

# **Growing “Religious” Radicalization Roots and recommendations for new counter-radicalism strategies<sup>1</sup>**

*Dr. Emna Jebblaoui*

The growing Jihadi salafi phenomenon and the expanding expiatory dogma require thorough analysis from a cultural perspective, which will be our focus in this paper as we will not address this growing religious phenomenon from a security or historical point of view. We will try instead to identify the reasons for this development which relies on interpreting Islam based on the one single truth rejecting the culture of difference.

## **I- General Context**

The goal of researchers is not to engage in rivalries marked by impassioned reactions. The value of scientific research is the objective analysis of the subject, putting in perspective generalizing visions that see either black or white with no gray zone in between. A lot has been said in this regard and we will try not to be redundant, we will try instead to contribute more questions and observations.

Let's first bring things back to their context with the resurrection of spirituality. It is necessary to put it in a global context, as the controversy on the emergence of groups calling for what is called the Islamic Renaissance limited to the enforcement of Shariaa, without properly understanding its various aspects, started to slowly develop especially in Europe, where Islamic minorities have started for more than a decade now to profit from liberties, and have been raising the issue of freedom of faith and religious practices in western democracies, sometimes even contradicting host countries' laws and constitutions, as the right to practice polygamy, separate swimming pools for

---

<sup>1</sup> A research elaborated in arabic for Arab NGO Network for development  
the original title was " Growing “Religious” Ordeals and Cultural Challenges”  
For the Civil Society Organizations’ Regional Dialogue on Partnership between Arab States and the European Union-Beirut, November 6-8, 2014  
Cultural Aspects of the Partnership between the European Union and the Arab Region  
<http://www.annd.org/arabic/data/folders/97.pdf>

women and men, or special praying rooms for Muslims, thereby opposing laws of some countries which usually offer meditation and praying rooms to all religions.

It is therefore necessary to raise this issue in the framework of the need to answer questions about who we are and who we want to be. Islam is 15 centuries old, and today's dynamics reflects the needs for necessary changes and reforms that may seem to inevitably take place soon. The convulsive and deep-reaching expressions of barbarism only reflect the painful delivery of reviews and reforms previously undergone by other religions which enabled them to survive, or on the contrary, they represent an indication of a decadent civilization bound to disappear.

Radical religious modals did not exist although the Muslim Brotherhood and Attahrir Party were founded in the thirties. Religious ostentatious signs emerged in the early nineties, with Muslim Arab women increasingly wearing the veil, probably reflecting their need for special piety; this trend should be closely analyzed and monitored. Between the fifties and the eighties, in countries like Egypt, Tunisia and others, women did not wear the veil. We note that this phenomenon grew with the increase in the number of workers in the Gulf, in addition to the appearance of preachers who would invade private homes without permission to give lessons and pretend that the veil is mandatory assimilating it to the "khimar" based on their own interpretations and readings made by theologians in specific social contexts and a prevailing culture not allowing critical thinking about this subject or about any spiritual issue in general.

The presence of "preaching" materials used for education and for the promotion of the conservative Wahabi and Hanbali ideology is considered by some to be a marketing propaganda for one single and packaged interpretation of religion. This material is promoted on proselytism TV channels as well as through charity campaigns, where evidence has shown that some are involved in facilitating for money the travel of young men and women to Syria.

The growth of Jihadi Salafism reflects a widespread need in the Muslim World to answer concerns about what it means to be Muslim in 2014. In the absence of knowledge, progress and science, in the absence of clear and tangible civilization projects that do not reduce humankind to one single ideology that

can lead to darkness, and in the absence of cultural, technological and strategic perspectives that may offer the Islamic World a decent position in the new world balance of powers, people would cling to superficial concepts and spiritual practices, thereby reinforcing their desire for loneliness.

We say: the enemy of Islamic culture and the enemy of religion may mainly be ignorance reflected in some policies adopted on both shores of the Mediterranean Sea, which have failed to develop knowledge about the Islamic world and history, and then interpretations made by Jihadi expiatory Salafis reflecting total ignorance about the real intentions of the Message.

