simplistic and general terms. In the end, a useful part will be dedicated to the interactions between Europe and Middle East, and the Western colonization of the Eastern countries. This will be useful to show how the ideas about each other have historically been influenced and shaped.

Of course, this paragraph itself is very general too, but my aim is not to furnish enough information to make judgements or to fully understand Islam. The aim of the paragraph is to give a partial first overview on these themes, and to introduce to this world the reader at least with a general understanding. The reader should not draw conclusions from these explanations but notice how complicated and complex the Islamic framework is from a religious, historical, social, political, geographical, philosophical, ethnic, and even international point of view. Indeed, for any further explanation and in order to deepen these contents, the book “A modern history of Islamic World” of Reinhard Schultze offers

⁴ Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (cit.) p. XIV-XV

⁵ Classical Islamist social utopias were by no means homogeneous. Rather they arose wrapped in any number of ideological colors, assembling socialist, statist or even fascist world views. Their common ground was made up of nothing but a joint Islamic language and code: Islam itself never determined the ideological world-view of its adherents. It served more as an extremely powerful interpretation foil, which contributed to localize the global ideologies of the 20th century in Muslim communities.

a wider recognition of Islamic history and culture.

The second and the third paragraphs focus on two of the main issues brought to the Western attention today for what concerns a social aspect of Islam: **the role of the woman** and a political one: **the significance of the *jihad***. These two arguments of the contemporary anti-Islamic debate might seem detached from the previous ones that have a religious, cultural and historical content. But, I believe that instead they need to be address here, since how the West perceives these aspects have its explanation and foundation in the traditions, the culture and the religion of Islam. Moreover, these two aspects (a diffuse Muslim practice and a core concept of Islam), of the most criticized, represent relevant examples of the misunderstanding originated from a low Western knowledge of the Islamic practices.

In the paragraph about women will be discussed about the basic precepts of Islam concerning women, and the role that they cover in the Islamic society. Especially, with a particular focus on the practice of veiling that gained a very powerful and symbolic connotation in the West (see the recent example of the Burkini Law in France), as a key sign of Muslim women's segregation. It will be further explained what is and how developed: The Islamic feminism. A discipline that born and spread between Muslims and Westerners to deal with Muslim women rights and the affirmation of women in the Islamic societies.

The paragraph about the *jihad* will try to give an explanation about what this term really means for Muslims. It will be traced back to the roots of the term and the words of the Koran. By the way, it is important to point out that we are in front of one of the many interpretations. In fact, the word and the concept of *jihad* involve a wide range of meanings and translations. However, what will be explained is the major view, as the most of Muslims interpret it according to the Prophet teachings.

Indeed, understanding the culture and the history of Islam may let us comprehend how this reality is not a unique one, but instead a very complex phenomenon. Moreover, it will let us reach a closer perspective to this world, and with more knowledge of it and respect of it, it will be easier to detect and understand certain Western attitudes when talking about Islam.

1.1 A Brief Introduction to the History and Culture of Islam

The history and the culture of Islam are very complex and it is not easy to sum them up here in few main aspects. Anyway, the aim of the paragraph is to give at least an overview of the Islamic World and an introductory acquaintance to better get in the Muslim culture. By the way, the knowledge of an average Western citizen is very low about Islam and even about the very basics and the foundation of this religion are unknown or misunderstood. Islam has roots even in the Christianity and as in this case lot of its values and moral concerns can be traced back to other religions.

Of course, the history of Islam is very complex, long and tortuous. My intent is not to build an historic reconstruction or explanation. I will focus on the aspect that might furnish a general proper knowledge of the culture and religion in the context of understanding Western involvement in Arab history and understand the culture through the birth of Islam and the foundation by the Prophet Mohammad.

1.1.1 *The Basics*

“Anyone who seeks to understand Islam must have recourse to the Koran. The Koran, according to Muslim belief, is the Word of God, the Revelation of His divinity and His command to men; it is the basis of the Islamic religion, a basis which has remained unaltered during the course of history, even if it is constantly experienced and interpreted anew.”⁶ The Koran words come from the teachings of Mohammad, i.e. the Prophet. According to his own belief and that of his community (called *umma*); he is the recipient of the Revelation, meaning he is God’s human instrument. The *umma* can be described as a kind of a supra-national community with a common history and it refers to the community both in political and religious terms.

Even if Allah was the name of God, even before Islam, what Mohammad did is to have contributed in the creation of a common literary language and in the reunification of the

⁶ Gerhard Endress, *Islam. An Historical Introduction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2nd edition, Edinburgh, 2002) p. 22

Arabs under a common faith, based on the exigencies of the at the time Arab society⁷. He brought to the Arab people the Revealed Message in their own language, and the beautiful words of this Message have been later codified in the Koran⁸ by the third caliph ‘Uthman in between the years 644-656. Must be added that Mohammad in building Islam drew its religious paradigms from the Jewish and Christian experience but conserving the ethics, legal concepts and religious rituals of the ancient Arabia.

Muslims date the events starting from the year 622, when the *Hijra* took place. This historical event represents the migration of the Prophet from Mecca, his city of origin, to Medina, because of clashes with the main tribe governing the city. In Medina, “the religious institutions of Islam took on the form which, in their broad essentials, they have preserved until today”⁹.

There are five main pillars that guide the Muslim through his Islamic faith and life: “the structure is the religion of Islam, with its three dimensions: [*Islam* (submission), *Iman* (faith) and *Ishan* (doing what is beautiful)]. If the five fundamental practices of Islam are called “pillars”, the implication is that everything else depends upon them.”¹⁰

1. The first pillar is the ***Shahadah***. This word means “to testify” or “to bear witness”. This pillar constitutes the confession of two sentences: “There is no god but God” and “Mohammad is God’s messenger” that a Muslim has to say at least once in his/her life. By the way, Muslims recite this confession frequently since it is incorporated in the daily prayers. “The Shahadah’s primary importance comes out clearly in the fact that reciting the Shahadah in the ritual whereby one submits oneself to God, that is, becomes Muslim”¹¹. This formula must be recited in Arabic language in the presence of two witnesses, clearly Muslims themselves.

⁷ The society of Mohammad was in change from nomadic to sedentary, from a tribal collectivism to individualism, from superstitious polytheist to monotheist. This society needed a way out of these conflicts and the arrival of the Prophet furnished the key to transform the new society and guide the change unifying the people.

⁸ The Koran is composed of 114 *suras*, different in length and number of verses, the first of which is called *Fatiha*, the opening *sura*, with a fundamental role in Muslims’ everyday prayers.

⁹ Gerhard Endress, *Islam. An Historical Introduction* (cit.) p. 28

¹⁰ Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, London, 1994) p. 8

¹¹ Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (cit.) p. 11

2. The second pillar is the *Salat*. The basic sense of this word is “pray” or “blessed”, but in Arabic it has even other meanings. “The Koran commands the performance of *salat* more than it commands any other activity, and prophetic sayings suggest that God loves the *salat* more than any other human act. It is not accidental that performing the ritual prayer in communion has come to symbolize Islam on television.”¹² Even if the Koran commands Muslims to perform this act there is little in it about the actual ritual and how should be performed. Minor differences arose in the different schools, anyway the major provide two basic kinds of *salat* that are the required and the recommended. The required ones are the ones to constitute the second pillar, while the others are connected to other particular moments and occasions. On Fridays, the *salat* is performed in the congregational form. An important aspect to notice is that prayers said in congregation acquire a stronger meaning and power. While the other days, it must be performed for five times during the day.

3. The third pillar is *Zakat*¹³. This is commonly translated “alms tax”. The root of the word *zakat* means in fact “purity”, and people purify their health by giving a share of it to God. According to the Koran there are eight categories of people designed to be the receivers of this tax: the needy, the poor, the collectors of the *zakat*, those to be reconciled to Islam, captives, debtors, those fighting in God’s path, and travelers. This activity has a clear and strong social connotation and also, it put in evidence how Islam look at priorities. First, the purification of someone depends by his/her attitude towards the others, helping the others make you pure. Second the tax is paid to another person and this creates necessarily a social interaction. Third, *zakat* represents an obligation only to people that can afford it. This makes evident that Islam establish some aspects that are obligatory to everyone, like the *Shahadah*, and others that depend from circumstances, like the *zakat*. “Islam ask Muslims to put their own house in order first. Only then are they expected to look at other’s people houses, according to the instructions given by God. In short, the primary task is to set up a right relationship with God, and this begins with the individual. A healthy society can only exist when its members are healthy. The

¹² Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (cit.) p. 11

¹³ To do not make confusion with the *sadaqa*, that is another tax but paid as a complete voluntary act of piety.

individuals who make the society are the primary focus of attention. But their religious well-being demands that they accept some measure of social responsibility.”¹⁴

4. The fourth pillar is to **fast during the month of *Ramadan***. The month called *Ramadan* is the ninth month of the Islamic year, based on lunar calendar. Anyway, fasting consists in refraining from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual activity. The fasting requirement starts after the achieving of the puberty, even if some exceptions exist. They are actually forbidden to do the fasting whose ill, travelling, pregnant, and menstruating women. Missed fasting needs to be recuperated on another time at discretion of the person. “Ramadan is a time of heightened attention to the rules of right conduct. For example, the Prophet said: “five things break the fast of the faster: lying, backbiting, slander, ungodly oaths, and looking with passion”. In other words, at a time when certain normally permitted acts are forbidden, acts that are always forbidden ruin a person’s fast.”¹⁵ It is evident that even *Ramadan* has a strong social component. When the pattern of individual life changes, the effects in the society are multiplied. All the restaurants and shops are closed during the day in the traditional Islamic communities, and when it comes the moment of eating, this represent a festive occasion.

5. The fifth pillar of Islam is the ***Hajj***, that is to make the pilgrimage to the House of God if you are able to. Every year a set of ritual take place around the Mecca. Mecca is a sacred place, and it is such since long time before Islam. It is in fact believed that Adam himself built a sanctuary in this city, eventually rebuilt by Abraham. By the time of the appearance of Islam, the *Kaaba* in Mecca became a place of pilgrimage and worship. Muslims are required to make the *hajj* once in their lifetimes, but only if they have the means to do so. This aspect acquired significance if it is compared to a time in which airplanes and trains did not exist at all, and this pilgrimage represented a momentum of life of great importance. Nowadays, this connotation is lost. In few hours from all over the world, Mecca is reachable. While traditionally, the pilgrimage was understood as a grand rite of

¹⁴ Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (cit.) p. 16

¹⁵ Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (cit.) p. 17

passage in one's life, when people got over with their everyday life and could spend their time exclusively to meet God.

6. Is there the existence of a sixth pillar? “Some authorities have held that there is a sixth pillar of Islam: the *jihad*. This word has become well-known in [the West] because of the cotemporary political situation and the focus of media on violence. Hence, a bit more attention has to be paid to it than would be warranted if we were looking at the role that *jihad* plays in Islam. The first thing one needs to understand about the term *jihad* is that “holy war” is a highly misleading and usually inaccurate translation.”¹⁶ This discourse is particularly relevant nowadays, especially in order to understand the attitude that we apply to Islamic traditions and actions. The term *jihad* is abused by medias, without a deep understanding of it. By the way, this aspect is only one of the many aspects of Islam that are misunderstood and criticized without a profound knowledge of it. I retain that a complete paragraph should be dedicated to this question that came to symbolize Islam in the West, especially through medias. The matter will be deepened in the paragraph 1.3 of this chapter.

[Anyway,] There are many other Koranic and prophetic injunctions that Muslims have to observe. (...) Among forbidden activities are lying, stealing, murder, adultery, and fornication and Western usages that are usually considered to lie outside the pale of religion, such as inheritance, marriage, business, transactions, and food that may or may not be eaten.

The whole body of rules and regulations set down by the Koran and the Prophet gradually came to be codified as the *Sharia*, or “the broad path leading water”¹⁷, the road of right activity that all Muslims have to follow. (...) Not only does the *sharia* tell people what they must do and they must not do, it also tells them what they should do and what they should not do, and it tells them explicitly that many things are different. Hence we are faced with five categories of actions: the required, the recommended, the indifferent, the reprehensible, and the forbidden.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (cit.) p. 20

¹⁷ Meaning of the water is the heavenly water that purifies and saves.

¹⁸ Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (cit.) pp. 22-23

In 2011, with several revolts ongoing in many Arab countries, the debate about sharia law versus secular law gained new scrutiny. Indeed, in Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt are examples of it. It has been discussed between Muslims whether or not democracy could be legitimate. Conservatives believe that the concept of democracy is purely a Western construct, and that are Western countries to wish it to be introduced in the Arab realities. While, on the other hand, some moderates sustain the democratic asset as something commended by the Koran itself, when talked about “mutual consultation”. Some Muslim scholars, such as Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, an expert of *sharia*, believe even that the best way to observe *sharia* is through secular governments. In fact, his idea is that enforcing *sharia* through coercive power of the state negates its religious nature, because Muslims would be observing the law of the state and not freely performing their religious obligation as Muslims.¹⁹

Anyway, this discussion deals with only a fraction of the Muslim world that is the countries around the Gulf and Middle East. In fact, there are different example of states where Islam is the first professed religion that have a state system based on the Westphalian conception. A clear example is Indonesia where 300 million Muslims live in a democratic a pluralistic system.

1.1.1 Schism

After the death of the Prophet, in the year 632, some events took place. At the moment of the Prophet's death the Arabian Peninsula was Islamic but many conflicts arose after: about the legitimacy of the caliphs, the successor of the Prophet, about the interpretation and inspiration of the Koran, about the legal system. Mohammad left no indication about his successor, and the caliph (*khalifa*) should be chosen as the most pious person and to rule as the deputy of the Prophet according to God's will.

The first four caliphs are called the *Rashidun*, that means the “righteously guided”. Only the first two, anyway, were elected belonging to same tribe of the Prophet, the Quraysh, and unopposed: Abu Bakr (632-634) and 'Umar (634-644). After them, there had been 'Uthman (644-656) and Ali (656-661). During the governance of the latter, the first

¹⁹ 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad Na'im. *Islam and the secular state: negotiating the future of Shari'a*. (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2008)

religious schism took place. In fact, Ali was opposed by the people supporting his predecessor. On the other hand, Ali's party, the Alids later known as *Shia*, supported him by the fact of being the Prophet's son-in-law, and so retaining ties of blood with Mohammad. *Shiites* think that Ali is the guardian of Mohammad's inheritance. Anyway, the outcome of the conflict brought division into Islam.

It is important to know that from this moment on the schism between *Sunni* and *Shia*, famous for major conflicts ongoing nowadays, has been shaped around an ideological conflict dealing with the succession to the third caliph, getting then after a religious conception. Of course, the Islamic history is very much more complicated and involves other struggles, dynasties, tribes and ideological conflicts but it is from this historical moment on, that Islam started to be fractured. Many different ideologies and parties arose, and this was only the first of other major schisms that occurred.

Anyway, the *Sunni-Shia* division remains the most emblematic. Members of the two sects, *Shia* and *Sunni*, have co-existed for centuries sharing many fundamental beliefs and practices, while differing in particular in the role of the Imam and of the Ayatollah. From Lebanon and Syria to Iraq and Pakistan, many recent conflicts have emphasized the sectarian divide, tearing communities apart. Several other movements eventually have developed from these schisms and even incessant intellectual disputes about the correct understanding of Islam and its practice. This makes clear why generalizing Islam and Muslim actions and inclinations could sound terribly wrong.

Only with a deep knowledge statements could be made about Muslim world, or Islam. By the way, we should remember that by having a western point of view we can hardly avoid to be biased and this aspect will be further explained in the Second Chapter of this work talking a lot about "Orientalism". Anyway, what follows is the history of the first interactions and exchanges between Middle East and the West. This could help to understand Western influence operated over the East and the Islam, and how, in what way and in which sense the Western view has been shaped around these historical events.

1.1.2 Colonialism and Westernization

The colonization of the Middle East started with the Ottoman empire collapsing because no longer able to sustain the military crisis and the need for modernization. The colonial powers looking for expansion, especially for what concerns agricultural and trade areas, saw in the collapse of the Ottoman empire the perfect opportunity of conquest. The missed opportunity of the empire of industrial revolution and modernization is mirrored even by the absence of a middle class and *bourgeoisie*.

By the way, through colonialism modernity and illuminist ideals have been brought by the West, anyway received only partially from an urban and high part of the society. This brought to a huge gap between social classes, on one hand illiterate farmers and on the other the élite governing the territory, recipient of the modernization. While, instead modernization in the military field led to several revolutions. Indeed, this is the situation that developed in the post-colonial phase with the dictatorships that we saw in many Middle Eastern countries today, for example Syria, Iran, Iraq or Libya.

Starting from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the European powers start to affect Middle Eastern rulers. In the Ottoman Empire the so-called “*Tanzimat* reforms” have been approved, as an example to modernize the states and compete with the West. These reforms consisted in importing versions of the western model of constitutional government, civil law, secular education and industrial development. At the time²⁰, the Ottoman Empire was known by the West as the "sick man of Europe" and European powers tried to increase their financial control over its territories. Soon this domination became a clear intention of conquest.

The colonialization started. The French power conquered Algeria in 1830 and Tunisia in 1878, extending later its influence to Lebanon and Syria. While the British occupied Egypt in 1882 and established some time later an effective control of the Persian Gulf. Even the Italians seized Libya in 1912. On the other hand, the Ottomans turned to Germany to protect them from these Western powers, but the result was increasing financial and military dependence on Germany.

