Dialogue of Civilizations: Fighting Islamophobia

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ملخص:

هذه المقالة عبارة عن دراسة لظاهرة *الخوف من الإسلام (الاسلاموفوبيا)* بعد أحداث 11 سبتمبر، في سياقها العالمي، وقد سلكنا في دراستنا هذه منهجية تغطي هذه الظاهرة منذ ميلادها ثم توسعها في الولايات المتحدة أولا ثم في العالم بالتبع، وكذا تحدثنا عن وسائل مواجهة هذه الظاهرة، حيث تظهر السلبية التي يعاني منها المسلمون في هذه المواجهة الذين هم ضحاياها في نفس الوقت، وإن واحدة من الطرائق المقترحة هو الدخول الفعلي في حوار الثقافات والحضارات.

Introduction

Islam is facing enormous challenges in the twenty first century. In these times of cultural and religious dialogue, Islam faces multiple challenges. The most important one deals with islamophobia. This work is an attempt to understand this phenomenon: its origins, its ramifications, and above all paths to combat the negative representations non-Muslims have about the Muslims.

Etymology

The word is a neologism. It was robotically coin by the word Islam, the morpheme "o" and phobia from the Greek φόβος (*phobo*), meaning "fear".

Islamophobia

The term islamophobia is literally the fear/hate of Islam. Inside this term lie issues related to the Muslims, Arabs, language and color of skin. Islamophobia is like other forms of scapegoat thinking, a matter of misunderstanding of Islam, and the people behind it. It stems form an extrapolation of individual empirics on

the whole Muslim population. Runnymede Trust defined Islamophobia as the "*dread or hatred of Islam and therefore, to the fear and dislike of all Muslims*[1]"

Moreover, the 09/11 attacks on the World Trade Center have undoubtedly altered the image of Muslims all over the world. In the name of war against terror, many western states found themselves stuck in a whirlpool of aggressive digressions. These digressions were overwhelmed by right-wing doctrines (the Hawks, the American Christian Coalition[2]....), and spread all over the West.

The verbal and physical injuries targeting the Muslims increased in the USA and Europe, as well. Many Muslims who do not adhere to terror, felt stigmatized and obliterated.

Morphology and characteristics

Islamophobia is a blend of xenophobia and ethno-centrism. Xenophobia is a constant cultural/social response to an uncontrolled flux of immigration. It is generally predicated on ignorance; the ignorance of foreign cultures and customs. Ethno-centrism, on the other hand, is a colonial remain[3], whereby the ex-colonial powers make unconscious mental construction of center and margin. The margin – being third world – constitutes a validation of the center's moves.

In postcolonial contexts, the newly independent Muslim countries[4] are no longer considered as satellites, but rather as source of massive immigration. The focus is naturally made on the colored; the alien; the ex-slave and all the "rejects" of the colonial system. Colonialism was muted, but instead transformed into imperialism.

Blatant and awful instances of Islamophobia could have been detected in Serbia. The 1995 massacre of Srebrenica, where more than 800 000 Muslims were killed, revealed an assumed belief in ethnic cleansing. Europe, then, seemed amnesic of similar acts performed forty years ago, by Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin.

The fall of communism in late 1980s initiated an ideological vacuum. That void meant the quest for the next thing to fight. Islam was somehow the perfect adversary to justify the existence of imperialism. The 09/11 attacks brought forward the perfect archetype. The wave of islamophobia found resonance all over the world.

Beyond intrinsic miscommunication flaws within Muslims immigrants, the origin of islamophobia is also attributed to the host countries. Their different integration policies have considerably failed to absorb the huge amounts of immigrants. In the USA, the ghetto system had isolated minorities in the peripheries of megalopolises. While, in France for instance, the successive governments have failed to achieve the project of assimilation.

Nowadays, "El Harga[5]" stirs other forms of xenophobia, and islamophobia. The economic recession facilitated the emergence of hostility toward the newcomers. Islam resurfaces as a common religious feature to all immigrants. Subsequently, the public opinions develop anti-Islam habits.

Manifestations of Islamophobia

There is a wide range of attitudes, running the gamut from intellectual to physical – passing by verbal, and symbolic. At the intellectual level, Islam is regarded as a barbarian, misogynist, and even static ideology, unresponsive to assimilation.