#### **1- Political Reason: absence of a political vision and of future civilization projects in the region**

**The growing number of Jihadi expiatory Salafi movements and of fighting fronts represents an answer to the absence of options clarifying people's identity, and the result of a globalization movement that failed to invest in the educational and cultural sectors and did not provide economic and social solutions to young people with no more job or travel perspectives:**

We note that countries throughout the Arab Region have failed in defining a national and independent identity, topped on the regression of Marxist, nationalist and socialist ideologies. Globalization and new liberal options have not invested in education and culture; they contributed to the formation of vulnerable identities for youth, which started to simulate their personalities as they lack basic civil principles and the culture of citizenship. After the dissipation of nationalist and socialist ideologies, young people no more have strong, motivating and convincing alternatives they can attach to. The notion of democracy is propagating throughout the region but is still suffering the painful impact of the economic regression and financial crisis and requires reinforcing good governance.

Therefore, the lack of a clear identity that can constitute the platform for Arab youth, an identity that may reflect their needs and respond to the expectations of generations seeking their path for the future, and in the absence of social parameters, the popular religiosity constitutes just a natural reaction to prevailing void and vacuum, and to governments' failure to coach young people and to invest in development and in good educational programs.

The new trend is to look for any culturally meaningful identity, and as there are no new convincing tendencies or ideas with clear popular backup, people are increasingly resorting to material religiosity, which reflects a common rambling

and digression. The solution would naturally be to work on creating innovative environments, but there is first need to reconstruct people's identities and pride.

In addition, there is also an urgent need to reorganize programs and materials widely broadcast on satellite channels, including statements and information that may not emanate from renowned religious and scientific references, who can make the difference between wise and ill-gauged speech. We sometimes see in the same case disputes and interpretations that may even contradict, leading to endless escalations and dissensions.

### **Myth of the gap between Islam and Modernity**

Reasons leading to the religion solution include the dubious image of modernity, and I insist on the term image, as we are not talking about modernity being a principle and a demand, but we are rather trying to understand the relation between the public of the modern and national State project, which has failed to find a new horizon and to define new objectives uniting peoples of the region. When people do not have the opportunity to learn western languages or mix up with western societies through travel or rich human interaction, they will not be able to know the other, which ultimately leads to animosity and stereotypes.

If we think about the gap that has recently emerged between Islamic crowds and civilization values, we may consider the following reasons: reduction of western programs and more specifically European and Mediterranean programs aiming at the promotion of Western culture, as a natural consequence of the end of the social and Soviet era, and the emergence of globalization that has failed to invest in culture as it does not respond to the logic of profitable trade. Leaders of the new World order have not thought about the cultural specificities of countries, which constitutes the basis of social peace and economic development.

Reasons for this gap also include closing borders and reducing opportunities for people to travel from the south to the north and from the Islamic world to the European and American regions since 2001.

What would then happen if ordinary Muslim men and women are bound to shut themselves away and cling to any value that may still be standing, and to resort to the religious and spiritual bark after so many losses and frustrations?

## **2. Economic Reason**

There are other reasons as well, mainly including the **economic factor** which is in fact the real issue. What is the Islamic World's position today in the global world?

The only strength it has is the number, in terms of number of consuming societies and the smaller number of countries with natural resources. We should confess that there are also some Islamic countries which produce technology such as Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey. But we also recognize that the Arab World lags behind in terms of manufacturing, while it used to be ahead of Asian countries in the fifties and sixties, in spite of considerable human and natural resources. There is need in this general context to ask the following question: **What have Muslims offered Humanity for 5 centuries** compared with non Islamic achievements performed by China, Europe and America?