At the doors of the First World War the Ottoman Empire decided to make an alliance with Germany joining its side against Britain and France. Anyway, the British have been able to

²⁰ In the 19th century.

detect the Ottoman Empire's weakness pushing and supporting an Arab Revolt against the Ottoman rule, with the promise to the rioters of a subsequent Arab independence. An agreement has been established between the British troops, with their correspondent Edward Thomas Lawrence, and Husain, for the Arab troops, nominated as the king of the Hijaz (Cisgiordania), ensuring the governance of the Arabs of this territory. By the way, when the Ottoman Empire was defeated by the Arab uprising, the British did not maintain the promise. Indeed, the British and the French governments concluded a secret treaty (Sykes-Picot Accords, 1916) between the two of them, dividing the Middle East territories under their control.

Moreover, the British promised the Zionist movement international support (Balfour Declaration) to get their historical homeland and this has been seen by the Arab population as a betrayal in respect of the precedent accords (this situation is the beginning of what we know today as the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict). Anyway, during and after the Second World War, the British, the French, and the Soviets departed from many parts of the Middle East, and many Middle Eastern states gained their independence again or anew.

Basically, Europe persists even today in looking at the Islamic world in a colonial framework. "The relationship between 'Islam and Europe' has had a number of effects in the historiography of the Islamic world. For one thing, it demands that the Islamic world be on principle excluded from the history of modern times because it is bound to a religion which has not traversed the 'politico-ideological process' that made Europe into 'a historical idea'. Since Islam experienced neither an 'Enlightenment, nor a Reformation nor the French Revolution', which made 'religious faith reflexive and unfettering subjective freedom', it is a 'pre-modern culture' and as such it stands outside the modern global community. We may add here that, if it is true, as many would argue, that the modern world represents the second great revolution of human history after the so-called Neolithic revolution then, within this framework, the gulf between the Islamic world and the West would be as wide as that between the Paleolithic world and advanced agrarian civilizations. It remains to be seen if there is any truth in these postulates. Curiously, they are repeated again and again, although no one has actually taken the trouble to find out if there is any reality in them from a historiographical point of view. In fact, there are indications that Islamic history did, as early as the 16th century, and on the strength of an independent tradition, participate in elaborating a modern culture, which in many respects

shows distinct parallels with European cultural history.”²¹

1.2 Women and the Use of Veiling

It is true that the next two paragraphs will deal with two issues that extrapolate from the Arab history, and are instead examples of contemporary debates. Anyway, these elements of the Islamic culture are used sometimes as the symbols of the anti-Arabs politics in many of the Western countries. These aspects have with their roots in the Islamic law and culture. For this reason, the explanation of these two contemporary debates can be detected in the basics of culture and practices of Islam. In order to better understand these two aspects properly a deep knowledge of Islam is needed.

The role that women cover in Islamic society has been questioned many times by Westerners. The practice of veiling, in particular, came to symbolize the abuses and the status that women are forced to live in Muslim world. Of course this paragraph is not sustaining any position on the righteousness or not of the activity, I am not in the position of giving any judgement, and since I am European, I cannot deny that this practice is not a manifestation of freedom or gender equality in western terms. But I can only talk as a biased Westerner immersed in certain values and society, with an improper knowledge of Islamic culture.

First of all, before questioning so hardly the practices of a world of which we do not know much about, we should look at the status of our own society. “Our” equality in the treatment of women and people of other ethnic groups (see Muslims or migrants today) should be analyzed first, and then ask ourselves if gender equality has been actually reached anywhere in the world. Second, the roots of the practice are deep in a religious belief and social structure that has been shaped and reshaped by history, with proper religious, ethical and ideological values that these people believe in. Third, our attitude of judging always comes with a preconception: the one that we are the righteous ascertaining about the wrong ones.

²¹ Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (cit.) p.3

1.2.1 *The role of Women in Muslim Society and the Veil*

The *sharia* requires women to cover themselves, based on the precepts of the Koran. The practical application in modern Muslim countries varies with the combination of individual and social taste. For example, more secular governments of Turkey or Tunisia banned for a period the use of headscarves in public buildings and in many countries such as Egypt, Tunisia or Morocco this practice is not an overall diffuse costume.

Concerning the issue of veiling, the complexity regards the multiple meanings that can be given to the practice, depending sometimes even from the circumstances. The sense of wearing the veil can be relatively personal as a matter of modesty, personal choice and behavior, an act of piety or related to a need of self-assertion within the inner circle. Furthermore, the veil can also be the signifier of social alienation, and not necessarily proving adherence to the religion. In the context of a western society a Muslim woman may don the veil as an anti-system gesture, as if she does not recognize to belong to that society or a political statement. Of course it can even fit with Western stereotype and represent a sign of coercion and submission. By the way, the reasons why a woman wear the veil can be many.²²

Even other issues regard the gender-based inequality in families and affect women physically and mentally, disadvantaging female well-being and health. Some of the themes that are mostly discussed about the disadvantages that women suffer under Islamic law, there are: domestic violence, societal and familial pressure, female mutilation, honor killings, and so on and so forth.

Another practice is the so-called female genital mutilation or female genital surgery or female circumcision. Human rights activists claim this ritual as a form of gender-based violence. In 1980 this issue emerged and Western media in the mid-1990s talked a lot about it. Anyway, this practice is pre-Islamic and for what concerns Islam is adopted only in Somalia and Sudan. “When one considers that the practice does not prevail and is much condemned in countries like Saudi Arabia, the center of the Islamic world, it becomes clear that the notion that it is an Islamic practice is a false one”.²³ Furthermore, the female circumcision is a practice diffused even in other cultures, foregone also in Christianity. We

²² Renata Pepicelli, *Femminismo Islamico. Corano, Diritti, Riforme*. (Carocci Editore, Roma, 2010)

²³ Haseena Lockhat, *Female Genital Mutilation: Treating the Tears* (London: Middlesex University Press, 2004), p. 16.

do not have to forget also that even men are subjected to the mandatory circumcision, then it cannot be treated as matter of discrimination. Abu Sahlieh said about it: "Circumcision is a *sunna* (tradition) for the men and *makruma* (honorable deed) for the women"²⁴.

Anyway, practical changes have been detected in correlation to the women status under Islamic law in nowadays societies: rapid demographic changes have been detected together with the decreasing of marriage age and educational gender disparities. Women keep being under-represented in politics but the ratio of participation of women in the labor force increased. By the way, it is still clear that the role of the woman in some Islamic society is quite far comparable to the one in Western societies (where still gender inequality exists and where still gender-based violence and sexual crimes exist too). By the way, it still remains simplistic to assume about the condition of women in Islamic regions depends completely by the religion.

In fact, Muslim women are enormously diverse across the regions and Islamic countries. Anyway, in some cases Muslim women start to be reducing the distance within non-Muslim women lifestyle. They are increasingly mobilizing against the disadvantages they experience as women, but not only because of in a Muslim society. Gender equality has not been achieved anywhere in the world at a full percentage and of course, it is not present in Muslim societies either. By the way, many Muslim women as non-Muslim ones are striking and fighting for their rights, as a proof of it: the emergence of the Islamic feminism.

1.2.2 *Islamic Feminism*

Feminism is a phenomenon that deals with the rights of women and gender equality and it has historically been created by both the East and the West, by the colonized and the colonizers, and it has been widespread by women of different races, religions and ethnicities. Therefore, "Those who claim that feminism is 'western' and 'white' do not know their history and perpetuate the circulation of myths"²⁵.

In the 1990s, the term "Islamic feminism" emerged and started to be discussed as such.

²⁴ Sami A. Aldeeb Abu Sahlieh, *To Mutilate in the Name of Jehovah or Allah: Legitimization of Male and Female Circumcision*. (*Medicine and Law*, Volume 13, Number 7-8, 1994) pp. 575-622

²⁵ Anitta Kynsilehto, *Islamic Feminism* (Juvenes Print University of Tampere, Tampere, 2008) p. 25

“On one hand, this debate is due to the ways in which it is embedded in the wider discourses concerning women’s rights and Islam, and the position of women in Muslim-majority societies as well as of Muslim women in societies where Muslim populations constitute a minority. On the other hand, the debate entangles to the controversies between the labelling practices and the positionalities of those who seek to resist the given labels: who is entitled to speak as and/or name someone else as an “Islamic feminist?” How are these labels accommodated, contested and eventually resisted? With these questions in mind, providing an exclusive definition of the term ‘Islamic feminism’ would raise numerous concerns, given also the multiplicity of definitions concerning different ways of conceptualizing feminism, or different feminisms, and the debates concerning ‘Islamic’ or ‘Islamist’ in connection with feminisms.”²⁶

It is not implicit in the Koran that women are inferior to men. It is men that interpreted the Koran justifying and proceeding to women submission. Further, what many activists and female scholars accuse is the universalist thought. In fact, the generalization and simplification about the status of women in Islam is misleading. Women issues cannot be treated as unique entity, detached from other questions such as class, race, age and nationality.²⁷

Moreover, the Koran not only does not explicitly talk about women inferiority but it contains instead principles in favor of gender equality and even social justice. Moreover, it is not the Koran and the Hadith itself to have established the patriarchal system but the interpretation made of them. This what many scholars sustain, basing their opinions on a modern interpretation of the Koran, founding grounds capable to challenge the patriarchal traditions. Moreover, between the most famous feminist dealing with Koranic interpretations Fatima Mernissi found that the misogynistic principles that can be detected in the Koran were entrenched within the sacred literature and enforced through manipulation of the texts both within and after Muhammad’s lifetime. According to Fatima, the actual understanding of the Koran comes only by Only by studying the context of emergence of the texts. The original Islamic principles are contained in the *hadith*, but in the centuries the correct interpretation has been victim of many bias of the time and the

²⁶ Anitta Kynsilehto, *Islamic Femminism* (Cit) p. 9

²⁷ Renata Pepicelli, *Femminismo Islamico. Corano, Diritti, Riforme.* (cit.)

position of women within Islam should be reviewed.²⁸

A signifying example is the feminist actions about the interpretation of the Koran in Morocco, that brought to the reformation of the Family Code in 2004. In this case, a re-reading of the Koran in a key of reevaluation of the role of the women led to a new code that guarantee increasing rights to women inside families.²⁹

By the way, Islamic feminism is still a working in progress. “To engage Islamic feminism is to stretch our minds and to expand the parameters of knowledge, and to develop and refine new analytical and conceptual vocabulary. It is to forge new bonds and extend the scope and forms of our collective and everyday activism. It is also to enter an embattled arena and perhaps this is a sign of Islamic feminism’s urgency and relevance.”³⁰ Islamic feminism is still ongoing and the debate shows many different ways of understanding what constitutes ‘Islamic feminism’ and in the wider context gender and religiosity.

The existence itself of an Islamic feminism, and Muslim feminists (between the most famous the Professor Asma Barlas and Senior Research Fellow Margot Badran) show that the debate is open, and that many are questioning or protecting the grounds of the patriarchal Islamic system, what is not put in question anyway, is the Islam. In fact, Muslim women have their right to profess their religion according to their human and civil rights. “Islamic feminism is more radical than Muslims’ secular feminism. Islamic feminism insists on full equality of women and men across the public-private spectrum. (...) Islamic feminism stands to benefit us all, Muslims of both sexes, as well as non-Muslims living side by side with Muslims everywhere”³¹

Random and general judgements are widespread in the West about Islam and the role of the woman, and average westerners are usually unaware of this work and the efforts that scholars and women of the Islamic sphere are putting in the debate. Conclusions, as usual, in matters of such complexity are difficult to reach. The presence itself an ongoing debate through most of the Arab countries is a clear evidence of the involvement of the Muslims themselves on the elaboration of modern interpretations of their own basis. Islam is not

²⁸ Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam*. (Basic, New York, 1991)

²⁹ Renata Pepicelli, *Femminismo Islamico. Corano, Diritti, Riforme*. (cit.)

³⁰ Anitta Kynsilehto, *Islamic Feminism* (Cit) p. 35

³¹ Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam. Secular and Religious convergences*. (One World publications, London, 2009) P. 250

questioned itself, again, but what we are looking at are the practice and interpretations that the men made of the words of God.

1.3 The Meaning of Jihad

“The attitudes of some Muslims who claim to defend the dignity of Islam and Prophet through violent means is a reflection of their ignoramus of origin and purpose of jihad in Islam or they have been misguided by sentiments. Demanding for the head or killing somebody on the account of desecration of the Qur’an is unfounded.”³²

If you look at the term *jihad* from a linguistic point of view it means “effort”, in the sense of a strong effort that engage all our forces. This effort has always to be *fi sabīl Allāh*, that means “on the path to God. There are many kinds of *ḡihād fi sabīl Allāh* then in a Muslim’s life that can belong to the interior sphere of life or to the exterior one, and therefore the one of the spiritual life and the one of the concrete and material life. From the Koran we retrace the meaning of Islam, and therefore even this term is interpreted according to it. Therefore, to comprehend the doctrine of *jihad* it must be understood that the semantic meaning of the word is wide and it could be referend to a war effort, anyway bonded to an ethical behavior, or spiritual effort of the interior struggles. The point is to comprehend that jihad implies both the perspectives, and who use only one of the two definitions is making a partial interpretation of the term. Extremism and suicide terrorism cannot be linked to this evaluation then.³³

Starting from the semantic definition, another important clarification is to make a distinction between the existing Islamic beliefs, such as Sunni, Shia and the Khawariji. Indeed, each of these movements developed its own doctrine of *jihad*. Moreover, other distinction is about the juridical orientations, *madhab*. In the end, there is a further debate inside the Sunni current brought about by the Sufism. Each of these visions and level have their own literature and led to the formation of diverse disciplines: *ilm al-tafsīr* (about the Koranic exegesis), *‘ilm al-ḥadīth* (about the sayings of the prophet), *ilm al-kalām* (about a

³² Bashir Abdul-Raheem, *The Concept of Jihad in Islamic Philosophy*. (American International Journal of Social Science, Vol. 4, No. 1, February 2015) p. 147

³³ Nicola Melis, *Il concetto di gihad*. (in P. Manduchi (a cura di), “Dalla penna al mouse. Gli strumenti di diffusione del concetto di gihad”, Angeli, Milano 2006) pp. 23-54.

theological discourse). All these disciplines in their work deals with the concept of *jihad*. Therefore, to talk about jihad should be proper to study and have a knowledge of them.³⁴ In this context, even the historical development is important to better understand the concept. In the past, the *jihad* appeared in different kind of conflicts, anyway talking about the actual struggles that took place in the name of *jihad* must be weighted on the fact that the historical concept is influenced by facts, contingencies and the historical framework. Therefore, we can distinguish an institutional *jihad*, an historical one, and in the end a juridical one. In fact, it is the juridical vision of the *jihad* that is the one used by the fundamentalism and exploit even by Western Media. This conception is the one that translates the term as “holy war”, dictated by the Law of God. Anyway, this aspect is misleading because it detects the jurisprudence in the Islam as the only soul of it. While instead Islam is made even by other aspects, such as the Sufism and concrete historical and cultural determinacies.³⁵

Those who want to understand properly this concept should be bringing to his/her attention all these aspects. Knowledge and accuracy is relevant to do not reach misleading and superficial conclusions. Each thins should be called with its own proper name, and conclusive random judgements would only make worse the situation in the already difficult situation between Islamic world and Western world. Both the parts should engage in better and more profound understanding of each other but even of their own story (because, as seen, even Muslims misunderstand the concept of *jihad*).³⁶

It is true then that Islam include the possibility of acts of violence, in certain sense, and that the interpretations of the precepts of Islam can be many. Moreover, it is evident that the fundamentalist did not followed the one above. But on the other hand, it is even true that the Koran and Islam do not say to kill innocents or to kill people in the name of the religion, do not say to force the world to Islam and do not say to spread violence in the name of God. Any interpretation that any fundamental group could have made of the words of God remain a personal view. Islam does not preach for violence itself, and this is clear. Many wars have been fought in the name of Christianity, many wars arose for religious reasons. The fault, by the way, is not of God or of the religion itself, but of men. We cannot point the finger to the religion, since Islam do not tell to practice acts of

³⁴ Nicola Melis, *Il concetto di gihad*. (cit.) pp. 23-54.

³⁵ Nicola Melis, *Il concetto di gihad*. (cit.) pp. 23-54.

³⁶ Claudio Lo Jacono, *I cosidetti fondamentalismi islamici*. (Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso, Roma, 1993)

violence, randomly targeting innocents, or attack without have been attacked. Therefore, if there is someone's fault is of humans, and we cannot target the overall religion and with it all the Muslims, since the most of them are following the teachings as explained above.

To conclude, the opening of the recent relevant work of the Italian scholar Massimo Campanini, send a very direct message to the public opinion and Western society about the attitude with which to face the understanding of fundamentalism: "L'opinione pubblica in Occidente si ferma attonita davanti ai morti di Parigi, ma deve imparare a ragionare freddamente, deve imparare a individuare le radici della malattia per combatterla. E queste radici non stanno nell'intrinseca violenza dell'Islam come farneticano intellettuali e politici e opinion-makers."³⁷

³⁷ Massimo Campanini, *Quale islam? Jihadismo, radicalismo, riformismo*. (La Scuola, Brescia, 2015) p.1

2 *How we see Islam*

“All knowledge that is about human society, and not about the natural world, is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgment and interpretation. This is not to say that facts or data are nonexistent, but that facts get their importance from what is made of them in interpretation... for interpretations depend very much on who the interpreter is, who he or she is addressing, what his or her purpose is, at what historical moment the interpretation takes place.”