The different anamorphic images carried in the media[6], which associate Islam with terror have undoubtedly blurred the views of public opinion. Consequently, many Americans redeveloped natural suspicions. Several amalgams are committed and the US public opinion got stuck in binary oppositions: Good Vs Evil; West Vs East; Christians Vs Muslims.
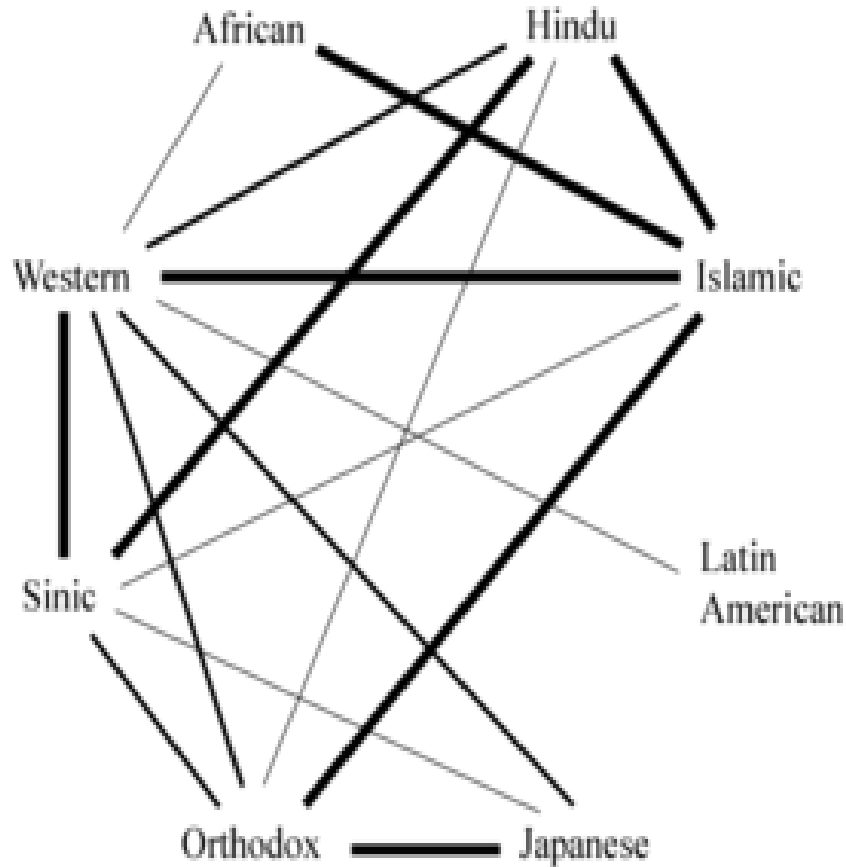
The Clash of Civilizations

The term was invented by Samuel Huntington in 1993. His assumptions drove him to sustain that there is a historical rotation of power. Theses cycles come to happen between civilizations paradigms (See Chart) that hold different word views.

"*It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future (…) This is not to advocate the desirability of conflicts between civilizations. It is to set forth descriptive hypothesis as to what the future may be like*".

Huntington (1993) Foreign Affairs

"Emerging alignments" of civilizations, per Samuel Huntinton's theory in *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996).

Greater line thickness represents more conflict in the civilizational relationship.

This is particularly true of the world situation after WWII. The Cold War was the stage of impressive confrontations, culminating the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1963. That time, the world was the verge of a nuclear cataclysm. After the fall of the Soviet Block, the immigration of Muslims to Europe and the USA facilitated the birth of a new cultural enemy.

Huntington's thesis of civilization clash makes it clear the West wants to export values that are thought to be universal. In postcolonial contexts, these values are not understood, or at least, considered as absolute priorities. The Domino Effect[7] wanted by Eisenhower (During the Cold War) was covered by the W. Bush administration to democratize the Middle East.

Inside this process starting in Afghanistan and Iraq, there were collateral damages in the representations of Muslims. Huntington considers that growth of counter-powers in Asia and Latin America (who do not hold the same views) is systematically a setting for future clashes. The Islamic Revolution in Iran, the First and Second Gulf Wars, as well as the war in Afghanistan nourished Anti-Americanism. Americans legitimized their islamophobia by the anti-American sentiment – prevailing in the Muslim countries.

Fortunately, there were nuanced thoughts counter-acting Islamophobia in both Europe and the USA. Left wing intellectuals and artists[8] refused to indulge in a Manichean vision of the world; a rendition of the conflict between the messianic and the invaders. The promulgation of W. Bush's crusade; his affirmation that was a born-again Christian made Muslims and non-Muslims feel targeted. Indeed, never before the election of W. Bush did minorities feel so stranded.

Fighting Islamophobia

Fighting islamophobia is a complex process made of two made orientations. The first and most delicate phase is to be achieved by the Muslims themselves. Obviously, there is a series of communication issues that need to be fixed inside the Muslim

community. There is a huge amount to be put on the pedagogy of dialogue.