There are some who decided to engage in competition, or have been bound to ... denied the truth and interpreted Islam as if they were assigned to do so but without consulting with anyone, with the aim to stand as the enemy of the West. Advocates of hatred joined them after the collapse of the Soviet Union. While it is necessary to understand the deep anger following events that happened in Afghanistan and Iraq about twenty years ago, combined with mistakes made by the Pope Paul XXI and the embargo imposed on Gaza, this anger led to the emergence of small groups reflecting the unclear image of a slaughtered bird beating with his trembling wings all that comes across. **Is this the image that we want to give on our culture to the West?**

### **3. Religious reason: absence of religious reform and need for the continuous renewal of a rational discourse:**

The critical and rational discourse is also fading away, so true researchers have to blow in fresh blood in the intellectual, scientific and civic debate that has been going on and also in forthcoming studies and discussions, as intellectuals have either recanted, kept quiet, or decided not to get involved with the belief they had the truth and accusing those who were "thinking differently" to be wrong and mistaken, thereby blowing up any chance for debate, respect and cohabitation. In the absence of dialogue and cooperation and the inability of the elite to talk to ordinary people with a language they understand and feel, intellectuals must hold the responsibility not to have made enough effort while sellers of extremism have been actively enrolling youth and teenagers. People of this culture must use their brains, and if they don't, they will have to pay for it. Even religion asks believers to think rationally not to be blamed, and if we

choose an objective cognitive referential, they will have to assume being thrown away by history ...

### **Accumulations made by Arab societies since the beginning of modernization**

Optimism is necessary and modernization is ongoing, but the crisis is global. There are achievements at various levels, but Arab societies' engagement in modernity after independence has not been equally performed. Countries have developed differently; the Anglo-Saxon divisions and new strategic distributions bringing together countries in North Africa and the Middle East in what is referred to as the MENA region may impede the most successful experiences, assimilate the most advanced to less developed experiments, due to cultural generalizations and identity simplifications.

### **Obstacles preventing better outputs**

Obstacles preventing reform efforts include competition between who should lead the modernization process. **An answer to this would be that we are all of the same Islamic and Arab culture, we all respect it and have of it different experiences, each his way and own interpretation, his own goals and perspectives, and each is trying to offer the best he can.** We should all be the best ambassadors of this culture and reflect the best image we can. We must be proud of it in the region and the world, and that we should all feel sorry for our image to be ruined and distorted by preachers of hatred on both sides of the Mediterranean and in other parts of the world. Instead of working hard towards growth and development, some have decided to engage in a useless war against time and against all others.

Visions of the conflict between civilizations have joined radical Islamists' aim to build an Islamist Holocaust enacted by militias slaughtering people and stealing their properties in the name of religion.

### **Tense relation between traditional scientists and the modern interpreters of religious issues**

This results from reference made to human science and to the study of the various religious manifestations. Some try to put limits on human sciences' interpretations of religious affairs based on the sacred essence of religion.

We need to identify the reasons and understand this phenomenon. Scientific research needs to be free of people's feelings, beliefs and cultural or social traditions. It should be clear that the analysis of any subject should not touch

on respect due to faith. Some claim that human sciences and modern knowledge cannot be applied on cultural specificities, but taking scientific approaches developed by others and tailoring or adapting them to profit from their methodologies does not affect convictions, but on the contrary can only reinforce them and make them more suitable to modern requirements.

If you refer to contradictions that some try to imply between theological and modern sciences, we are confident that while the two systems may be different but are not contradictory, as the first relate to belief, which is personal, while the second have to do with scientific research.

Stressed reactions do not reinforce scientific dialogue, but have negative impacts on those who have them more than respond to their hopes, and reflect a void competition and the weakness of response and argumentation tools. On the other hand, there are promising researchers and writers who may contribute a great deal in spite of their different approaches and research methods. On the contrary, they agree on the need to study and respect true ideas and free speech. The leading Tunisian experience in civilization studies carried out in Arabic and history sciences can have consistent contributions. Many researchers believe that a major contribution can come from our country, referred by some as a religious innovation or reform, and which has become necessary otherwise there will be decadence, chaos and subsidence. Civilizations have died and cultures have disappeared, and we are heading towards the same end if we do not react.

#### **4. Cultural and media reasons:**

**The organization of the media environment in the Arab region has become necessary.** There is need to reconsider Arab TV production and imported programs shown on Satellite TVs. TV programs can have access to all Arab homes and beyond, including homes of Arabs living in Europe and in other countries. We all know that the weakest programs are those discussing subjects related to religion, taking profit of people's suffering, weak emotions and feelings and lack of knowledge. Some claim to protect religion and good morals and forgot that morals are an abstract human value, as they forgot they should not be the religion's spokespeople or sole representatives, and that there are different interpretations as difference is in itself a sign of abundance and richness.