Edward W. Said

With ‘Islam’ is intended a very complex phenomenon: “the ‘Islamic World’ is a blanket term. It covers all those countries, regions and societies in which Muslims live together as a majority, and which are historically connected with the development of Islamic culture since the 7th century. This is a traditional concept which depends on the notion that Muslims form a cultural unity, and that this unity is of greater significance than the specific traditions of individual countries or social histories. Moreover, it assumes that the Islamic world has a ‘unifying bond’ in the religion of Islam, that it is a space defined by its inhabitants’ unified profession of Islam.

It is plausible, on the other hand, to conceive the Islamic world as a global culture: global because the limits of the Islamic world, insofar as they can be defined at all, cannot be staked out by political or social units, since the Islamic world consists of more than countries and states; and a culture because Islam consists primarily of a network of social relations that are conveyed by communication and symbolic systems and about whose content there more or less exists a consensus. If the Islamic world is described as an independent cultural space or as a global culture, this means that it confronts, say, Europe or ‘the Western world’. But while the unity of the West is no longer, after the secularization of the Christian Occident, defined in religious terms, in this definition religion continues to form the fundamental identity of the Islamic “Orient”. This is usually

explained by the fact that the societies of the Islamic world have gone through no process of secularization, because, it is often argued, Islam admits of no separation between religion and state. As a result, a secular West organized into nation states confronts a religious, ethnically differentiated Islamic East. In the last few decades, and especially after the rise of radical Islamic movements, this view has contributed to a renewal of the idea of the ‘centuries-old opposition between Orient and Occident’ as a conflict of systems which, ‘takes the place of the ebbing East-West conflict’, and marks a renewed hostility between ‘Islam and the West’.”³⁸

The first chapter is dedicated to retrace the theory of Edward W. Said, who represents one of the most relevant author in explaining the West/East relationship. His assumptions sustain the main idea that Westerners have a biased interpretation of the East. From his theory it will be easy to understand also how the vision of Islam, the Muslim World and the Arab World is affected by this view. Said wants to raise awareness about the existence of a misconception in the reciprocal interpretation, and my work follow his purpose. The second chapter is dedicated to a more practical approach, and it deals with some of the concrete causes for the negative vision that the West detain towards the Islamic community.

Said explains clearly how our attitude has been born and structured. The productions we made of this original representation, made then possible these to be conserved in our societal and mental constructions, leading to the so-called Orientalism. Furthermore, it can be detected five practical causes that allowed and contributed to the stigmatization and persistence of this western biased attitude towards the Islam.

The chapter will go through **history**, explaining some events that put in evidence the balance of power that mark the West/East relationship. Moreover, it will be said about how through historical experiences this “generalized” **doctrine** about the Orient came to be formed and to be strong enough to influence all the future thoughts about the East. It will be focused also on the **literature**, the **cinema** and the **medias**, the **journals** and **television**, and the **opinion leaders** that caused the diffusion, the rooting and the radicalization of these visions. Western culture has been shaped through and by these elements.

³⁸ Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (cit.) p. 2

2.1 Said and Orientalism

This paragraph is based mainly on the work of Edward W. Said (1991) called “Orientalism”³⁹ and his conception for which the Western scientific and social community interpreted and keep interpreting the East by “Orientalizing” it. This means the existence of structured preconceptions through which the West looks, studies and understands the East.

The East is the main cultural competitor of the West, it has been the main historical source for colonies and moreover it represents the more rooted example of difference to the West. Therefore, we can clearly see how the relationship between West and East is based on: cultural rivalry, balance of power, and fear of the different. In particular, Europeans and Americans have a strong tradition of interpreting the Orient basing their views on the role and position they detain as being Western Europeans or Americans. In few words, Europe interprets the East as being West, with a western point of view, conforming to have biased attitude.

2.1.1 *The Formation of the Orientalism in contrast with the Occidentalism*

The process of orientalization, according to Said, originated in the XVIII century when many researchers and travelers started to move from Western Europe to the East (especially English and French towards their Eastern colonies). Each of them brought back his own knowledge and personal experience later concretized in a cohesive understanding of the East. With time, these notions and information spread and have been institutionalized in a real and scientific “generalized” discipline about the Orient.

Said sustains that the writings about the Orient played a fundamental role in the formation and diffusion of the typical representations of the Orientalism. In the past, if a traveler had to move to any Eastern/Asian country, he would have consulted the existing material and unofficial writings made by the previous travelers. This behavior characterized the phenomenon of transforming the existing literature about the East from simply reliable to authoritative. All the experiences of the East from that moment on have been based on the

³⁹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, New York, 1978: trad. it. *Orientalismo. L'immagine dell'Oriente in Europa*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2006)

study of the previous ones, structuring in this way the common mentality and the general attitude towards the East. Nowadays, current writers are induced to think and write as their predecessors and the works of the past are considered authoritative and affirmed by the Western intellectual community. Said explains in this way how a common knowledge about the Orient has been created by the West and it is still alive today.

By the way, the concept of “Orient” has been criticized since it acquires itself an ambiguous connotation. Indeed, respect to what East is at east? In other words, geographically speaking the concepts of East and West are already stereotypical ideas of the world asset. The East appears as such in contraposition to the center of civilization that would be the Europe of ‘800. It is in this period that the European countries defined the conceptions of East, Middle East and “the other”.⁴⁰ The work of Said has been even criticized by different scholars affected by his theory, such as Albert Hourani, Nikki Keddie, or Bernard Lewis. In fact, it was retained that the approach of Said was in a certain sense too extremist and to give the East a sort of excuse in delegitimizing the studies of the West.

Nevertheless, Said does not want to say that all European writings are useless or based on conjectures. He recognizes the importance of some studies like the ones about geography and history, which display a more evident quest for objectivity. Anyway, for what concerns the general knowledge about the Orient, the author detects the presence of a component of “imagination” that corrupts and influences the understanding of the West about the East. What Said really criticizes of the orientalist scholars is to have no doubts about the possibility to achieve the objectivity in the understanding of the Islam and the East, that is clearly a utopia.

On the other hand, at the same time Said stimulated an ongoing debate that it has been received by many Arab scholars. One of these is Hassan Hanafi that researched and developed a contraposing theory called “Occidentalism”.

In fact, the end of the Orientalism would imply the beginning of the Occidentalism. The

⁴⁰ Massimo Campanini, *Dall'unicità di Dio alla rivoluzione. Un percorso fenomenologico di Hasan Hanafi*. (in G. Filoramo (a cura di) *Teologie Politiche. Modelli a confronto*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 2005)

Occidentalism is a reversed Orientalism, where the West for once become the object of study and not the subject and vice versa. For what concerns Occidentalism, the West is evaluated in order to quest for objectivity, where the Third World can reach its redemption from the colonizers. While Said purpose is to raise awareness between the Western scholars and to overcome the dichotomy. The Hanafi proposes a revitalization of the East, where the 'other' is the West.⁴¹

According to Hanafi the politicization of the Islam, both Shia and Sunni, grew gradually in the last decades. Hanafi believes this is a clear sign of the affirmation of the Islam and its rebirth. The Muslim world is coming back on the scene as a prominent actor and the terroristic form that it might undertake represent only a transitional moment. The West is declining and the East is emerging again.⁴² Since the interpretation of the Occidentalism could be an Orientalism in reverse, this even mean a new cultural hegemony.

Both the East and West are two entities emerged from historical events and social circumstances. In the case of a complex phenomenon such as Islam, its knowledge comes from a series of images, book works, and experiences that has been hand down by different people with different perspectives. In the intent of the anti-Orientalism there is the intention of unmasking this attitude, while the Occidentalizing tries to invert the tendency and led to objectivity through a contrasting vision, as the West that is the object studied by the East.

Anyway, what Said proposes, as said, is to overcome the dichotomy West/East, and the imaginary geography that divides "our lands" from the "lands of others" (the barbaric ones). This could be a solution on which to work, both for the West and the East better understanding.

⁴¹ Hanafi, H., *Dall'Orientalismo all'Occidentalismo*. (Rivista Internazionale di filosofia e psicologia, vol.2, n.2, Mimesis Edizioni, Milano, 2011)

⁴²Massimo Campanini, *Dall'unicità di Dio alla rivoluzione. Un percorso fenomenologico di Hasan Hanafi*. (cit)

2.1.2 Culture and Power relationship

The concept of culture is fundamental in the work of Said. Culture cannot be seen as unique and defined entity, but it is made instead of different historical and geographical influences interlaced with a variety of aspects. Furthermore, culture changes continuously adapting to the needs of its society, this one shaped around the nature of the links that connect its people. Even more important and complex is the **combination of culture with power**. Despite this relation produces a knowledge connected to the contingency, the production and the spread of these notions have the power to influence the representations, the thoughts and the exchange of ideas in a given society.

The existing connection between the cultural institutions that produce this knowledge and the dominant powers that support it must not be undervalued. As said, the connection between power and culture is a very relevant one. Indeed, in order to explain the great diffusion and the overall acceptance of this generalized information, Said underlines the great influence of that reliable and high rank people have on society. These speakers repeating and diffusing the information produced create a negative perspective and poison, sometimes involuntarily, western attitude towards the East.

Historically speaking, the East has always been seen as a completely different world than the Western one, and in many cases the connotations given to it were negative. The dichotomy West/East as opposite to one another led to idealize the West as the righteous and the Eastern people as the wrong ones. What mainly emerged from these representations were the despotism, irrationality and backwardness of the Orientals contraposed to the progress, rationality and civilization of the West. These judgements were made as a projection of the western cultures over the eastern countries, in order to legitimize themselves and define themselves through the representation of what was opposite to them.

Therefore, the relationship between the West and the East is a matter of power and hegemony. In order to explain how power regulates the relations between these two worlds, the historical events that marked the two areas are the greatest source. Said focus mainly on the period in which the Eastern territories begun to be part of the European countries as colonies. Colonialism and Imperialism are the key periods to understand the history and culture of dominance of the West over the East.

Napoleon's arrival in Egypt signs a fundamental historical connection, for which French and then English powers established in Middle East, and only after they reach the rest of the world. In this occasion, people of Middle East has been described as passive, despotic and fake for nature, and therefore easy to be dominated.

Said believes that the studies about Middle East should be rethought, since they are biased by historic elements, the balance of power and the hegemonic position of the West. Indeed, these elements contributed in the creation of the "Orient" stereotypical image to the West.

2.1.3 Orientalizing Middle East

In his work "Orientalism", Said refers to the East in its geographic wider sense, since the West sees the Orient as a unique big entity. Anyway, the Middle East is treated even in the specific since it represents the "closer East" to the Western lands and the most evident representation of what is different from the Western mentality and culture. Moreover, Islam has a long history of historical, religious and cultural rivalry with the West.

After the travels and the experiences acquired from the East, from Marco Polo to Della Valle and Mandeville, we started to get to know the East better, and what was retained to be a world completely unknown became something commonly recognized as different. The final result of our understanding of the Islam is that this faith represents a modified and fake version of the Christianity. Their values began to be seen as in contradiction with ours, and though this pressure the Islam came to be interpreted as the wrong world contraposed to our right one.

After the death of Mohammad, in 632, the Islamic military, religious and cultural power spread and grew enormously. The Muslim army conquered Persia, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, and then North Africa, reaching Spain, Sicily and part of France between the VIII and XIV century. For this reason, Islam ended up symbolizing the cultural and religious terror, and the so-called "Ottoman danger", latent at the doors of the European continent, represented an everlasting traumatic presence for all the XVII century.

It is evident then that Christianity had a relevant role in stereotyping the Western view of Islam. The ongoing presence of this threat has been slowly incorporated in Western mentality. A fundamental role is that of Mohammad that influenced the vision of Islam

made by Christian thinkers. This basic figure for the Islamic religion came to be interpreted as having an analogous role as that Jesus Christ for Christianity. Indeed, Jesus is at the basis of Christianity, therefore the assumption of Christians was that Mohammad represented the same in the Islamic faith. In this sense, Mohammad represented the personification of the fake word, an impostor that was propagating a fake faith.

The Christian vision of Islam came to be based on fear, the fear of a new powerful faith spreading all over the Arab peninsula, too close to the Christian territories. Moreover, this vision was characterized by the opposition, meaning that the Christians only saw the Islam contraposed to themselves and not as an independent entity. Muslims were not simply different as any other culture but they were the opposite of Christians and so impostors. The interpretation of the Islam nourished of these aspects and it acquired no meaning by itself, but it could be seen only as long as it was contraposed to Christianity.

This attitude created a defined imaginary of what Islam is, according to Christian view and values. Furthermore, this view has been strengthened by many writings, poetries, and popular superstitions. In this way, the ignorance about the Islam became more complex and structured than its factual knowledge. According to Said, even fiction has its own logic and it develops during the time. In fact, this imaginary vision of the Islam evolved in the centuries, conserving that biased attitude that was at the root of it. In the XII and XIII centuries, the Arab territory was considered at the periphery of the Christian world and the asylum land of the heretics, while in the XX century, Islam came to be interpreted by westerners as a second hand Arianism.

European literature described the Eastern world in dramatic and theatrical terms. Ariosto, Milton, Marlowe, Tasso, Shakespeare and Cervantes got their inspiration from the “Orient” for their works enriching it with fantasy and imagination. As Said points out there are many examples in Western culture of the stratified imaginary of the Islam and the East, from the *Bibliothèque orientale* di Barthélemy d’Herbelot to the Divine Comedy of Dante. For Example, in the work of d’Herbelot, Mohammad is described as the fake prophet, while in the Dante’s Inferno XXVIII he is confined to the eight circle, just one further from Satan, as “*seminator di scandalo e scisma*”⁴³.

History and literature are the basics of our culture. We have seen how Christianity that is

⁴³ Alighieri Dante, *La Divina Commedia*

the root of many western values and ideals shaped and fostered the imaginary that we have of the Islam even today. This vision grew and has been fostered through works that nowadays represent the traditional masterpieces of our literature and culture. The distortion of the figure of the Muslim is rooted in the century, and not necessarily it is based on racism or xenophobia but simply caused by historical events and contingencies. The roots of western culture, mentality and values are more complicated than we might think. Nowadays, despite many European countries are laic, people still conserve in their minds the influence of their Christian roots. As this works for the Christian past, it does for the colonial period and the nature of the economic and cultural exchanges that characterized the historical relation between West and East.

In conclusion, what Said wants to underline is not simply the existence of a biased attitude of the West, but he wants to make it clear that we (westerners) are influenced by our roots even when we do not realize we are. He criticizes the Orientalism and the orientalists, but they are not necessarily guilty on their intentions or their studies are completely useless. The point of his work, and of my intention, is about to raise the awareness of the West around the existence of a bias in the interpretation of what is retained to be Oriental, as it is of what is retained to be the Islam.

2.1.4 Mass Medias Orientalism

How Medias influence the idea of Islam in the West is a question that will be further explained in the Fourth Chapter of this work, deepening the contents and through a wider correlation with the main substance of this thesis. By the way, in order to better understand the work of Said and its thoughts, fundamental in this discipline, part of this paragraph on ‘How we see the Islam’ should be dedicated on the role that medias cover in this imaginary.

In his work “Covering Islam”⁴⁴, Said describes the phenomenon that provoke the generalization of the knowledge and the spread of the assumptions about the Arabs and Islam, through medias. This phenomenon represents a popularization of the Orientalism, and he sustains that if this is particularly widespread is mainly thank to the medias and the

⁴⁴ Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We see the Rest of the World* (cit.)

popular mentality. He puts in evidence that Western interpretations are so persuasive to be widespread even in the Middle Eastern countries themselves. By being colonizers, the western powers detain a particular influence and they are capable to introduce their own views to their colonies' reality. Today, this process is still on, but it is working differently than in the past. Nowadays, Modern Medias have a further, easier and more intensive reach, so that the Orientalism tends to be extended even to the East itself. The proof of it is the presence of Arab books and journals of second hand dealing with the so-called "Arab mentality" and "Islamism".

Cinema too has a big role in the description of the Arab and in giving us an idea of how the western imaginary has been shaped by history. Moreover, cinema's productions have reached even the Middle East countries spreading this imaginary and creating an East/West tension. Middle East Orientalism in movies is represented through the typical representations of the Arabs or Muslims with stereotypical attitudes such as laziness, aggressiveness, irrationality and despotism. Nowadays, even terrorism and fundamentalism came to be used as elements to describe the average Arab. The pressure is so strong that sometimes even the Arabs get used to imagine themselves as 'Arabs' in an "hollywoodian" way, creating an evident paradox.

For many, the Arabs can be described as venal, lustful, potentially terrorists whose fortune might have come from a dishonest business or a lucky event, or linked to the oil market. American movies follow many of these stereotypes. In the cinema or television, the Arab is usually dishonest and lustful, particularly cunning in organizing tricks or crimes. These kind of stereotypes can be find in many examples such as the TV series *True Lies* or *Delta force* or even *Indiana Jones* reports many of the Oriental stereotypes according to western mentality.