Dialogue is a top priority in these times of global communication. The fluid movement of populations in the real and the virtual spheres generate frictions and clashes. Verbalizing discourse is one way to appease ethnical and cultural tensions.
If negative representations exist, they may have parts of truth. Stereotypes emerge for generalizations and shortcuts. If one Muslim did wrong, others shall not be associated with isolated acts. Now, what the West reproaches to the Muslims is violence. On that item Deepa Kumar replies:

"The history of Islam is no more violent than the history of any of the other major religions of the world (…) During the first crusade, after taking control of Jerusalem, the crusaders went on a killing spree, murdering almost the entire population of Muslim men, women, and children. The Jews, who fought side by side with the Muslims to defend the city, were not spared either. The Crusaders set fire to a synagogue where the Jews were hiding and made sure that every single Jew burned to death. The same levels of brutality were seen again during the third crusade when King Richard of England (Richard the Lionheart), after one battle, beheaded thousands of men in cold blood. In contrast, the Sultan of Egypt Saladin, after he successfully retook Jerusalem from the Crusaders, forbade acts of vengeance and violence. Jews were given state money to rebuild synagogues and churches were left untouched.[9]*"*

Deepa Kumar shed light on historical evidences which place relativity as a constant tool for religions' observation. The second phase would include educational perspectives on the history of

religions. Education of dialogue and mutual understanding seems the only way to root civilization understanding and avoid violent conflicts.

Dialogue of Civilization

Interfaith dialogue is the alternative to the clash of civilizations. The former Iranian president Mohammed Khatami formulated this idea, in response to Samuel Huntington's theory: the Clash of Civilizations. The dialogue of civilizations had been endorsed by the UNESCO in 2001, having as a first objective, bringing people of different confession to talk and find convergence points.

This is particularly true for monotheist religious which possesses fundamental common backgrounds. The demographic pressure all over the world urges populations (of different confessions) to shift in space. These social movements create communication situations which are not systematically fluent.

First impressions and global representations constitute a key fact for the establishment of dialogue gates. When immigrant Muslims integrates a foreign social structure, their part of the process is bound with a certain code of conduct. Respecting the rules of the host country is a rational step in the negotiation process. The compromise that one makes between identity components and social convention is a fragile balance that Muslims need to maintain.

Another segment in the negotiation process involves the hosting country. Immigration countries need to set/reinforce integration and tolerance in early infancy. Instances of Swedish kindergartens are stunning. Racial and cultural diversity is

encouraged: young children are insidiously taught tolerance by the installation of diversity habits in early ages.

Besides, the vector of communication goes by the adjustment of self-image and other-image in social and cultural spheres. For both Muslims and non-Muslims, there is a cultural need for readjustment: situating the Muslim-self in a global world, in regard to communication imperatives Vs Understanding the other vision of the world. Eventually, the questions of shaping an identity in global contexts come to be significant as (linguistic, ethnic, and cultural) minorities fight to safeguard their singularity.

Conclusion

Islamophobia continues to be a challenging matter. It arises most especially in immigration contexts. The flux of Muslims immigrants stimulates fear mechanisms which are in sum normal. The norms become no longer valid, if the hatred becomes normality. As for communication troubles dialogue is recommended, equal measures are advised when culture contact is involved. In globalization imperatives, dialogue looks as the safest mode to ensure peace and mutual understanding. Historically, the world didn't work better, than in the "too short" period of peace and dialogue.

Bibliography

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2)-Barbé, Philippe, *L'Anti-Choc des Civilisations: Méditations Méditerranéennes*, Editions de l'Aube, 2006.

3)- Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations?,* in "Foreign Affairs", vol. 72, no. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22–49

4)- Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, Simon & Schuster,

5)- Köchler, Hans, *The Clash of Civilizations: Perception and Reality in the Context of Globalization and International Power Politics*, Tbilisi (Georgia), 2004.

End Notes & References

[1] Runnymede 1997, p. 5, cited in Quraishi 2005, p. 60.
[2] The Washington Right Wing lobby that accompanied George W Bush, during his first mandate at the White House.
[3] See Edward Said : Orientalism
[4] Some of Which adhered to nationalism, socialism, or monarchy
[5] Neologism Form Algerian Arabic, standing for illegal/clandestine immigration on boats.
[6] Example is seen In OUTFOXED, a documentary made by Robert Greenwald, on the media propaganda orchestrated by Fox News.
[7] A theory which assumes that if one country fell under Communism, the other countries would follow. The Domino opposed effect could occur by containment and democratization.
[8] Michael Moore is one of the author of the vehement attacks against W. Bush ; Fahrenheit 9/11.
[9] Deepa Kumar. Fighting Islamophobia: A Response to Critics.