We must note there is a limited number of TV channels broadcasting religion lessons fulfilling basic scientific standards. Others promote moderate services

and ideas. However, other channels show programs full of mistakes about history, and we have often noted inaccurate references and erroneous information. **There is no scientific authority to watch over the huge amount of information and chaotic ideas disseminated through the channels mainly on the NILESAT, which may sometimes raise people's awareness but may also poison people's brains, as they have access to their homes without permission.** This authority that should monitor Islamic media promoting a ready-for-use, globalized and packed Islam, has not sufficiently prepared to have full control of these new media manipulating people's minds. We are facing today a generation of new stars and modals such as soccer players, TV stars, singers and commercial preachers who have never attended a class on religion. There is no doubt that we should have religious TV channels as we have music and entertainment ones, but we are concerned about the absence of cultural TV channels offering a different content that would balance programs shown by the huge number of channels disseminating ignorance and unenlightenment.

### **Design of an Arab strategy to fill media gaps**

There is an urgent need for elites to work on improving their discourse and to look for ways to develop media production, where there is the quantity but not the quality. We also need to say that some Arab governments and capital holders will have to fund the creation of TV channels preaching wisdom and promoting sciences and that will have to build confidence by using balanced speech reinforcing peace and security in the region.

### **Media actors extorting peoples' minds**

What sometimes complicates issues is the exploitation of events to extort and manipulate people's minds, stimulating their anger against western countries' foreign policies, such as their positions towards Syria, Libya and others. These feelings can be used to accuse some of betrayal, or reinforce the theory of conspiracy, and enhance hatred and therefore of anger due to the accumulation of losses and failures in the settlement of regional issues.

There is no doubt that the majority of Muslims is tolerant and can indeed be the best ambassador to what is called moderate Islam founded on love and cohabitation. But this majority in number is not seen on the front. The pure and pious Muslim is busy looking for his daily revenue, and the wise scientists who did not get in addition to their theological training any training in communication that would enable them to perform on visual media. If they

start to talk, they will certainly do better than what the public receives today. It is therefore necessary to think of **building up a new generation of well educated scientists capable of modern communication skills** and provide them with the financial autonomy in order to ensure their independence of radical parties' agendas and funds.

## **II- Growth of religious challenges: religious violence and terrorism on the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean**

**The relation deteriorated after September 11, 2001 between the two sides of the Mediterranean further to the theory of the conflict between civilizations as opposed to the globalization theory.**

**The relation between Muslims and European societies was based on mutual misunderstanding and the growing fear of Islam. The fragile policy aimed at the integration of Arab and Muslim immigrants largely impacted the relation between Europe and the immigrants' countries of origin. The gap further grew further to several attempts disregarding policies aimed at understanding the social, economic and cultural needs of immigrant communities.**

Religious references used by European Muslims as well as by all other Muslims are the Koran and Sunna, subject to various interpretations. **Islam has no priesthood or a function similar to the Pope**, and no one can pretend to have a religious authority on other Muslims, therefore every Muslim is fully responsible for deciding upon his/her spiritual path. The chaotic deliverance of religious opinions (Ifta') is the best evidence that the Muslim's guide is his own conscience and personal choice to pick from the so many and sometimes contradictory opinions. The principle of multiple interpretations is a double edge knife: it provides the freedom of diversity among Muslims, though knowledgeable and recognized religious theologians can sometimes interfere to arbitrate when conflicting interpretations may need mediation.

This clearly shows the paradox of Europe's Muslims: they don't know enough about religion and not much of the Arabic language, which is the main key for Europe's Muslims, and mainly the most religious, to learn about historical literature. This has resulted in the need to resort to Sheikhs and to theologians to explain to parched Muslims their religion and own heritage. A number of preachers have therefore emerged to respond to people's need to differentiate themselves from the European identity through stigmatized signs including

clothing, worship sites and narratives to build up an image that Europe has failed to complete.