Medias have a great responsibility in the preservation of this western attitude about the Arab and Muslim world. Assumptions, stereotypes and social structures emerge in many occasions to put in evidence how this modern instrument contributed and keep contributing in conserving the ideal of East. Of course, in this paragraph, the discourse is not developed enough and many other arguments could be touched. Anyway, it was useful to mention some aspects in order to open a widow through Said's work on the role of medias, such as cinema and television.

History, literature and cinema are reflections of a culture. The western mentality shaped and is shaped by these aspects, as in a vicious circle, and it apply its visions and interpretations of Islam in its productions as in real life. Medias foster this phenomenon, voluntarily or not, and have a great responsibility for the influence they exercise over people.

2.2 Causes of the Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West

Due to the events of the past three decades that involved the Middle East and the Islamic World⁴⁵, Western Media's attention has been increasingly captured by this matter. Indeed, about Islam, journalistic and scientific publications have been produced and the West position has been shaped and defined. The European Union had to come to the realization that "their societies will be permanently confronted with a significant number of Muslims and with their different cultural and religious backgrounds"⁴⁶. Consequently, mutual relations between West and Middle East have been establish on the grounds of this new awareness, fostering stereotypes and prejudices. Moreover, the role of medias in the West emerged as particularly significant in the definition of Muslims, most of times addressed as fanatics, irracionals, primitive, belligerent, and dangerous.

By the way, in practical terms, the so-called Islamic threat to the West, as it has been considered by the two professors Shadid and Van Koningsveld (1995) together with Halliday (1995), is only a myth or an illusion. Actually, any significant militant and military action has been ever conducted against the West by a unified Islamic World, since the Islamic World as such cannot be considered unified at all. Halliday calls the phenomenon of this a priori western hostility against Muslims: anti-Muslimism. This terminology comes to describe the basis of the rejection that comes from elements of xenophobia, racism and stereotypical interpretation of the Muslims. Furthermore, he distinguishes between two attitudes of the West: a "strategic" one and a "populist" one. The first type of anti-Muslimism comes from the United States, and it represents the behavior that has been adopted in the political issues such as oil supplies, nuclear weapons,

⁴⁵ For example: The Iranian Revolution, the Rushdie Affair, the Gulf War, the war in former Yugoslavia, the revolution in Afghanistan, the Arab Springs, the extremist movements such as the current threat of Isis, and the waves of migrants reversed into the European territory.

⁴⁶ Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (in "Religious Freedom and The Neutrality of the State: The Position of Islam in the European Union", Peeters, Leuven 2002) p. 174

and terrorism. While the second type of anti-Muslimism is created by Western societies on social issues related with assimilation, integration, race and veiling.

What must be pointed out is that the causes that lead to the negative perception of the West of the Islamic World are linked to a consistent series of different aspects not only religious but even historical, political and cultural. Moreover, the ongoing attitude of a series of speakers, such as politicians, journalists and scientists nourish voluntarily or not a culture of detachment and incomprehension of the Islamic World. In fact, “presenting Islam as a threat to the Western World will instigate negative effects in the intercultural relations between the groups concerned”⁴⁷.

In order to better comprehend how this negative image originated and structured the following categorization might help in this sense. The five models of explanation that will be further deepened in the next paragraphs focus on the causes of this negative image: 1) the model of changing power relationship; 2) the model of the clash of civilizations and the indispensable enemy; 3) the model of political Islam; 4) the model of oversimplified information; and 5) the model of the increased Muslim immigration to the Western World.

2.2.1 The Model of Changing Power Relationship

The rivalry between the two worlds is entrenched with historical developments. Some historians divided the period of West and Middle East relations in four phases. In the first period, between 622 and 1492 (year of the fall of Granada), the Muslims World detained the hegemony of the region, experiencing expansion and spreading of the Islam in the Arab Peninsula, North Africa, Asia and parts of Europe. In the second period, the west attacks the hegemony of the Islam through a religious war, and from the eleventh century until 1683, with the Christian Crusades. The third and fourth period, after the end of the Crusades lead to the hegemony of the West, through the colonization of the Muslim World, in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Therefore, the historical roots in the building of the negative image of the Islam are connected to the Christianity attitude of raising a barrier against the Islam and affirming its superiority over it. Then during the colonial period this image acquired a new function, i.e.

⁴⁷ Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (cit.)

to legitimize the subjection of the Muslims World to the European superpowers.

This shows how the biased vision of the Islam is rooted in the history and how this vision has been transmitted through it until nowadays. Wrong information about the Islamic culture, ethnocentrism, superiority and the inferiority of the culture of others and have been reported in textbooks and through education. The historical developments and the history of the relations between with the Muslim culture and Christian one shape even nowadays our opinion.

2.2.2 *The Model of the Clash of Civilization and the Indispensable Enemy*

The term “clash of civilizations” focus on the existing differences between the two cultures. This model shows our way to see the Islam is trapped in a conception of rivalry. Our attitude is to see this culture as different, but in terms of ‘contrary’ and ‘opposite’. By the way, even if this model does not only apply to Islam but even to other distant cultures, “in the case of Islam, this threat is compounded by geographical adjacency and historical antagonism and also the overtly political role that Islam plays in the lives of its followers. Rivalry with the West is made more potent by the fact that Islam is still itself a vigorous and expanding collective identity”⁴⁸.

Anyway, some other experts pointed out that the “clash” might have arose not only from the differences, but even from the similarities existing between the two civilizations. Indeed, both sustain the idea that its own ideology is of universal understanding. Therefore, both Westerners and Muslims retains to be the righteous ones and this clearly create a contrast. Muslims are even convinced that their religious system would offer an adequate alternative to Western liberalism and democracy.

Anyway, according to Huntington (1993) the “clash of civilizations” is the major source of conflict in the New World Order. Huntington describe seven/eight major cultures that “clash” in World and that can be restricted in three main ones: Western culture, Islamic culture and Confucian culture. According to the professor, the Confucian and Islamic cultures cooperate in order to challenge the West, while the West in order to face the threat of the Islamic-Confucian culture promote the synergy of the European and North

⁴⁸ Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions*(cit.)

American components with Eastern European and Latin American cultures, whose are closer to those of the West.

Another point to add is about the existence of a necessity for the West of a rival in order to legitimize itself. Sartre might explain this concept through philosophy: “To obtain any truth about myself, I need the other. The other is indispensable for my existence and for the awareness I have of myself.” Therefore, if a westerner philosopher suggest this kind of mentality appear possible that the West in the history always tried to emerge from a conflict. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the West had to reinvent its enemy, and found another counterbalance of its power, to legitimize itself as the good and right culture against the bad the wrong one.

Hipler and Lueg (1995) state that “We invent an Islam that suits us, that best fulfils our politico-psychological needs. This is exactly how we arrive at a clear separation between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (the other), between inside and outside that are never supposed to meet and we thus succeed in fencing off and fortifying our own Western identity. Similarities and parallels between the cultures would only disturb this image, because it would mean recognizing ourselves in the Other and blur the distinction. Indeed, we stress the differences of Islamic countries and Islamic culture, and ‘the Orient’ is stylized as the antithesis to the West. We thus create a polar opposite against which we can assure ourselves of our ‘self’ and of our values, and against which we can shape our perception of our Western world.”⁴⁹

2.2.3 *The Model of the Political Islam*

Nowadays, the West is experiencing hard times in dealing with the Muslim World. It is evident indeed that one of the major factors influencing the image of Islam is the violence of the fundamentalist movements’ actions spreading all over the Western territory. In the last thirty years, and with a particular intensification these days, the threat of the fundamentalism posed a challenge to the West, endangering the societies and raising political, cultural, social and security issues. By the way, the vagueness with which the term ‘fundamentalism’ has been used combined with the negative connotation is inadequate to identify the nature, aims and activities of the various movements. The label

⁴⁹ Hipler, J., Lueg A., *The next threat. Western perceptions of Islam* (Pluto Press, London 1995) p. 24

that Medias have been giving to particles of the Islam with different scopes and strategies did not help to understand and contrast this menace, and led instead to generalization and incomprehension.

Even the term Islamism and political Islam are sometimes used improperly, since the resurgence of Islam is a complex phenomenon and it should be understood through a scientific evaluation capable of considering in which context and circumstances it appears. On one hand, some scholars, defined as ethnocentrists, sustain the idea that the emergence of Islam as a political movement is entrenched with fact of being a religion. This representation neglects that other aspects such as: the political, cultural, social and economic could have influence in the Muslim World. This to say that the Islam's political force and its socio-economic and political asset must be understood only through the comprehension of it as a religion, that require to be studied and analyzed. On the other hand, other scholars' view (cultural relativists) focus on the social, economic and political capabilities of the Islam to influence the society and correcting inequalities presented in it.⁵⁰

By the way, what it is clear is that Islam and in particular Islamic movements where it comes to politicization is a multiple phenomenon and cannot be treated superficially as sometimes it is done through western medias and politicians. Not every Islamic movement can be classified as fundamentalist, where the distinction between non-militant and militant has rarely done. "The reality is that such movements are much more complex and deserve more scientific and political attention in order to understand their motivations and ideologies, Islamic religious political movements differ, among other points, in their goals degrees of organization, militancy, political involvement and the international character of their support".⁵¹

⁵⁰ Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (cit.)

⁵¹ Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (cit.) p. 184

2.2.4 *The Model of the Unnuanced Information Service*

Another important aspect is one of the main focus of this thesis. The information that we perceive from medias or opinion leaders in general about the Islam and Muslim world, its religion and its followers, is most of times oversimplified, biased or superficial. Education and socialization are two of the main vehicles through which the information are transmitted from generation and generation, while medias reinforced or created this information. Medias plays a significant role in the creation of new stereotypes, despite the ones existing already in the culture and rooted through generations.

Elizabeth Poole (2000) researched about the Medias spread the information about Islam and Muslims, more specifically she studied the British Medias and reported that the transmission of the information is overwhelmingly generalizing and Islam is considered to be obsolete and a threat to British society. Moreover, Muslims are seen as divergent, irrational, and unable to integrate in society. “The general conclusion of these publications is that the Western media both directly or indirectly play a central role in the spreading and preserving of the negative images of Islam and its followers. Even more alarming is the suggestion made by some authors accusing reporters of contributing significantly of the production and reproduction of racism.”⁵²

This affirmation might appear extreme since many journalists sustain that they just report facts and events as they seem to be. Anyway, even if they there is not a specific purpose to raise racist sentiments, they might be affected by the values and prejudices of their own society shaped as we have seen in the previous paragraphs. Sometimes their will in reporting the information is unprejudiced and have no intention on concretizing racism, anyway, they are absorbed by a society structured around historical and cultural hostility towards this opposite/different culture. Therefore, they might indirectly foster hostile sentiments and xenophobia in their society as part of it, through their wrong perception.

In order to better understand the role of the Medias in the creation of this negative image, we can analyze three aspects for which they contribute to shape an unfavorable representation of these groups. First of all, as said, “Western media present an

⁵² Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (cit.) p. 188

oversimplified and static cultural concept”⁵³ of the Muslim groups. “They refer facilely to classic Islamic culture in order to explain the behavior and the assumptions of Muslims in the modern world. In this way they quite wrongly spread the assumption that every individual with Islamic background is religious and practicing and that religion only accounts for such aspects as the inequality of women and the lack of democracy in the Muslim world. Other factors are seldom taken into consideration”⁵⁴.

Secondly, in the content and lay-out of Western media’s articles quite often appear mention of the ethnic origin or religious affiliation of those who commit a crime, or they classify present ethnic and regional conflicts as religious. It can be noted a case in the Italian news in which a case of femicide has been reported giving great emphasis to the ethnic and religious origins of the man. This case was a classic case of domestic violence against women and femicide such any other case of these crimes committed by any other Italian man with no connection with the religion or the race of the murderer.

By the way, “those presenting a negative image of Islam and its alleged incompatibility with western culture are mostly politicians, civil servants and researchers. [Therefore, as a third aspect,] the media contributes to shaping the myth of threat by presenting such statements uncritically. Compounding error, the media hardly ever compare the deviant fanatical behavior of some Muslims fundamentalists to similar behavior of members of other religious movements such as in Northern Ireland, India or Israel, to point out the relativity of the picture presented.”⁵⁵

Journalists and reporters, such as politicians and public speakers, should achieve a deeper understanding of the Islamic and Muslims world, since they represent the voice of the society or even more they embody a model that people follow. They could carry a change in the cultural misperception of the Muslims world and they could bring awareness of existing prejudices that could be corrected in order to have an unbiased realization of what these groups are, what their actions mean and in what they differentiate from each other.

Anyway, Media do not present a negative image of Islam and Muslims necessarily with

⁵³ Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (cit.) p. 188

⁵⁴ Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (cit.) p. 188

⁵⁵ Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (cit.) p. 189

deliberate intention. These shortcomings are mostly caused by structural factors related to the method with which the reporters gather the news in general. First, as said, as members of the society themselves they nurtured the prejudices that have been influencing themselves. Basically, “opinion leaders are inclined to present the news in such a way that it corresponds to their own views and to the norms and values of the groups to which they belong”⁵⁶. Moreover, what influence the Medias in reporting the news are the so-called “news-values”. “In order to render a higher “news value” to messages so as to attract the attention of the media user, reporters are inclined to lay a heavy emphasis on the differences between Islam and Muslims on the one hand and Christianity and Western society on the other.”⁵⁷

Third factor influencing the negative presentation of Muslim deals with the actual lack of specific knowledge needed to understand and cover the groups concerned. The consultation of suitable experts and first hand sources are sometimes bypassed by most the accessible and secondary sources that led to a mass critical analysis based on inaccurate information.

“In short, oversimplification and generalization should be avoided as much as possible while at the same time the stress should put on the socio-economic and religious diversity within as well as between the groups living in hundreds of countries that lie on five continents, which represent various religious streams and law schools and possesses various levels of education as well. Generalized news on Islam and Muslims especially by negative messages, strengthens the presumed relationship between the reported deviant behavior and the central characteristics of the group concerned. (...) As a result, Islam and Islamic revivalism are easily reduced to stereotypes of Islam against the West, Islam’s war with the modernity, or Muslim rage, extremism, fanaticism, terrorism. The ‘f’ and the ‘t’ words, ‘fundamentalism’ and ‘terrorism’, have become linked in the minds of many. Selective and therefore biased analysis adds to our ignorance rather than our knowledge, narrows our perspective rather than broadening our understanding, reinforces the problem rather than opening the way to new solutions.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (cit.) p. 189

⁵⁷ Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (cit.) p. 190

⁵⁸ Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (cit.) p. 191

2.2.5 *The Model of Increased Muslim Immigration to the West*

The increase in the perception of Islam as a threat is connected to the increase of the immigration of Islamic backgrounded people to the West. The presence of relatively large groups of Muslims residing in countries of the European Union is of fairly recent date. “The negative attitude of the West towards Islamic immigrants in Europe became manifest only during the 80s, which may be explained roughly by two causes: the ethnicity argument and a statistical misperception.

The first argument concerns “the refusal of certain groups to accept the fact that various West European countries became immigration-countries and that nowadays a considerable number of their population has a different physical appearances and cultural background, but at the same time identify themselves with these societies as well”.⁵⁹ This led the autochthonous groups to confront themselves every day with a new multicultural reality, that they fear might endanger their cultural framework of references. The immigrants in the West Europe are usually marginalized accentuating even more their ethnic and cultural differences.

The second underlines the causes of the deterioration of the Western attitude towards Muslims in Europe. “Scientists, the media, or official institutions base their estimations on the number of immigrants from the Islamic world in general. In contrast, the estimations of Christians are based on the number of church members, while a distinction is made in the various denominations within Christianity. Because of the number of church members is decreasing in practice, while the number of immigrants from the Islamic world increases, the statistical misrepresentation of Muslims and non-Muslims becomes ever more disproportional. Such labelling has serious negative consequences for the inter-ethnic relations in the countries involved. Defining one group by religious characteristics (Muslims) and the other by nonreligious qualities (Dutchmen, autochthonous), creates a false dichotomy: ‘they’ the believers and confessors as against ‘us’ the liberals and seculars. Furthermore, such a presentation intensifies the fear of the population about the alleged Islamization of the country which is even spread by certain ‘scientists’.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (cit.) p. 192

⁶⁰ Brugman, J., *Het raadsel van de multiculturaliteit*. Meulenhoff (Amsterdam, 1998)

3 Media's Influence over the Misrepresentation of Muslims in Europe

“Despite the variety and the differences, and however much we proclaim the contrary, what the media produce is neither spontaneous nor completely “free:” “news” does not just happen, pictures and ideas do not merely spring from reality into our eyes and minds, truth is not directly available, we do not have unrestrained variety at our disposal. For like all modes of communication, television, radio, and newspapers observe certain rules and conventions to get things across intelligibly, and it is these, often more than the reality being conveyed, that shape the material delivered by the media.”

Edward W. Said

In this chapter, it will be talked about the role of the media in the Western world in fostering the misperception of the Muslim world and the misrepresentation of the Arab people. Our era is signed by the technologic revolution. Technology came to affect our life at every level: individual, national and global.

One of the biggest change brought in the society by technology concerns the way to communicate and to have access to the information. It is fascinating to notice how everything developed so fast and how we have been able to absorb this development so deeply. In the 30s, it has been diffused the first computer, in the 40s we start using mobile phones and we gained the access to the internet through them for the first time in the 90s. The widespread and usage of these technologies related to the use of internet is impressive, and even more impressive is the way this changed communication.