- **Babel tower or the language misunderstanding hypothesis**

**In our opinion, the language deficiency preventing Muslims in Europe to properly understand religious texts has created a kind of tutorship on Muslims, which contradicts with the absence of priesthood in Islam.** It is therefore necessary to further investigate the link between ignorance of the Arabic language and the appearance of political religious Salafism in Europe and in other African and Asian countries, where these radical trends emerge well away from religious texts in their language of origin.

Misunderstanding therefore starts by some Muslims failing to properly understand religious texts and ends in conflicts with European civilian laws, in a total confusion between men-made and God-given legislations, while most researchers agree that the doctrine system is a man-made approach including defects and imperfections from the start.

- **Europe's bad management of the system**

Arabs and Muslims always point to the racist right wing parties adopting a speech of hatred in the northern part of the Mediterranean which hold a hostile behavior towards Arab and Muslim immigrants and this is legitimate, but holding the other side responsible for all sins would be a mistake in analyzing the reasons of the problem. Incitement to adopt parallel laws and regulations and to recognize other authorities represents a threat and an assault against countries' sovereignty. Even if they may be well-intentional, ideas and acts can be initiated by leaders desperately looking for power and eager to resort to purification violence. They may be followed by innocent and naïve individuals and groups not sharing beliefs of some heads. These heads may want to strike values of independent and developing states and to destroy the foundations of civilian countries; it is therefore necessary to react and oppose their discourse and attempts to destabilize national identities, which represent an accumulation of a rich and united heritage.

It is also necessary to recognize the failure of public policies aiming at the integration of immigrants including those originating from the southern shore of the Mediterranean.

We need to think of designing strategies for the short, middle and long terms that would include reforming school and cultural programs, such as civic

education curricula, stressing the fact that European and democratic citizenship also involves Muslim communities, but on the other hand, these communities must seriously reconsider their interpretation of Islam, in order to harmonize between a European Islam and democratic values. Efforts must mainly be carried out by European Muslims. We may here wonder if there is one single harmonized entity that we may deal with, and if not, we will have to define representatives of European Muslims reflecting all different trends and groups, in addition to involving anthropologists and Islam sociologists.

We also need to stress the need to set up new development paradigms and design a new social contract confirming the need to support the democratic State in development, good governance, and the protection of citizens' rights in the framework of the existing economic system.

Sustainable development must integrate the economic, social and political components in addition to good governance. We also need to add new concepts still in progress such as human security and strategies to fight against radicalism and terrorism, relying on the security and cultural approaches, where culture means combating expiatory and expiatory speeches, preparing appropriate answers and building a new knowledge about religious matters.

Therefore, it is necessary to stop the development of this terrorist ideology, if it may be referred to as an ideology. We have to identify its components and work on a strategy to coach young people appealed by this trend.

Arabs who constitute the largest group on the southern shore of the Mediterranean must focus on common goals with Europe and build efficient policies, as they are on the same side of war against terrorism and the globalization of crimes of terror and the dissemination of the speech of hatred and destruction, which has not brought anything to Islam and to Muslims; this is in fact due to the failure of policies where experts in the field or serious researchers have not been involved. Most importantly, there has never been a strong political willingness.

- **A temporary but sustained marriage between violence and identity**

Religious violence reflects deep concerns and weakness continuously regenerated. Religion represents one component in building up identities, but when it becomes the only reference, this may result to an imbalance in a relation leading to violence targeting the outer world.

Do Muslims want that the World looks at them as being producers of violence and nothing else? Why don't energies focus on a positive civilization project adding value to industrial development or taking leadership in any domain? Why don't they choose a subject where they can excel along with their Muslim and cultural characteristics?

### **III- Recommendations**

#### **A. Need to protect minorities' rights**

It is necessary today to take in consideration ethnical and religious minorities and to develop tools and laws to protect them in addition to the need to deal with this subject both politically and scientifically. General politics has sometimes made a confusion about minorities and the political roles they can play, and which may likely disrupt social cohesion.

We may first confess as many other did, the pertinence of André Malraux's predictions about the twenty first century, when he said that we will see a resurrection of religion throughout the world. In this regard, it is necessary to examine the notion of cohabitation between what is called religious groups or communities within the same society.

With the growth of expiatory trends and the hunt for religious and ethnical minorities, mainly in Syria and Iraq lately, where we see minority groups such as the Sabia, Yazidi or Christians being robbed and stripped by armed groups in the absence of strong State institutions.

It is necessary to ensure security and legal protection, and to promote a culture for others to recognize them and recognize their rights. The human rights culture needs to be based on the necessity to know other groups. We need to disseminate another culture based on others' right to be different, by paying more attention to ethnical minorities and mainly religious minorities in the framework of objective academic research aimed at understanding the phenomenon and analyzing old literature **describing the importance of minorities**, then referred to as "hives of bees", or small groups in number and in weight.

Working on this issue requires putting focus on perceptions and stereotypes that may define the vision and cognition held about them. Research may highlight diversity and provide scientific evidence about the difference between perception and reality. Knowing reality is a cognitive requirement.

We suggest an approach based on policies relying on figures and data and also based on knowledge, including knowledge of the past that may help interested researchers to find educational material about the history and interpretation of Islam, which may bring about social peace in societies with various religious and ethnical groups.

After losses and failures, some Arab and Muslim societies and communities were excluded and displaced, such as communities around the Euphrates in 1500 BC, and others that were chased by militias such as the Sabia, Yazidi and Kaldoachouras. Sound and serious research should remind of the openness of Muslim societies on non Muslim groups throughout history.

Some groups have tried to take profit of the minorities issue to strike social cohesion, but we have to make the difference here between legitimate rights stated in international agreements and conventions, protecting them against discrimination based on ethnical or religious origins, and those using just issues for political reasons. It is also necessary to differentiate between objective scientific research and rules of the political game. Researchers have to explain issues and analyze their deep and thorough components.

One of the reasons for research is to contribute to polishing our knowledge of minorities and to making the difference between the cognitive and the ideological. There are minorities who feel more national and patriotic than those who pretend being part of the majority, and these minorities have shown how important social cohesion is for them.

In fact, respecting minorities is similar to respect due to the majority, as when preserving the rights of the minority, the majority will be able to feel social security.

I believe that economic crises and cultural entanglements badly affect the majority which would stand believing that the solution would be to sanction minorities, by weakening or dismissing them, as is the case in the European Union's handling of the Gypsies.

### **B. Reinforce the notion of human rights and show it does not contradict with Arab and Muslim culture in school programs**

When some pretend that this is concept is not enrooted in the Arabic and Muslim culture, this is considered not only inaccurate but erroneous and misleading. I refer in this context to studies conducted about this subject including thorough research conducted by Dr. Ghanem Hamad Ennajjar,

professor in the Political Science Department at the University of Kuwait entitled “Is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a western product?”. Dr. Ennjar says “The careful study of the declaration and its drafting conditions undoubtedly show that the western contribution ... was in general against it”. He stresses that “the Arab and Muslim contribution to the design of the declaration was not marginal ... it was obvious from the launch of the human rights committee” in the various discussions held, which were attended by Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Syria, and Arab and Muslim delegates shared their thoughts and comments in the different meetings as one can see in the archive documents.

The issue is not that of authenticity; the issue raised and which represents a danger on the notion of human rights is errors and violations committed by countries or coalitions used by some to fight against this principle; in fact, this process is a permanent and natural argumentation between the logic of power and domination on the one hand and that of international law and justice on the other. So does failure to protect children’s rights in Niger mean that this concept is useless and that we need to replace it by more authentic Nigerian values? Violations committed in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine are serious but all qualified experts, regardless of their origins agree that international law must be respected and we need here to remind again of the Turkish experience which was able to make a case before international law about the “Freedom Flotilla.”

There is no more need to ask about the authentic nature of concepts in 2010, but it is necessary to improve suitability which actually started between the universal declaration, the Cairo Declaration and the Arab Charter. What still needs to be done is to seriously investigate these issues in order to achieve two goals: the first is to further work on the possibilities to reconsider reservations, and the second will be to better adapt legislations and prevailing mindsets in order to prepare the ground for their enforcement.