Mass Media, nowadays, represents this technologic change in the field of communication. The changes introduced by the new media communication tools, as social media, are many. They regard the access we have to information, the influence that medias exercises over the values set of people and their way of thinking, and the way to affirm and

concretize our cultural identity. Every single individual, every day and in every moment have access to the wider amount of information. A relevant asset is the opportunity that emerged to differentiate the sources, and to get to a proper knowledge of the world through confrontation. Anyway, the problem is that generally this does not happen. Indeed, Western medias keep shaping Western minds, and Eastern medias shape Eastern minds.

The access we have to the information is selected for us by medias themselves. The tools of information gained political, social, cultural and economic power. Moreover, journalists and reporters are themselves the ones born in the “medias’ generation” and them too, at their time, have been influenced by medias. Therefore, the way we think is stacked in a vicious circle.

In the context of this dissertation, this argument assumes importance when talked about Islam. In this chapter I want to point out the main elements in medias’ way of communicating. Medias are influencing our thoughts and attitude towards Islam, and the Arab world overall. As we have already seen in the past chapters, there is a stratified history of academic, cultural, religious, artistic and philosophical materials around Islam, that in the past contributed to the formation of a Western attitude towards the East. Medias in this context spread and amplified these biases.

The first paragraph deals with how it is that medias found a very fertile grounds in which to diffuse wrong ideas about Islam. There is a great consensus about how to interpret Islam, and the biased representation of Arabs and Muslims is common in the West. This paragraph will explain how and why. The second one is related to the concept of generalization. This practice used in the communication introduced a lot of problems in the building of a right conception of what Islam, the East, Arabs and Muslims are. The third paragraph wants to adopt a bipolar perspective and point out that the problems related to Western society are shared even by the East. Easterners tend to foster this attitude by the West, and therefore they are biased at their time. In the last paragraph will be shortly raised a concrete example of how medias act in certain circumstances connected to the Arab World, i.e. the Iranian revolution.

Mass Medias have a great responsibility on how the Westerners see Islam. Anyway, this dissertation does not ever use accusative tones but the intention is to make observations. It is to be said that this phenomenon is not always voluntary, but it is a cultural process and

as such sometimes unaware. Indeed, to raise awareness and to give the possibility to reflect on these aspects is the first aim of this work.

3.1 Mass Medias and the construction of consensus

Television, radio, magazines, newspapers, books, social medias and movies daily contribute in building the representation that we have of the world. Through medias we learn and we have access to information. Therefore, our opinions and thoughts are highly influenced and shaped by these tools. In fact, as the word itself describes it: medias are a tools and through these we perceive the world. The problem comes when we allow certain ideas of certain opinion leaders, that we retained to have the authority to make statements, to have a great influence on our thoughts. Indeed, the industry of culture to exercise a strong power over people opinions and choices.

The predominant industry of culture, i.e. medias, works through a sort of Imperialism, particularly dependent, for what concerns the Western World, by the United States. The images coming from television, cinema, and journals, according to Edward Said, transmit values that seems legitimized by the authority of the West, Americans and Europeans.⁶¹ The fact that few multinationals detain the control of the production and the distribution of the news contribute in a restriction of the sources that reach the entire world and sometimes in a manipulation of the information for interest. In the United States this happens by the fact that this industry is left in the hands of private sectors. Moreover, this control in few hands allow to maintain a kind of status quo, hard to oppose. As an example must be noticed that the journals that acquire more visibility internationally are the Anglophones ones (due also to the widespread of English). In this way Western journals, Americans or English (such as the BBC or the CNN), gains a strong power to influence the news, and opinions, all over the world.

Noam Chomsky⁶² is a famous sociologist that worked even on theories about the building of consensus in the society. According to Chomsky, there is a connection between medias and the powers of economic and political grounds. His analysis discusses the fact that the communications are made of a structure of propaganda. Medias want to impose over the public their opinions, and they express the ideas in a way to persuade the listener to agree with them⁶³. Even according to Said, we are surrounded by medias and the homologation they made of the information have a profound influence in our lives. Basically, medias have the power to shape our opinions.

⁶¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage Books, New York, 1993)

⁶² Noam Chomsky, Herman Edward, *La fabbrica del consenso*. (Marco Tropea, Milano, 1998)

⁶³ Noam Chomsky, Herman Edward, *La fabbrica del consenso*. (cit.)

Anyway, Said sustains the idea that even if this is what happen, medias not necessarily impose themselves voluntary or as their ultimate ends. In fact, there is no monolithic power that wants to impose itself or conspire against someone, there are no rules. This phenomenon is simply what happen. Information and medias, indeed, always try to achieve common ideas and to reach the wider segment of the society. There is general acceptance of the ideas coming from medias because they sound reasonable, clear and realistic. The public shapes and is shaped by the medias.

The facts reported by the journals are shaped around social circumstances and historical events. Therefore, what mass media reports reflect the context in which it developed. The information spread is related to its own context of production. In short, the content of a news is the outcome of a certain culture, the mass medias are the mirror of the culture and produce themselves culture, shaping contemporary history.

In this context, it acquires importance the style with which the news is reported. Often, in television is required to explain and display the events very directly and fast. Few words are dedicated to expose a wide range of events and images, and most of time, it is treated a phenomenon with a very complex background and a variety of factors and interactions. We can call these kind of news “ready-made”, because in a certain sense their structure is already a standard one in which to make fit the news. This means that since the structure and the content of the information reported is already imposed over the news, there is little space for contingencies and proper explanations.

The influence of this way of making information is comparable to that of advertising companies. The evens must be treated by the journalists in a fast, impacting and concise way capable of stick in the mind of the auditor. According to Said, this is how the “ready-made” information can be widespread on large scale. Indeed, this way of presenting the facts is such simplistic that makes impossible for people to stimulate any critic or personal idea: the news and the opinions are presented as a status quo and then the facts are taken as given, by the audience.⁶⁴

This way of communicating is not a simple distortion of reality, it is seriously influencing the culture. In fact, it induces people to accept and absorb certain given values and ideas spread by medias.

⁶⁴ This form of information is an obstacle even to the development of democratic exchanges and critics, leading to the Imperialism of the information medias.

Moreover, most of times the aim of these medias' companies is to reach the collectivity and to express the common sense. In the articles it is common see words as "we" or "them", implicitly intending the existence of cohesive identities thinking and acting in a common way. On the other hand, there is an undifferentiated and "all-inclusive" "other" that represent the opposition to "us". The America, the West, the Orient start to be seen simplistically cohesive and coherent. This attitude creates an "us" that is the West, considering North America and all the countries composing Europe, sustaining a common and shared idea contraposed to a "them", meaning the other that is not West, that is exotic, different, opposed, and strange; including Middle eastern countries, North African ones, and partly Asian countries (evidently very different from each other, and with many differences even inside the countries themselves).

Anyway, the attitude of generalizing is a feature of the human nature and especially of western nature. If we pay attention to our way of express in everyday life, we will detect in many occasions references to "the Germans" or "the Americans" or "the Africans", addressing not only the people living in a given country but involving their culture itself and their mental structure, giving for granted lot of distinguishing traits within these populations. Moreover, this way of communicating represents even a process developed to affirm and protect "our" own identity: *"Avere la sensazione" che stiano per arrivare i russi, che il mercato giapponese stia lì per lì invaderci o che i militanti islamici marcino verso di noi, non significa soltanto partecipare a una paura collettiva, ma anche rafforzare la "nostra" identità, in quanto stretta d'assedio e minacciata.*"⁶⁵

At the same time, it is important to never forget the existence of actual cultural differences while generalizing a culture and be aware how and why we are speaking of something, in order to avoid the absorption of these generalizations and stereotypical cultural biases in our mindset. The generalization as an issue brought by mass medias and the intensification of cultural bias made by this process will be treated in the following paragraph.

3.2 Mass Medias and the diffusion of generalization

The danger of stereotypes to intervene in the descriptions of the "other" cultures made by mass medias, especially when talked about far countries such as the Arab and Muslim

⁶⁵ Edward W. Said, *Dire la verità. Gli intellettuali e il potere* (Feltrinelli, Milano, 1995) p. 108

ones, is omnipresent. As already exposed, in order to reach a wide public, medias use a language passible of misunderstandings and generalizations. The result of this discourse is the homogenization of the image of Islam.

American and European medias use similar and common representations to describe Muslims, usually negative. Repetitive expressions such as “Islamic mentality”, “Muslim practices”, “Arab violence” or “Shia inclinations” are heard and reheard. Arabs are severally represented in the context of oil issues, terrorist attacks, Muslim practices of segregation, acts of violence and wars. When journals talk about the Muslim world is most of times to point out disadvantaged and critic situations. Instead, what is the violence, the fanaticism, the discontent and the fundamentalism are only connected to a very restricted sphere of the overall picture of the Muslim and Arab world. Moreover, these aspects say little about the religion of the society of these populations considered.

A very interesting aspect is that the generalization reach even the representation of single characters. It is easy to detect the western attitude if we think about how quick and inconsistent is the presentation of an Arab person that acquire importance for a given event. For example, even if we know little about a person that emerges suddenly in the news for such an event, we can base our knowledge on the Islamic general features, and all in a sudden we are able to have an idea and be able to recognize him right after in the successive news. By the way, the journals never said enough about his background, did not introduce him but just “throw” him in the news as taken for granted.

It comes from the generalization a monolithic view of Islam, easy to explain but difficult to understand, this because a Muslim World as we intend is inexistent. As saying Christian World include a variety of cultures, currents, views, and ethnic groups, this works for the Islamic one too (Islam includes believers in countries from China to Nigeria, that is clearly not so easy to associate). A label cannot be attached to this reality, especially if pretending this way to understand. Indeed, Said said that we would never accept this kind of confusion and generalization if dealing with Europe for example.

An example brought to the attention by Said⁶⁶ is that of John Kifner, reporter in Beirut, and

⁶⁶ Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We see the Rest of the World.* (cit.)

his article in the New York Times of the 1980. This journalist sustained the idea that the Muslim World no recognizes any separation between state and church, and therefore no distinction between everyday life and religion, describing this system as antique, unadapt and backward. To the Islam, it seems to be associated all the negative aspects of societies and life style. This world appears as one to be modified and rectified. It does not matter if the person who makes this kind of analysis has no authority or knowledge to do so, it does not matter if these analyses might be wrong. They are taken for true.

This problem emerges in connection with the authority of the sources in the diffusion of information. Professors, journalists, directors and even presidents emerge especially in the case of some crisis. It is in this way that they conquer I kind of authority in some matters that they are not really capable to analyses and have no background to discuss them. Therefore, in the field of knowledge, the relations of power are decisive. Indeed, if these people get the authority to intervene in such subjects, this is not given them by their actual competence, but their role and the power they exercise through medias.

Generalizations and the widespread of wrong or biased information depends even by the difficulty in obtaining reliable sources. The distortion in reporting the news can depend even from superficial translations, partiality of the knowledge, oversimplification due to make possible the access to the news at the audience. Moreover, who is working in reporting the news have a national education and values and opinions of a given society are part of his mindset since he is young. In addition, sometimes these journalists are under pressure and they have to respect certain ideals of the journals they work for, they are then conditioned by the political sphere, willing or not.

Another fundamental aspect contributing to the rushed generalizations and misleading information is the historical carelessness. If the Islamic world is depicted as backward this collide with a very western attitude that is the intention of modernize the non-westerner countries. In all the events that involve a Muslim community, there is the inclination at do not take in consideration the geographical and historical context, as what happen in the Philippines could be compared to the developments in Iran or the situation of Palestine.

The tendency is that of treating Islam without caring about its own history, culture and differentiation. Islam is talked without giving the right importance to his history and his past, its great changes within it, and its spread. The past of Islam is used only to sustain

already made explanation and opinions about the existence in it of despotism, fanaticism and violence. What is further neglected is that this world is immutable and “classic” Islam has been victim of no change through the years, while indeed many historical processes are neglected.

3.3 Contrasts between Medias of the Est and Medias of the West

Anyway, the conflict between East and West should be seen from both sides. Not only the West contraposes itself to the East, but even the East developed a certain attitude towards the West. If on one hand, we have the aggressors, on the other there are victims, and both tend to acquire the attitude and the bias given by the role and position they think to detain.

The West has been shaping this contraposition as a conflict and even the East partially adapted to this view. The fact that the West refers to the Muslim religious world as whole seems to have unified all these countries at least on the aspect of being in a fight against the West. Therefore, Muslim identity too needs the West to affirm itself and counterbalance the Western aspiration to be the right part of the world.

Generalizations are reproduced then even by the East, where Easterners depict themselves as the victims of this system. An example of it is the common attitude of looking at the United States as whole as the bearer of the evils and the cause of their problems. This forgetting again how even the United States is a very complex society, made of different people with different ideals, made even by very different cultures between which the Arab ones.

The one plums the stereotypical attitude of the other, and vice versa. And in this framework, the Islamic world tend to get more rigid each time it receives strong critics from the West, and sometimes to “radicalize”. This attitude seems to be fostered as a defense of their religion against the attacks of the Western societies. Islam has to defend its own identity and so it has to affirm its existence in a very decisive way.

This thesis, sustained by Said, could even be linked to Samuel Huntington’s theory of the clash of civilizations⁶⁷, which would appear particularly undesirable. The author of the *Orientalism*, as he criticizes Western perception of the East he criticizes even Middle Eastern

⁶⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, *The clash of civilizations?* (Foreign Affairs, vol. 72, no. 3, USA, 1993)

complains about this hostility. Both sides should avoid comparisons, and to canalize themselves in unrealistic stereotypes, namely the one of the aggressive colonizers and the colonized victims.

Both the East and the West should avoid to foster this contrapositions, generalizations, and misunderstandings. Then, it is even in the hands of the Muslims to be capable to articulate a proper image of themselves, and do not be represented through wrong models that do not belong to them. This even because the religion itself could be presented in a different way, such different to be the opposite representation of the one medias make today. An Islam linked to authoritarianism, punishments and theocracy is only a choice, and a part of the Islam, as it is a choice to talk about these aspects more than others. The framework is quite composite and complex, and a unique direction to look at Islam does not exist, and it should not even for the West.

3.4 Practical example: The Iranian Revolution

The Iranian Revolution took place in 1979. In this context, there developed even a particular event that attracted American Media's attention: the seizure of some American citizens working in the United States Embassy in Tehran, this "attack" took place from November 1979 and January 1981. What is interesting about these two events, one inside the other, is the language used by medias to report the happenings.

Ayatollah Khomeini was the leader that led the revolution and brought a new constitution and the establishment of a new government: The Islamic Republic. The predecessor Reza Pahlavi left the country and has been hosted for a short period in the United States. This created many oppositions and brought to the event where some American hostages have been kept by Iranian students seized in the Embassy, creating a great suspense and making media's attention focus on this event insistently.

The terms used by American televisions and journals were describing the Islam and Iran with caricaturist images, through generalizations and stereotypes. Before these events to take place, the majority of Americans did not know anything about Iranian culture, religion and people. During the period of the revolution and especially of the seizure the events have been introduced daily almost as a TV series. The Americans passed so quick from no knowledge at all to be battered by news about the situation almost 24h. For this reason,

they got the idea of knowing about it and be able to judge.⁶⁸

Iran has been described as a very dangerous country where Islam has been presented as an enemy to fight. The descriptions were inaccurate and confusing. Shia Islam was presented as the “ideology of martyr” or Shia people were depicted as having “inclinations to the persecution”. Many discussions have been held about Iranian history, Islamic jihad and other arguments without any deep knowledge of them and proper understanding, talks between people with no grounds to report these kind of opinions.

Moreover, even the figure of Ayatollah Khomeini has been described in a very emphatic way. He has been taught to be irrational and a psychological analysis has been made of him. His profile has been shaped without any reference to the Iranian history and the composition of its society, as no mention of its political status. And these elements are fundamental to trace a proper picture of such an event as a revolution. Further, to point out it is even technical obstacles to a proper understanding, such as the incapability of the majority of the reporters based in Iran to speak any word of Persian.⁶⁹

Iran has been represented as a unique and monolithic entity, and all the medias tried to keep the same image coherently between them to be recognizable by the public. What Said detected about this example is that what television and journals reported was functional to American policies on Middle East and internal. The speeches had in television were not only received by American public, but even by other governments, states and politicians.

Anyway, it is even important to say that not all the information has been completely biased during that period. There are examples of good information, through comparative terms and by having a decent overall picture of the situation. The problem in this, is that usually the more widespread medias are the ones to have a greater influence, but the same time they are the ones to draw the influence over people and to be the most biased in order to control and maintain their position, as in a vicious cycle.

⁶⁸ Said W. Edward, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We see the Rest of the World.* (cit.)

⁶⁹ Said W. Edward, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We see the Rest of the World.* (cit.)

4 Working for a Better Comprehension of the Islamic Culture

“The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than this.”

The Bible, Mark 12:31

This chapter will deal with the European situation in terms of the Muslim presence in the European territories and the attitude with which these communities are received by the different societies. The intention is not to touch any political view or judge any political strategy enacted. The purpose is to retrace the societal perception that lies behind the Muslim integration process taking place in the EU. Integration is not an easy matter, especially when it comes to Muslims and especially when it comes to Muslims in the current situation.