There are three and major levels to subscribe to the human rights approach; as a matter of fact, countries from the region have already engaged in these international, Islamic and Arab systems:

- 1- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was issued by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948;
- 2- The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam was adopted by the Council of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic World Conference Organization in Cairo on August 5, 1990, including some

reservations that may be further discussed in order to improve the non discrimination principle;

- 3- The Arab Human Rights Charter in its most recent version adopted by the 16<sup>th</sup> Arab Summit hosted by Tunisia on May 23, 2004, and we now have a honorable Arab Charter.

The human rights culture is a requirement and an achievement, and its development will certainly ensure better justice and less violence against humanity. These are conditions that will reinforce modernizing efforts in the Arab World, and will strengthen the human rights culture based on international conventions and agreements, as this will boost the democratic process along with reforms that need to be carried out on the religious thoughts, by answering and clarifying some issues that need to be settled in view of contradictory opinion makers which can only divide national unity, mainly in the Muslim and Arab world. Serious research needs to be carried out on the relation between Islam and human rights.

- **Second generation of rights**

It is necessary to define the second generation of human rights i.e. the economic, social, and cultural rights. Some Arab countries have made progress implementing the first generation of civil and political rights, but problems of unemployment and citizens empowerment still persist in terms of cultural and educational development that would prevent marginalization.

There is need to build strategies and work policies that do not rely only on security and intelligence activities but on a more comprehensive approach that would include, in addition to security, the cultural and educational approach to fight against religious and ideological thoughts.

**C. For new EU neighborhood policies in the region:**

When we think of the neighborhood policies that the European Union wants to implement, we would like to recommend the following:

***1) Support scientific research to guide policies***

Create a research institute at the level of the European Union to set up strategies to fight against increasing radicalism, with the contribution of experts and researchers on the history of religions, mainly of Islam, in addition to anthropologists, philosophers, military and security experts.

Policies that have so far been applied in the northern and southern parts of the Mediterranean have relied on the security perspective not taking in consideration the importance of the cultural and educational aspects in increasing religious tensions, sometimes reflected in religious violence and terrorism but most often linked with organized crime<sup>2</sup>.

A research center or a research program that works on designing strategies to fight against radicalism, mainly Islamic radicalism, may help to put the foundations for a new approach looking forward and suggesting new paths to understand Islam without pretending to interfere in believers' faith.

The Salafi and expiatory ideologies and the religious groups we see today have gone too far in acts of violence, violations against human rights and the terrorization of non Muslim groups...

The think tank that such a center may set up, will help in the design of a new vision or in the revival of a soft Islam that is open on other cultures and religions. Interpretations may be suggested to enable lost Muslims to overcome problems of identity and to feel proud of their Islamic culture with no fundamentalist views or the pretention to hold all the truth. *"This project should be undertaken by people concerned"*, am I often told by some European political leaders, and that *"Islamic issues are internal and there is some embarrassment to do it on their behalf."* Today, I am standing as a researcher who respects Muslims' beliefs and culture, and also understands the "culturalist" and essentialist position of decision makers in European countries.

Nevertheless, I see that Islamic affairs have definitely become a global matter, and that Muslims obviously need to open up debates about them, but it is as vital that their neighbors also get involved, mainly countries with Muslim communities holding European or American citizenships.

It would not be pragmatic for us to remain silent and not to react against this chaos and the anarchy of religious opinions and preachers, and the confusion and disarray of interpretations and readings.

Some who pretend to speak on behalf of Islam have crossed red lines; with the paralysis of official policies and the immobility of scientists, and as interpretations have taken the lead over wise research and critical thinking, the gap has gotten bigger between requirements of modern age and some who

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/regions/moyen-orient-afrique-du-nord/afrique-du-nord/Tunisia/b041-tunisia-s-borders-ii-terrorism-and-regional-polarisation.aspx>

want to take us back centuries ago without any knowledge of history and without any clear methodology for they call identity or Islamic renaissance. I do not want to make any value judgments or lay out ideas or thoughts for no reason, but if slaughtering Yazidis or imposing Islam on non Muslims are aspects of renaissance – old books call them Ahl Edhemma – then there must be an error, and it would be necessary to redefine roles played by preachers and other TV channels on the NILESAT satellite. It is also necessary to define laws regulating relations between Muslims and others and relations between various trends as Muslims are not alone in the globe.

As for policies to deal with new religious challenges, neighborhood policies may sometimes contradict with domestic policies used to fight against terrorism or to suggest cultural solutions for religious violence, which is in fact a reaction to the absence of proper educational coaching, to growing unemployment and to unclear development and economic perspectives.

Young men and women born in Europe and holding European nationalities aspire to understand their identity, as they know they are Europeans but they also know they are Muslims; they are only guided by Mosques or TV channels showing all they want to incite for violence with no consideration to human rights. After all that happened, policy makers can no more use religious freedoms as a pretext not to write manuals identifying European Muslims, their rights and duties, and the red lines that they should not go beyond.

The design of a charter defining the relation between these groups with the civil and democratic State would ensure peace throughout the region and initiate serious research about this complex issue. Europeans should start to act and jointly work with experts from both sides of the Mediterranean. If we had to wait for Muslim States to initiate this process, we may never see the real beginning of cultural and educational reforms of our knowledge about Islam and the history of the Muslim Civilization, which includes in addition to religion, very bright cultural aspects.

## ***2) Reinforce legal tools***

- Set up legal tools, follow up mechanisms and sanctions against speeches inciting to violence and not respecting the human rights based approach,
- Set up laws to regulate the social responsibility of the private sector and to design tools for this sector to contribute with specific rates to the construction of schools, citizenship clubs, cultural clubs and youth activity centers.

3) ***Design daring policies and clear images of Islam***, throughout the World and at the level of Europe, and set up the foundation for the rights and obligations of European Muslims

Holding training sessions and conferences may not properly impact the new stakeholders at the level of radical religious groups. It is therefore necessary to invade social media networks such as Twitter, Facebook and You Tube, and use what is broadcast on TV channels to promote the history of Islam and the region and hence disseminate alternative material and new ways to understand religion and its interpretations, now monopolized by formal scientists not producing any consistent new knowledge in Islamic Research Centers disseminated here and there.

I don't see any interesting new initiative that seriously works on reforming the religious system and old approaches that no more cope with the 2014 requirements. A center that would critically look at reform initiatives and would suggest renewed approaches to fight against hysterical violence and assassinations should bring together Muslims and non-Muslims and religion researchers in order to come up with a new vision that would put a limit to growing radicalism.

Improving Muslims' conditions may be the result of improving European Muslims' conditions through the European Institution.

What happens in Syria and in Iraq, and the migration of European youth to war front lines reflect a growing economic crisis and the vulnerability of Muslim communities in Europe, especially the second and third generations of immigrants to Europe. These economically and culturally vulnerable groups need support as they are subject to manipulation and propaganda due to the failure of immigrants integration policies and the reduction of the State's social and cultural role. We therefore recommend the following:

Europe has to abandon its "culturalist" position not to interfere in Islamic matters with the pretext to preserve Muslims' feelings and their religious rights. Refusal to deal with this issue and to undertake research to help Europe better understand Islam and its different ramifications further excluded the Muslim community already facing economic marginalization. This community has become an easy target for preachers' networks taking them to Syria, hunting idle and lost individuals, with no horizons in Europe where they were born and where they studied: I give you an example of books handed out in some private schools in London about cutting thieves' hands. We need to look

for ways to initiate a serious debate about matching Muslim communities' requirements with the laws of European countries where they live. We also need to encourage European Muslims to be more active in this domain, to better coach young people and to protect them against religious radicalism. In this regard, it is necessary to reconsider the way the official Muslims' representatives are selected, as they sometimes have no means to reach out to the different Muslim communities.

#### ***4) Reform the educational system***

- Reform educational programs throughout Europe and focus on elementary schools, to raise interest about the need to integrate Muslims communities and their respect of laws enforced in their countries of residence;
- Design training programs based on a scientific approach and taking full consideration international standards of human rights.