It is important to point out that Europe made some efforts to make possible the Muslim residents to integrate in the EU member states and norms. Some countries, more than others, “suffer” of Muslim influxes due to their colonial past and each of them is facing these migrations with its own approach, that unluckily, resulted to be not enough effective in any case. Indeed, the ineffectiveness is mirrored by the living standards of the majority of the Muslims in the EU. Most of time, rejected or living in the suburbs of the cities, creating their own communities not integrated with the nationals, and sometimes victims of discrimination and xenophobia. Muslim European identity has not been built yet. However, lately even the European identity itself is faltering.

The first paragraph touches elements of the European Muslim process of integration, focusing on the more representative countries in terms of Muslim presence. European

nation-states are forged around a strong sense of national identity and socio-cultural membership. This process is very difficult to neglect, and has a great influence on European states' set of norms, values, mentalities, attitudes and ideals.

Moreover, the representation of the Muslims in the Western society keep to conserve a very biased point of view. In fact, being westerner do not help in understating properly the Islamic reality, i.e. Muslim issues are seen to be addressed uniformly as refereeing to a unique entity. While instead, as said many times in the past chapters, Muslim world and Arab world are very complex substances. Furthermore, Muslim reality in the EU is even more fragmented. This is why a second part of the paragraph is dedicated in explaining the different Muslim realities and dimensions taking place in the EU.

By the way, it came a time in which we have to face these problems for real. Extremism, fundamentalism, the “crisis of migrants”, Muslim secularism, Muslim religious norms creating ethical problems with liberal and democratic values: these are the arguments that are more discussed nowadays, and these are the arguments that need to receive proper attention. Anyway, even once we have given them the proper attention, it is fundamental to make an effort in extrapolating ourselves from our cultural biases and western attitude if we really want to solve them properly.

The second paragraph try to give possible solutions in order to tackle the societal problems coming from the new Muslim relevance in the international affairs and contemporary struggles. Evidently, structural solutions are very complicated to do be formulated. The main point of my thesis is to raise awareness. Once we understand that we have a certain inclination towards Muslims and we ascertain that this attitude has an influence over every Islamic issue, we could start elaborating more effective strategies.

I do not want to give conclusions, nor judging none of the sides. West as the East have their history, culture and norms that are entrenched with their attitudes. This creates influence in their interactions. Awareness from both sides is the only first step and possible solution at the moment. Many efforts can be made, but if we do not try to approach differently, with prejudice-sensitive approaches to the others, we will never learn how to address properly these socio-political problems.

The challenges we are facing nowadays are of different kind. We came to a point to choose for more integration or less, with all the implications that both choices present.

4.1 Integration in the EU: A Social Problem

Many European countries have large and growing Muslim communities. The majority of this minority is hosted by the countries that saw the influxes due to their colonialism.⁷⁰ Between the countries with more Muslims there are Netherlands, UK, Spain, France and Germany, without including the nowadays so-called “migrant crisis” that involved greatly even Greece, Italy and Sweden. Indeed, in this paragraph will be talked about the Muslims that live in EU as citizens and as following a “normal” migration process, that is different from the crisis that is going on nowadays involving thousands of refugees. Even if this is evidently adding tensions and problems in the managing of these people and their integration.

The presence of Muslims on the EU soil raised some problems concerning even the tackling of terrorist attacks and recruitments by terroristic organizations. This happens where these people keep feeling marginalized, not part of the society itself and then extremist feelings arise. By the way, even if the vast majority of Muslims in Europe are not involved in radical activities, some terrorist attacks that took place in the last decade show how EU has not done enough to integrate these people, whom in the most of these cases were citizens of the country where the attack has been perpetrated.

Many European countries tried to adopt strategies in fostering integration. By the way, after the attack of the 11th September 2001, the European attitude of people has been hard to control. EU countries tried to ameliorate the Muslims situation through new citizenship laws, language requirements (to promote communication), “homegrown” imams, improvements in the opportunities on the economic and educational grounds, and intentions in tackling racism and discriminatory attitudes.

Anyway, that was probably not enough. Muslims communities are most of the time marginalized living together in defined areas, attending same schools and hanging out in defined places. Moreover, bans to head scarves or other kind of obstacles to their religious practices⁷¹ are present in some countries that right or not from an ethical point of view do not help them feel welcomed.

Some “studies indicate that Europe’s share of the global Muslim population is relatively

⁷⁰ Felice Dassetto, *L’Islam in Europa*. (Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, Torino, 1994)

⁷¹ For example, in November 2009, Switzerland through referendum, imposed a national ban on the construction of minarets.

small (3% or less), they also suggest that the number of Muslims in Europe is increasing as a result of continued Muslim immigration and higher birth rate among Muslims than non-Muslims.⁷² Anyway, the European attitude is to fear an overpopulation of Muslims in EU countries or Islamization of Europe. Some other concerns are around the possible radicalization of these people. According to some experts is the failure of European countries to fully integrate Muslims into “European civic, political, and economic life that may leave some EU Muslims more vulnerable to extremist ideologies.”⁷³ Anyway, what is worrying, too, is the increasing anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiments that may encourage right-wing extremists to violence in Europe (see the case of Norway in July 2011).

As already said, European countries engaged in different policies and strategies to integrate their Muslim population into the society. Each country had a different perspective with the aim of making feel this people more part of the EU community. “However, none of these various approaches have been completely successful or prevented the development of parallel societies, in which discrete ethnic, linguistic, and/or religious communities function apart from the culture of the host country.”⁷⁴ Moreover, a great proportion of the Muslims living in EU are poor, unemployed or in prison. Some EU countries have an attitude of *laissez-faire* towards integration. What governments try to face is to promote tolerance and non-discrimination but without worrying about the socio-economic disadvantages that these people actually live. It is promoted anti-racism attitudes towards these people but they are not instilled with national identity and common values. Integration in EU is controversial.

France is one of the most evident examples in EU. In fact, France is the European country hosting the higher number of Muslims. Unofficial statistics⁷⁵ supposed that by 2011, the Muslim population of France was from 5.6 million to more than 6 out of 60 million of total French population.⁷⁶ The majority of the countries where these people come mostly from are Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and the ancient French colonies of sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, Islam is the second religion professed in France, where anyway Muslims do not

⁷²CRS Report for Congress, *Muslims in Europe: Promoting Integration and Countering Extremism*. (Congressional Research Service, United States, 2011) p. 1

⁷³ CRS Report for Congress, *Muslims in Europe: Promoting Integration and Countering Extremism* (Cit.) p. 1

⁷⁴ CRS Report for Congress, *Muslims in Europe: Promoting Integration and Countering Extremism* (Cit.) p. 6

⁷⁵ French government does not allow to collect statistics about its citizens on terms of race, ethnicity, religious beliefs. This information is forbidden to ask even in the case of job applicants or employees.

⁷⁶ CRS Report for Congress, *Muslims in Europe: Promoting Integration and Countering Extremism*. (Cit.)

represent a coherent community but divided by traditions, countries origins, language, ethnicity, and even form of religious membership.

The approach in integration of France is connected to the French Revolution, that brought religious freedom and republican ideals clearly establishing a wall between state and religion. This is why the French intent is that of not providing a special consideration in public life for the inclinations of religious or political type. For example, in France there are no actions in affirming the minorities. No judgements want to be made towards French values and system. It is only to point out that different strategies have been applied in the various EU countries, with the intention according to the own values to integrate these people. At the same time, it is evident that in many cases these people still do not feel part of the nation, do not feel integrated and sometimes victims of xenophobia, racism and discrimination.

Integration policies are generally under the responsibility of the individual member states. The legal basis in terms of integration policies are quite recent, and assume a greater importance nowadays with the so called “migrants crisis”. Through the Schengen accords, some concerns raise in terms of mobility of these people, while their education and integrational level depend from the member state of first permanence. The EU as whole should maybe have more to say about integrational policies, since the different states are having different approaches and different reactions to the phenomenon.

We are talking of a very sensitive and endurable issue. These people need to be integrated for the best of everyone, but at the same time the fear of the Europeans are some way understandable, if taken in the context of their historical and cultural background. European nation-states became as such through a very deep, slow and struggled process. Their identities shaped and became so defined to “obstacle” the achievement of a complete European integration itself. The EU integration itself is under judgement and it is blocked at a stage that is revealing to be quite dangerous for the European existence itself. If it is so hard to accept each other, must be even harder for EU members to accept even the “third others”, the recent British referendum, so-called “Brexit”, is a clear example of this.

These political problems get evidently more complicated when we add social and cultural issues. The integration process of EU, as the integration process of Muslims, is seen under a wrong perspective. This perspective is the one we have been talking about along the

other chapters too, i.e. the West has its own biased attitude towards the East. Westerners feel somehow superior, righteous and the non-exotic ones. Moreover, they feel endangered by the different; under attack as if Muslim people were coming just to take away something only to prove that Christianity is wrong. As if they would put the veil or the headscarf as to make us feel impure. Let's even say that Europeans are quite "egocentric" from this point of view.

Of course, it is not all about this, as said, all the phenomenon is very complex. Anyway, the EU made some efforts to integrate Muslims, and sometimes it is even them to do not seem willing to integrate with the European system. Some biases in both views are in action, and it seems an issue difficult to be solved in the short time, but maybe generation by generation.

Sami Zubaida⁷⁷ offered an overview of the different types of Muslims existing in the EU. This analysis can help in order to understand how EU could ameliorate its integration policies and focus on different approaches. The author sustains that "strands of public discourse and the media have tended to see Islam as a totalized unity of communities and forces which are distinct, even hostile, to an equally totalized West, Christian or secular, but liberal and democratic. This totalization is reinforced by proclamations to similar effects by confrontational Muslims, emphasizing the unity and uniformity of some universal *umma*, defined in political as much as in religious terms, and one distinct from a West conceived as a hostile enemy. The reality, of course, is different: Muslims in the West (as elsewhere) are differentiated on a variety of dimensions, which correspond to different religious, or secular, orientations and patterns of practice and association, as attested by a wide variety of observation and research. Let us consider some of these dimensions."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Sami Zubaida, *Islam in Europe*. (Critical Quarterly, 2003, Web. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-8705.00475/full>, 29/08/16, 18:42)

⁷⁸ Sami Zubaida, *Islam in Europe*. (cit.) p.88

4.1.1 Social Dimensions of Difference

From a social point of view, the Muslim people that are living on the EU soil attains to different realities, that we are not usual to consider but that makes great difference in their way to live, think and act. The dimensions between which we can find major social differences, that could be linked even to a certain level of religiosity, are: the ethnic and national one, the social class, the generation.

In the case of the **ethnic and national dimension**, we consider the roots and the origins of these people. For example, the majority of the Muslims settled in Britain are coming from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh, whether in France they are predominantly from Maghreb and from Turkey in Germany. As said, this happened for historical reasons and the colonial past of these countries. Their identification appears as unique Islamic community but they are actually very different from each other.

For what concerns the **class**, it deals with the educational level and the occupation they have. Usually, migrants occupy the lower class jobs in the society in which they migrated. By the way, their ethnicity still explains some patterns. For example, in Britain, people from Bangladesh are the ones with lower education and obtain lower level jobs, while the people from India the highest. In the case of refugees for example, sometimes we are in front of high level professionals, in their countries, that have escape from persecution.

Another gap is in the **generation**. There are Muslims born and raised in EU, with a European education. These people tend to be more open-minded and literate. These young generations can be going towards two directions that of assimilating the dominant culture or identify themselves religiously and have even a stronger relationship with it. Anyway, second generation Muslims present a different background, needs and mentality than their fathers.

4.1.2 Religious Dimensions of Difference

The different social origins and patterns led even to differences in the religiosity, of the Muslims present in the EU. By the way, these different models of orientation must not be taken as fixed but they overlap giving as a picture even more complex of the fragmentation

and differentiation existing between European Muslims.⁷⁹

We can find an ethnic orientation, orientation to the country of origin, the universalists, and the secularists.

In the case of the communal/ethnic orientation, these people want to conserve their affiliation to their ethnicity. “Indian subcontinental Muslims in Britain, for instance, have built up communal structures of mosques, Qur’anic schools, halal food production and retail, burial grounds and processes, as well as charities and social and familial associations with various degrees of formality. They are concerned with the preservation (or reconstruction) of elements of traditional culture and communal continuity and reproduction in the context of the European environment. (...) Communal divisions of this kind tend to get in the way of attempts by Muslim leaders to get recognition for an overall Muslim community as such, in parallel to Catholics, Protestants and Jews.”⁸⁰ Even on political grounds, they try to be recognized as ethnic communities needed to be represented.

When they are oriented to the country of origin, they are particularly connected to the territory of origin and its traditions. “Many sub continentals in Britain, for instance, import imams from their countries. (...) It is Turks, however, who appear to be the most strongly preoccupied with the religious-political and associational divisions of Turkey. This is partly to do with the control over religious institutions and finance exercised by the Turkish Government’s Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet) in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. This attempt at control is challenged and countered by extensions of religious associations and the Islamic political party in Turkey.”⁸¹ The same control and influence is exercised for example by the country of origin over the Algerians in France, or by the Saudi government in many European cities.

The universalists are the ones who feel detached from any cultural or ethnic orientation. In particular, it is usually the orientation of the new generations, that decide to detach from the traditional culture of the parents considered backward. Within this category, according to Zubaida, we might find the so-called “accommodationists” and the “dissidents.”

⁷⁹ Sami Zubaida, *Islam in Europe* (Cit.)

⁸⁰ Sami Zubaida, *Islam in Europe* (Cit.) p. 90

⁸¹ Sami Zubaida, *Islam in Europe* (Cit.) pp. 90-91

- The accommodationists are usually people educated and raised as professionals. They detach from the traditional culture, but not refuse it. They think that religion and culture should be separated, and they are usually religious based on the scriptures and subject to rationalism. Women are particularly relevant in the formation of a Muslim feminism, detaching from the patriarchal culture but claiming a return to pure Islam detecting a different perspective in the reading of the Koran. From a political point of view, these people accommodate with the culture in which they have been raised. “We have many examples of this kind of orientation in Britain, notably a recently founded club and cultural center called *Ar-Rum*. The founders are educated professional young Muslims, mostly women from an Indian subcontinental background. The club consists of a restaurant, a juice bar and activity spaces for concerts, poetry readings, children’s events and discussions, some of them inter-faith. There are also a number of Muslim associations dedicated to projecting favorable images of Islam and Muslims in the media and the public eye, and to countering Islamo-phobic trends.”⁸²

- The dissenters are instead on the lower social class and educational level. “They are the typical alienated youth of the *banlieu* in France, and of the deprived northern cities of England. They are generally disenchanted with their parents’ social and cultural styles, but at the same time alienated from the society into which they have been socialized by education and general orientation. They suffer from prevalent racism, exclusion from job opportunities and cultural impoverishment. In the earlier decades of the twentieth century, leftist and labor movements and ideologies may have provided a refuge and an expression to the earlier generations of disadvantaged migrants and their children are no longer available, and the second and third generation migrants may drift into native delinquent cultures related to drugs and petty crime, or, in the case of some of the young Muslims, identification with radical Islam, thus rejecting the society which excludes them, in the name of a higher inclusive and universal identity.”⁸³

In the end, the last orientation is the secularist. Indeed, a good amount of Muslims in Europe declared to be secular or lax in their religious observance. “Felice Dassetto ⁸⁴

⁸² Sami Zubaida, *Islam in Europe* (Cit.) p. 92

⁸³ Sami Zubaida, *Islam in Europe* (Cit.) p. 93

⁸⁴ Felice Dassetto, *L’Islam in Europa*. (cit.)

estimates that some 60 per cent of all European Muslims are secular in one form or another, agnostic, indifferent or culturalist Muslims. Another 20 per cent, he estimates, are 'individual pietists', that is to say they keep their religious observance to the private sphere. It is only the remaining 20 per cent who are public activists, divided between 'ritualists', missionaries, mystics and militants. (...) These findings are not surprising when we consider the secularising thrust of modern societies, of the liberation of most of the younger generation from family controls and communal and religious authorities, and the incentives and desires of sex, entertainment, cultural pursuits and consumption. On the other hand, these pressures are precisely what may dispose certain minorities to rejection and dissent in the name of religious identity and exclusion."⁸⁵

This picture focusing on the different dimensions to which the European Muslim population belong might serve again to the purpose of underlining the diversified group we are talking about when we say Muslims. Moreover, these models trace a clear structure in which there is very small space for fundamentalism and political or religious radicalism. Therefore, generalizing is totally improper and have a strong effect on the integration process of these people.

4.2 Possible Solutions

It is very complicated to furnish clear and sure solutions. This thesis tried to point out that Europeans and Americans have an attitude that we can say, if not wrong, biased. The history and culture of Islam is misunderstood and victim of the summary knowledge of the Westerners about the Muslim World. In fact, the West has an imposing and superior attitude towards this different, due to the colonial past and the ottoman danger. Moreover, misleading happenings created an aura of fear and distance from Islam as religion. Furthermore, Mass Media had a great role in maintaining and reshaping this image of Islam in the West and fostered prejudices and an appearance of knowledge that is missing out of the right basis.

The attitude that Westerners shows towards people from Middle East is very general, and involve the Arabs as a unique entity, including a mixture of everything that might pertain to this world: Muslims, Non-Muslims, Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims, fundamentalists,

⁸⁵ Sami Zubaida, *Islam in Europe* (Cit.) p. 94

moderates, secularists, people from Middle East, people from eastern countries of every kind, and very different ethnicities and minorities present on the Arab soils but not professing Islam, and so on so forth. Indeed, in Arab countries are present lot of minorities, even Christian or Jewish, and much more. Therefore, it is clear how difficult is to talk about Islam and how then to give answers and solutions as to a unique entity (that is not!).

Moreover, we cannot even generalize on the other side. Not all the Americans or all the Europeans produced biased material and completely useless opinions about Islam. And furthermore, with Europeans, for example, we talk about a very differentiate picture of states and cultures that deals with the “Islamic issues” in different ways, according their values, laws, historical experiences, cultures and resources.

Since “such historically rooted prejudices are transmitted through education”⁸⁶, first of all, a possible solution could be to intervene at the educational level. Schoolbooks, for example, could be adjusted removing the negative information. Moreover, objective and complete information about Islam and Muslim could be added. Teaching about Islam could be a way to improve the attitude and the knowledge of it since young. While, the Arab world is acquiring importance nowadays on different grounds could be useful and important to educate children to this reality properly. Some texts that stress indirectly or directly the superiority of a culture and the inferiority of another could be avoided.

Secondly, Westerners politicians, scientists, opinion leaders and media could acquire themselves a more adequate knowledge about Islam. Assumptions and tensions related to the power relationship between West and East should avoided. For example, that of the clash of civilization or the prejudiced idea that democracy and Islam cannot coexist. Many leaders reject *a priori* any Islamic political movement, and this is not helping for a deeper understanding of Islamic mentality, political culture and developments. Therefore, if the leaders and reports could study better and possibly without prejudices the Islamic vast acquaintance.

The eminent Moroccan professor Al-Jabri ⁸⁷ suggested a strategy to build a bridge between

⁸⁶ Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solution*. (cit.) p.178

⁸⁷ M.A Al-Jabri, ‘*Clash of civilizations*’: *The relation of the future?* (In: Muñoz, G.M., “Islam, modernism and the West. Cultural and political relations at the end of the millennium”. I.B. Tauris Publishers, New York, 1999)

the two cultural attitudes, and a possible base for a solution. First, “the recognition of the ‘other’ within its own system”⁸⁸. For example, westerners should stop believing that democracy could be reached only on their system and structure. “Islam has historically provided formulas for maintaining several bodies of legislation within the same polity that apply to individuals on the basis of their religious affiliation. If Muslims are to be ruled according to the sharia, non-Muslims need the right to be ruled according to their own legislation and customs. Returning to those unique forms of legal and social plurality is easier, and possibly more urgent, than creating Western-style pluralism.”⁸⁹ Second, the principle of recognition of the other’s right to be different. “Therefore, Islam as a religion, should not to be continuously compared with the Western secular system.”⁹⁰ “Islamist critiques are essentially attempts to reopen the ‘end of history’ debate through the notion of a ‘new convergence thesis’. Such efforts will not be easy, given the triumphalist cold war assumptions that underpin Western foreign policy making.”⁹¹ Third principle is that of tolerance and indulgence, connected to the concept of cultural relativism. It refers mainly to an attitude of understanding towards what is different, and respect of others perspectives. We should be able at this point to accept some of their cultural norms and values, which are indispensable to them to preserve their identity and religious belief.

Salamé⁹², a Lebanese professor, pointed out some possible solutions in order to improve the mutual relationship between West and East, intended as Muslim world. First aspect is “the dissemination of knowledge about Islamic movements in the West and the recognition of the existing religious and ideological diversity in the Muslim world. He states that Western governments should seek to know what the Islamist groups are and what their activities consist of. This cannot be achieved if the West views the Islamist challenge solely from the perspective of a security threat. (...) More generally, the West has to learn that its model of the secular nation-state is not as universal as it presumes, and other forms of political organization may be as valid. (...) Western attacks on Islam and negative media stereotypes of Muslims help confirm Islamist paranoia about supposed Western plot

⁸⁸ Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (cit.) p.182

⁸⁹ Ghassan Salamé, *Islam and the West*. (Foreign Policy, n. 90, The Washington Post Company, Washington, 1993) p. 32

⁹⁰ Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions*. (cit.) p.182

⁹¹ Michael E. Salla, *Political Islam and the West: a new cold war or convergence?* (Third World Quarterly, vol. 18, n. 4., Routledge Publisher, UK, 1997) p. 740

⁹² Ghassan Salamé, *Islam and the West*. (cit.)

to eradicate Islam.”⁹³

The second point Salamé argues is that the West should start by getting closer to the moderate Islam, and to gradually associate it within their governments. Moreover, as third point, “the West's discourse on human rights and democracy always seems to have been conditioned by strategic considerations. (...) the negative image of Islam in the West has authorized the international community to deny the movements concerned their elementary human rights and to refrain from criticizing the political elite in the Muslim world for denying their people their democratic rights.”⁹⁴ Therefore, it should be critiqued by the West these violations of human rights, when Muslim people are seeking for democracy.

For what concerns Media, in order to avoid the development of new biases about Islam and Muslims, the Mass Media should adjust their incorrect views and procedures adopting strategies that could prevent prejudices. Sensitization and raising awareness are needed to correct this process. “the responsible framework of the media [should] become convinced of the fact that they are indeed contributing to this stigmatizing process and recognize the necessity for change as well. (...) Reporters [should] start differentiating between the different Muslim movements and streams in their messages and emphasize the existing diversity of opinions in the Muslim World. Improving the knowledge of reporters on this topic during their vocational training would greatly assist this process. In addition, such knowledge will be of use to the reporter in the critical evaluation of statements made by important persons concerning these groups, and consequently enable them to place question marks if necessary or look for a second opinion on the topic.”⁹⁵ Moreover, the journalists should be careful when they report the news to do not be selective or emphasize on exotic events and details, especially when not needed. Oversimplification and generalization should be avoided, and more often the comparisons should be taking in consideration also socio-economic and religious diversity and as well the differences within groups and countries concerned.

In the end, to focus on the so-called “crisis of migrants” taking place nowadays. We can say first that migrations are not a problem of only these times, but since the 80s Islamic

⁹³ Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions*. (Cit.) p.187

⁹⁴ Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions*. (Cit.) p.188

⁹⁵ Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (Cit.) p.190

immigrations start to be felt by the European states. It is important to rectify the “the negative image of Muslims in the European Union may be achieved by means of an ‘acceptance-policy’ aimed at stimulating the acceptance of these groups by society. This will require more than just providing information about the mutual cultures and the stressing the acquisition of the cognitive skills necessary to associate with them.

Acceptance is a process that needs to be internalized by both parties in order to make the essential mental turn: on the part of the Muslims in Europe implying the acceptance of the respective countries as their second homeland and on the part of the autochthons, the readiness to accept these groups as fellow-citizen. At the psychological level, being accepted in Europe would mean to immigrants, among other things, ‘feeling at home’. This long-term goal will only be realized if governments apply a multidimensional policy directed towards Muslims as well as towards society at large.”⁹⁶ Europeans have to come to the realization that a Muslim can be a good European too. Working on the society and the perception that Westerner societies have of Islam is the first step.

⁹⁶Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions*. (Cit.) p.194

Conclusion

The world asset is changing and every states and geographic areas is facing its own challenges. Anyway, with the phenomenon of globalization acquiring stronger relevance, the majority of the challenges are getting global and shared by the entire community. The international community in defining these new issues and old threats is talking about the so-called “new normal”.

Are we really adapting to a new concept of normality in international issues and relations? Do the ongoing conflicts in many areas of the world achieved a status of normality of everyday life? Did terrorism become a normal action of war and did we give up to find a proper way to tackle it? Are we getting used to all these challenges that we do not really know how to face yet?

As we have seen, apparently Islam is representing one of these global challenges on many grounds. The most problematic phenomenon nowadays connected to it is the terrorist organizations and the individual inclinations to it. This clearly is a hard issue to be solved in the short term and with classical methods. Indeed, United Nations are faltering, and we need new strategies for the new problems, and for the old ones that have never been solved yet.

Effective answers and solutions are difficult to achieve. Anyway, for this reason, the West should learn how to look at these issues from a different perspective, since the one it had until now did not produce any tangible result. Migrations, conflicts, and terrorism keep threatening the unity and stability of the European Union as well as the capacity of action of the UN.

For what concerns the Muslim world, Muslims represent a very fragmented complicated reality. The West to deal with it should make the most effort to understand it properly, in order to address concretely these new and old challenges. Deep biases exist in Western conception of the Islamic world and Arab one, and governments should start from this

awareness to deal with these problems. Western society is not well-oriented in the integration of these people, creating many cultural and social clashes and introducing evident problems in the Western societal environment.

Our culture, identity and values are rooted in the history, an history of contraposition to the West. Possibly, these implicit sentiments should be eliminated, but this is quite a difficult task. Anyway, the first step would be to diffuse awareness and prompt a different attitude towards Islamic practices and institutions. First of all, learning to differentiate the different Islamic realities one from another, avoiding generalizations and very stereotypical images. Secondly, understanding their culture and beliefs as inserted in a wider picture than that one we have now. Islam is shaped around a specific history and social needs and cultural origins, that differ from ours, but not necessarily to be seen as inferiors. Then third, it would be relevant to change the Western colonial and imperial perspective of superiority interlinked with the traditional Christian repulsion of Muslims as enemies.

Better knowledge, more respect for the undeniable existing differences and awareness about the attitude we built over years would help us to look at the issues from a different perspective, and maybe find enduring and concrete solutions. Both the parts, East and West, should engage in this effort in order to change the representation of Muslims that the West adopted and its attitude in evaluating and judging Islam.

The effort would worth a new understanding, and help our minds to beat our fears. In the end, we are in an era that is presenting us the bill for what we have built until this moment. The UN and the EU are asking for more integration to make their jobs. Globalization is making the World to get as a unique territory shared by populations, in which threats and benefits are interlinked. Are we really ready to sacrifice a bit of our strenuously achieved national identity, in order to go on with the process and open up the doors to a different level of governance? Are we actually ready to address these issues differently or are we intentioned on recalling them “new normal” as concretely showing our fear for this change?

How we are going to face these challenges, between these the Islamic one, will furnish an answer to these questions.

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Abstract

“So tell the tale – perhaps they will reflect.”

Koran 7:176

The world asset is changing and every state and geographic area is facing its own challenges. Moreover, nowadays globalization is reaching stronger relevance, turning most of the national threats into global issues. Mass Media is talking about the concept of “new normal”, as if we are experiencing a normalization of the catastrophic events of our time. Are we really adapting to a new concept of normality in international issues and relations? Do the ongoing conflicts in many areas of the world achieved a status of everyday life normality? Did terrorism become a normal action of war and did we give up to find a proper way to tackle it? Are we getting used to all these challenges that we do not really know how to face yet?

The world is acclimatizing again to new clashes, but even to the old ones never solved. The new international morality and norms, the point of stall reached by the United Nations, the recapitulation of the European Union process and the intangible threats posed by the international terrorism are on the hedge of the insolvency. In all this tangle, the Islamic world is one of the most relevant protagonist. Therefore, how are we facing the challenges coming from this vast geographic area, of economic, political and cultural kind, and even more religious and social? The Muslim world and the Islam is posing serious dilemmas. However, in order to solve a problem, first it is needed to understand what the problem is, and who and why is causing it. Moreover, it is needed to detect, if the problem is only one, or a series of problems to be addressed with different solutions. In this case it could be asked: Are we having a proper understanding of these challenges? Are we sustaining the proper attitude towards these problem/problems?

“Our” western society perceives the Muslim and the Arab Worlds on the basis of its own historical and cultural experience. Moreover, Mass Media have a great responsibility in the propagation and settlement of certain ideas in the mindset of Western people towards the

Islam. Therefore, it is of fundamental importance to provide the proper explanations and raise awareness about the existence of a particular attitude that Westerners assume when talking about Islam. Western attitude has been shaped in the decades by historical events, political and social developments and a contrasted relationship with the Middle East, based even on religious grounds. The West saw the East as the symbol of the “Different” for long time to end up becoming the representation of the “Opposite” reality to the West. Feared and distant, the East acquired specific connotations, that with the time became prejudices, stereotypes and *a priori* judgments. The West, sometimes conscious but most of times unconsciously, acted and expressed opinions affected by this rooted biases, unable to see the problems with the right attitude.

Speaking about concrete examples of how society is affected, recently we have been witnesses of some cases of Western society’s reaction to the Muslim community. One of these examples is the “burkini case” in Nice, France. Indeed, possibly affected by the recent terrorist attack that took place in the same city in July 2016 (where around 84 people have been killed and many other severally injured), the mayor of the city banned women from wearing the so-called burkini⁹⁷ on public beaches. The ban spread even to other French coastal cities, but it has been finally judged unconstitutional by the National Court since breaching fundamental freedoms. This law was clearly targeting first of all Muslims. It is human to think that the terrorist action that had taken place recently enhanced xenophobic sentiments, and fear. At the same time, it is unacceptable to get to the point of breaking national norms, values and ideals to contrast an Islamic entity as a whole, with such random attitude. In fact, the inclination of Westerners is to treat the Islam and Muslims as a unique big entity. Instead, Islam is fragmented, and it represents a very complex picture of cultures, ethnicities, geographical areas, practices, interpretations, dimensions, orientations and degrees of adherence. It cannot be reduced to a single, simple, common entity. We cannot talk about Europe as talking about Christianity, and at the same time talking about Islam is not the same as talking about the Muslim or Arab community overall.

Another example is about the many critics that the magazine of Charlie Hebdo received after publishing a drawing about the Italian catastrophic earthquake that hit the central part

⁹⁷ A swimsuit for women initially presented in Australia by the designer A. Zanetti. This clothing item covers the entire body, leaving uncovered hands, face and feet. This swimsuit has been used by Muslim women, since created according to Islamic traditions.

of Italy, in August 2016. The cartoon depicts the Italians as different kind of pasta, one image in particular shows dead Italians under layers of rubbles. Evidently, this picture of the situation raised disappointment, disgust and critical attacks towards the satiric journal. A debate about the correctness and the right of expression about Charlie Hebdo to publish such offensive drawings has been raised and involved the public opinion. Without spending time on judging the ethic, the defense of freedom of expression, or the morality behind this kind of publishing, this event clearly put in evidence our different attitude in treating and expressing opinions on matters dealing with the West, conversely to the East.

Indeed, Charlie Hebdo has even been a victim of a terrorist attack perpetrated by Muslim fundamentalists in January 2015. This attack has been fomented by the offending cartoons towards Muslims, the prophet Mohammad, Allah and Islam published by the same journal. After the event, the public opinion has been reassumed against the Muslim community. No evidence of offence has been raised by the general public opinion, that did not focus on the inappropriateness of sketches but only on the horrible killings and the threat represented by fundamental Islam. Westerners mobilized to blame, with the stereotypical traits associated to Muslims, the aggressiveness, violence, and extremism of the Islam overall. But no serious blame has been particularly put in evidence around the disturbing attitude of Charlie Hebdo in this case by major medias or public opinions. Many Muslims probably have been offended by such satiric attacks, but not all the Muslims concluded that killing the cartoonists was an option. The two situations are evidently not precisely comparable. However, in this context, the “Charlie Hebdo case” is an evident example of the different attitude that Westerners apply in the evaluation of issues involving Muslims rather than the Western community.

A relevant author that tried to create a discipline around the existing relationship between West and East is the Palestinian/American Edward W. Said. According to Said, Western scientific and social community interpreted and keep interpreting the East by “Orientalizing” it. This means the existence of structured preconceptions through which the West looks, studies and understands the East. The East is the main cultural competitor of the West, it has been the main historical source for colonies and moreover it represents the more rooted example of difference to the West. Therefore, we can clearly see how the relationship between West and East is based on: cultural rivalry, balance of power, and fear of the different. In particular, Europeans and Americans have a strong tradition of interpreting the Orient basing their views on the role and position they detain as being

Western, Europeans or Americans. In few words, Europe interprets the East as being West, with a western point of view, conforming to attitude to their bias.

The history of the formation of the “Orientalism” begins with the travels and the experiences acquired from the East by the travelers and traders, from Marco Polo to Della Valle and Mandeville. We started to get to know the East better, and what was retained to be a world completely unknown became something commonly recognized as different. The final result of our understanding of the Islam is that this faith represents a modified and fake version of the Christianity. Their values began to be seen as in contradiction with ours, and though this pressure the Islam came to be interpreted as the wrong world contraposed to our right one. After the death of Mohammad, in 632, the Islamic military, religious and cultural power spread and grew enormously. The Muslim army conquered Persia, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, and then North Africa, reaching Spain, Sicily and part of France between the VIII and XIV century. For this reason, Islam ended up symbolizing the cultural and religious terror, and the so-called “Ottoman danger”, latent at the doors of the European continent, represented an everlasting traumatic presence for all the XVII century.

Moreover, Europe persists even today in looking at the Islamic world in a colonial framework. Indeed, starting from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the European powers start to affect Middle Eastern rulers. In the Ottoman Empire the so-called “*Tanzimat* reforms” have been approved, as an example to modernize the states and compete with the West. These reforms consisted in importing versions of the western model of constitutional government, civil law, secular education and industrial development. At the time⁹⁸, the Ottoman Empire was known by the West as the "sick man of Europe" and European powers tried to increase their financial control over its territories. Soon this domination became a clear intention of conquest. The colonialization started. The French power conquered Algeria in 1830 and Tunisia in 1878, extending later its influence to Lebanon and Syria. While the British occupied Egypt in 1882 and established some time later an effective control of the Persian Gulf. Even the Italians seized Libya in 1912. On the other hand, the Ottomans turned to Germany to protect them from these Western powers, but the result was increasing financial and military dependence on Germany. Only many years later, during and after the Second World War, the British, the French, and the Soviets departed from many parts of the Middle East, and many Middle

⁹⁸ In the 19th century.

Eastern states gained their independence again or anew.

During all this time, Christianity had a relevant role in stereotyping the Western view of Islam. The ongoing presence of this threat has been slowly incorporated in Western mentality. The Christian vision of Islam came to be based on fear, the fear of a new powerful faith spreading all over the Arab peninsula, too close to the Christian territories. Muslims were not simply different as any other culture but they were the opposite of Christians and so impostors. The interpretation of the Islam nourished of these aspects and it acquired no meaning by itself, but it could be seen only as long as it was contraposed to Christianity. This attitude created a defined imaginary of what Islam is, according to Christian view and values. Furthermore, this view has been strengthened by many writings, poetries, and popular superstitions. In this way, the ignorance about the Islam became more complex and structured than its factual knowledge.

On one hand, different scholars have been affected by Said theory of “Orientalism”, such as Albert Hourani, Nikki Keddie, or Bernard Lewis, and strongly criticized Said for being too extremist and to give the East a sort of excuse in delegitimizing the studies of the West. On the other hand, at the same time Said stimulated an ongoing debate that it has been received by many Arab scholars. One of these is Hassan Hanafi⁹⁹ that researched and developed a parallel theory called “Occidentalism”. The Occidentalism is a reversed Orientalism, where the West for once become the object of study and not the subject. For what concerns Occidentalism, the West is evaluated in order to quest for objectivity, where the Third World can reach its redemption from the colonizers. While in order to face the challenge of the contraposition of this two worlds, Said purpose is to raise awareness between the Western scholars and to overcome the dichotomy. Hanafi proposes a revitalization of the East, where the ‘other’ is the West.

Both the East and West are two entities emerged from historical events and social circumstances. In the case of a complex phenomenon such as Islam, its knowledge comes from a series of images, book works, and experiences that has been hand down by different people with different perspectives. In the intent of the anti-Orientalism there is the goal of

⁹⁹ Hassan Hanafi, *Gli arabi nello specchio dell'Occidente*. (in F. Corrao e S. Pagani (a cura di), *L'altro nella cultura araba*, Mesogea, Messina, 2006)

unmask this attitude, while the Occidentalism instead tries to invert the tendency and led to objectivity through a contraposed vision. Anyway, what Said proposes, as said, is to overcome the dichotomy West/East, and the imaginary geography that divides “our lands” from the “lands of others” (the barbaric ones). This could be a solution on which to work, both the West and the East for the reciprocal better understanding.

In addition to a stratified history of academic, cultural, religious, artistic and philosophical materials around Islam, that in the past contributed to the formation of a Western attitude towards the East, Medias is another aspect influencing our thoughts and attitude towards Islam, and the Arab world overall. If we think about the events of the past three decades that involved the Middle East and the Islamic World¹⁰⁰, Media gained a specific role in referring the events and shaping the public opinion. Going back until the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington, it must be said that this event has been the most crucial in putting the Islamic World in the spotlight of the international affairs. Osama bin Laden, founder of the *jihad* fighters known as *al-Qaida*, claimed to be the perpetrator of these devastating attacks. These Islamic extremists are only a section of the many *jihad* federations and groups trained in Afghanistan or of a variety of sympathizers present in Sudan, Libya, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Anyway, these extremists represented only a small fraction of the Muslim population of the world, currently estimated at over 1 billion¹⁰¹. “Bin Laden’s terrorism is not, for example, the expression of an innate Islamic readiness for violence or self-sacrifice, but the expression of his very specific world-view that rhetorically re-creates the meaning of *jihad*, power and sacrifice. His rhetoric is not conditioned by Islam – it is Islam, within his discourse, that is reconditioned by his rhetoric. In consequence, such a discourse is only successful in places where it helps to give meaning to a social reality [and that could be partially applied to the ISIS too.] (...) [In this context], at a time of concern for political correctness, the boundaries of cultural identity are guaranteed. The political culturalization of the world order has created a new explanatory script for social and political events. It is asked whether Islam endorses or promotes suicide attacks, whether Islam unconditionally calls individual Muslims to *jihad* and whether Islam ethically legitimizes the use of violence. Humans do not appear any more as responsible for their actions, but as an executive power of Islam – its agents. But

¹⁰⁰ For example: The Iranian Revolution, the Rushdie Affair, the Gulf War, the war in former Yugoslavia, the revolution in Afghanistan, the Arab Springs, the extremist movements such as the current threat of Isis, and the waves of migrants reversed into the European territory.

¹⁰¹ Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (Hepton Books, Oxford, 2000)

their actions were never determined by normative Islamic systems. On the contrary, their interpretations reformulate Islam.”¹⁰²

Therefore, starting from the events of the September, 11 on, Western Media’s attention has been increasingly captured by Islam. Indeed, journalistic and scientific publications about Muslims and the Arab world have been produced in great number and the Western position has been shaped and defined by them. The United States, as the European Union, had to come to the realization that “their societies will be permanently confronted with a significant number of Muslims and with their different cultural and religious backgrounds”¹⁰³. Consequently, mutual relations between West and Middle East have been establish on the grounds of this new awareness, fostering stereotypes and prejudices. In fact, most of times Muslims are addressed by Media as fanatics, irrationals, primitive, belligerent, and dangerous. Television, radio, magazines, newspapers, books, social medias and movies contribute daily in building the representation of the world that we have. The predominant industry of culture, as we can call medias, works exploiting a sort of Imperialism, exercised by the West, and in particular by the United States. American and European medias use similar and common representations to describe Muslims, that are most of times negative. Repetitive expressions such as “Islamic mentality”, “Muslim practices”, “Arab violence” or “Shia inclinations” are heard and reheard. Arabs are severally represented in the context of oil issues, terrorist attacks, Muslim practices of segregation, acts of violence and wars. When journals talk about the Muslim world is most of times to point out disadvantaged and critic situations. It comes from the generalization a monolithic view of Islam, easy to explain but difficult to understand, this because a Muslim World as we intend is inexistent. As saying Christian World include a variety of cultures, currents, views, and ethnic groups, this works for the Islamic one too (for example Islam includes believers in countries from China to Nigeria, that are clearly not so easy to associate with each other). Generalizations and the widespread of wrong or biased information depends even by the difficulty in obtaining reliable sources and historical carelessness. The distortion in reporting the news can depend even from superficial translations, partiality and inaccuracy and oversimplification due to make the access to the information to the audience possible. Medias found a very fertile grounds in which to

¹⁰² Reinahrd Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (cit.) p. XIV-XV

¹⁰³ Shadid W., van Koningsveld P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (in “Religious Freedom and The Neutrality of the State: The Position of Islam in the European Union”, Peeters, Leuven 2002) p. 174

diffuse wrong ideas about Islam. There is a great consensus about how to interpret Islam, and representation of Arabs and Muslims is a common one in the West. A label cannot be attached to this reality. Indeed, Said said that we would never accept this kind of confusions and generalizations if dealing with Europe for example.

After having explained how the Western attitude emerged and how through Media It has been diffused and commonly accepted, it would relevant to talk about how this bias reverberate concretely in Western societies. In fact, many Western countries have large and growing Muslim communities. In particular, in the European Union, taken as example, the major part of this minority is hosted by the countries that saw the influxes due to the colonialist past. Between the countries with more Muslims there are Netherlands, UK, Spain, France and Germany, without including sections of Muslims connected to the nowadays “migrant crisis” that involves greatly even Greece, Italy and Sweden. The Muslims that live in EU as citizens and as following a “normal” migration process are a different challenge than the ongoing crisis that is involving thousands of refugees. By the way, this event is adding tension and problems in the managing of the Muslim people overall and their integration.

The European Union (EU) is born with a very slow and long development. And before the establishment of the EU, the European states had to find and define their identities through historical struggles and sometimes suffered processes. The European nation-states rooted their identities in the history, social and ideological changes and conquered their national sentiments sometimes through agony and hope. Such deep sentiments are difficult to neglect. Each state went through out a different process of formation, and even if this process gave the same results at the end, the path made by the singles still counts and influences differently each national view, values and ideals. These historical constructions came to threat Europe itself and a very recent example is the so-called Brexit, that took place through the British referendum in June 2016 and highly influenced even by the EU migration polices and struggles. The challenge for Europe is evident. As it is evident that if European integration itself arrived to a point of stall, it is hard to conceive how the “different”, such as the Muslims, could be easily integrated in the European societal process.

The presence of Muslims on the EU soil raised some problems concerning even the tackling of terrorist attacks and recruitments by terroristic organizations. This happen in

particular where these people keep feeling marginalized, not part of the society itself and therefore extremist feelings arise. By the way, even if the vast majority of Muslims in Europe are not involved in radical activities, some terrorist attacks that took place in the last decade show how EU has not done enough to integrate these people, whom in the most of the terrorist cases were actual citizens of the country where the attack has been perpetrated (at times even second generation citizens). It is important to point out that even if Europe made some efforts to make possible the Muslim residents to integrate in the EU member states and norms anyway, these resulted to be not enough effective enough. The ineffectiveness is mirrored by the living standards of the majority of the Muslims in the EU. Most of time, rejected or living in the suburbs of the cities, creating their own communities not integrated with the nationals, and sometimes victims of discrimination and xenophobia. Muslim European identity has not been built yet, where, anyway, even the European identity itself is faltering.

It came a time in which we have to address these problems in concrete. Extremism, fundamentalism, the “crisis of migrants”, Muslim secularism, Muslim religious norms creating ethical problems with liberal and democratic values: these are the arguments that are more discussed nowadays, and these are the arguments that need to receive proper attention. Anyway, even once we have given them the proper attention, it is fundamental to make an effort in extrapolating ourselves from our cultural biases and western attitude if we really want to solve them properly. It is very complicated to furnish clear and sure solutions. Since “such historically rooted prejudices are transmitted through education”¹⁰⁴, first of all, a possible solution could be to intervene at the educational level. Schoolbooks, for example, could be adjusted removing the negative information. Moreover, objective and complete information about Islam and Muslim could be added. Teaching about Islam could be a way to improve the attitude and the knowledge of it since young. While, the Arab world is acquiring importance nowadays on different grounds could be useful and important to educate children to this reality properly. Some texts that stress indirectly or directly the superiority of a culture and the inferiority of another could be avoided. Secondly, Westerners politicians, scientists, opinion leaders and media could acquire themselves a more adequate knowledge about Islam. Assumptions and tensions related to the power relationship between West and East should be avoided. For example, that of the

¹⁰⁴ Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solution*. (cit.) p.178

clash of civilization or the prejudiced idea that democracy and Islam cannot coexist. Many leaders reject *a priori* any Islamic political movement, and this is not helping for a deeper understanding of Islamic mentality, political culture and developments. Therefore, if the leaders and reports could study better and possibly without prejudices the Islamic vast acquaintance.

The eminent Moroccan professor Al-Jabri¹⁰⁵ suggested a strategy to build a bridge between the two cultural attitudes, and a possible base for a solution. First, “the recognition of the ‘other’ within its own system”¹⁰⁶. For example, westerners should stop believing that democracy could be reached only on their system and structure. “Islam has historically provided formulas for maintaining several bodies of legislation within the same polity that apply to individuals on the basis of their religious affiliation. If Muslims are to be ruled according to the sharia, non-Muslims need the right to be ruled according to their own legislation and customs. Returning to those unique forms of legal and social plurality is easier, and possibly more urgent, than creating Western-style pluralism.”¹⁰⁷ Second, the principle of recognition of the other’s right to be different. “Therefore, Islam as a religion, should not to be continuously compared with the Western secular system.”¹⁰⁸ “Islamist critiques are essentially attempts to reopen the ‘end of history’ debate through the notion of a ‘new convergence thesis’. Such efforts will not be easy, given the triumphalist cold war assumptions that underpin Western foreign policy making.”¹⁰⁹ Third principle is that of tolerance and indulgence, connected to the concept of cultural relativism. It refers mainly to an attitude of understanding towards what is different, and respect of others perspectives. We should be able at this point to accept some of their cultural norms and values, which are indispensable to them to preserve their identity and religious belief.

Salamé¹¹⁰, a Lebanese professor, pointed out some possible solutions in order to improve the mutual relationship between West and East, intended as Muslim world. First aspect is

¹⁰⁵ M.A. Al-Jabri, ‘*Clash of civilizations*’: *The relation of the future?* (In: Muñoz, G.M., “Islam, modernism and the West. Cultural and political relations at the end of the millennium”. I.B. Tauris Publishers, New York, 1999)

¹⁰⁶ Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (cit.) p.182

¹⁰⁷ Ghassan Salamé, *Islam and the West*. (Foreign Policy, n. 90, The Washington Post Company, Washington, 1993) p. 32

¹⁰⁸ Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions*. (cit.) p.182

¹⁰⁹ Michael E. Salla, *Political Islam and the West: a new cold war or convergence?* (Third World Quarterly, vol. 18, n. 4., Routledge Publisher, UK, 1997) p. 740

¹¹⁰ Ghassan Salamé, *Islam and the West*. (cit.)

“the dissemination of knowledge about Islamic movements in the West and the recognition of the existing religious and ideological diversity in the Muslim world. He states that Western governments should seek to know what the Islamist groups are and what their activities consist of. This cannot be achieved if the West views the Islamist challenge solely from the perspective of a security threat. (...) More generally, the West has to learn that its model of the secular nation-state is not as universal as it presumes, and other forms of political organization may be as valid. (...) Western attacks on Islam and negative media stereotypes of Muslims help confirm Islamist paranoia about supposed Western plot to eradicate Islam.”¹¹¹ The second point Salamé argues is that the West should start by getting closer to the moderate Islam, and to gradually associate it within their governments. Moreover, as third point, “the West's discourse on human rights and democracy always seems to have been conditioned by strategic considerations. (...) the negative image of Islam in the West has authorized the international community to deny the movements concerned their elementary human rights and to refrain from criticizing the political elite in the Muslim world for denying their people their democratic rights.”¹¹² Therefore, it should be critiqued by the West these violations of human rights, when Muslim people are seeking for democracy.

For what concerns Media, in order to avoid the development of new biases about Islam and Muslims, the Mass Media should adjust their incorrect views and procedures adopting strategies that could prevent prejudices. Sensitization and raising awareness are needed to correct this process. “the responsible framework of the media [should] become convinced of the fact that they are indeed contributing to this stigmatizing process and recognize the necessity for change as well. (...) Reporters [should] start differentiating between the different Muslim movements and streams in their messages and emphasize the existing diversity of opinions in the Muslim World. Improving the knowledge of reporters on this topic during their vocational training would greatly assist this process. In addition, such knowledge will be of use to the reporter in the critical evaluation of statements made by important persons concerning these groups, and consequently enable them to place question marks if necessary or look for a second opinion on the topic.”¹¹³ Moreover, the

¹¹¹ Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions*. (Cit.) p.187

¹¹² Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions*. (Cit.) p.188

¹¹³ Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions* (Cit.) p.190

journalists should be careful when they report the news to do not be selective or emphasize on exotic events and details, especially when not needed. Oversimplification and generalization should be avoided, and more often the comparisons should be taking in consideration also socio-economic and religious diversity and as well the differences within groups and countries concerned.

In the end, to better focus and try to tackle the parallel challenge of the so-called “crisis of migrants”, we can say, first, that migrations are not a problem of only these times, but since the 80s Islamic immigrations start to be felt by the European states. It is important to rectify the “the negative image of Muslims in the European Union may be achieved by means of an ‘acceptance-policy’ aimed at stimulating the acceptance of these groups by society. This will require more than just providing information about the mutual cultures and the stressing the acquisition of the cognitive skills necessary to associate with them. Acceptance is a process that needs to be internalized by both parties in order to make the essential mental turn: on the part of the Muslims in Europe implying the acceptance of the respective countries as their second homeland and on the part of the autochthons, the readiness to accept these groups as fellow-citizen. At the psychological level, being accepted in Europe would mean to immigrants, among other things, ‘feeling at home’. This long-term goal will only be realized if governments apply a multidimensional policy directed towards Muslims as well as towards society at large.”¹¹⁴ Europeans have to come to the realization that a Muslim can be a good European too. Working on the society and the perception that Westerner societies have of Islam is the first step.

Better knowledge, more respect for the undeniable existing differences and awareness about the attitude we built over years would help us to look at the issues from a different perspective, and maybe find durable and concrete solutions. Both the parts, East and West, should engage in this effort in order to change the representation of Muslims that the West adopted and its attitude in evaluating and judging Islam. The effort would worth a new understanding, and help our minds to beat our fears. In the end, we are in an era presenting us the bill for what we have built until now. The UN and the EU are asking for more integration to make their jobs. Are we really ready to sacrifice a bit of our strenuously achieved national identity, in order to go on with the process and open up the doors to a different level of governance? Are we actually ready to address these issues

¹¹⁴Shadid, W., van Koningsveld, P.S., *The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions*. (Cit.) p.194

differently or are we intentioned on recalling them “new normals” and keep fearing these changes of the globalized world?