

The Political Obstacles Encountering the Euro-Muslim Co-existence:

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At present, many talk about the issue of cultures or civilizations with much focus being given to the issue of Western and Islamic cultures. While some talk about or “clash of civilizations”, some others defend civilizations dialogue “intercultural dialogue”. Both groups, no doubt, are possessed by intellectual and academic motives. Yet, the persistent discussion of this issue by certain countries, institutions and research centers is, by no means, isolated from unfolding political changes at global and regional levels. Therefore, there has been a growing political and academic Western interest in the Islamic phenomenon as well as the present Islamic – Western relations. A lot of universities and research centers are currently leading an academic movement in this regard that can be best seen through many relevant aspects such as conferences, publications, local and international seminars, and the emergence of many specialized academic institutions.

There is no doubt that the September 11 attacks against America have given great momentum to the issue of the relationship between European and Islamic civilizations. It is expected that the issue will witness and achieve academic analysis. Also expected is birth of new trends, policies and interests.

The roots of Euro – Islamic dialogue can be basically traced back to the cultural relations that began to assume shape following the independence of the Arab and Islamic World from European colonization on the one hand, and to the contradictory political and economic interests of both sides in the 1960s and 1970s on the other hand. The dialogue began to have its political and institutional features in 1975 through a “European – Islamic Dialogue” in the aftermath of the October 1973 War ⁽¹⁾ which witnessed the use of oil weapon against pro-Israel Western powers. Owing to several reasons, the issue of “civilizations clash or dialogue” was later revived to serve many various political, economic and security goals. These reasons run as follows:

1.The growth of the so-called “Islamic fundamentalism” since the 1980s., 2.The collapse of the communist rival in 1989-1990., 3.The obsession by what has been referred to as “ the new Islamic threat.”, 4.The growing phenomenon of Islamic violence in the Arab and Islamic World., 5. The increase of migration to Europe by Arab and Islamic labor force.

The research problem:

It is common knowledge that any solid and ceaseless relationship between Europe and the Islamic World, as two cultural and political entities, should be based on mutual respect, equality and justice. However, a lot of political, historical, social and cultural obstacles are there. This article is meant to explore the political aspects of such obstacles only in terms of what they are and how they can affect coexistence relations between both sides.

The scope of the study:

While this study is restricted to the 1980s and 1990s, it attempts to present an appropriate future perspective. In certain cases, some historical backgrounds are

provided not for the sake of exploring historical events, but rather to investigate to what extent they affect today's events and how they can affect the future of Euro-Islamic relations.

The research methodology:

As a research methodology, the study first identifies political obstacles in terms of nature and background. The possible influence of such obstacles over the coexistence relations of the target sides are then analyzed. Finally, the obstacles' volume and influence are thoroughly investigated alongside possible solutions.

The research concepts:

The article uses the term "European" to refer to a geographically, politically, religiously and culturally united entity represented by Europe. "Muslims" is a term used to refer to a culturally, geographically, politically and religiously united entity represented by the Arab and Islamic World. Domestic differences and peculiarities in each entity are not ignored. When referring to the relations between Europe and Arab and Islamic governments, there might be certain cases where we should distinguish between the concept of the geographical entity of the Arab-Islamic World and Muslim peoples on the one hand, and that of the official governments in the Arab-Islamic region on the other. For academic research purposes, the study restricts the Islamic entity to the Arab World and some neighboring Islamic states (namely Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan) that have Islamic minorities living in Europe. As for Europe, the article basically addresses Western Europe, the other political and practical participant in the civilizations Dialogue. Coexistence is defined as a win-win state of positive mutual cooperation and relations based on mutual balance and respect for the rights and privileges of each side at institutional, public or official level. Political obstacles are those political problems that cause coexistence to be either impossible or difficult.

The main political obstacles encountering the Euro-Muslim co-existence are:

Negative Political Effect of Conflict Background

The historical Euro-Islamic relations have been mostly characterized by conflict and disagreement. The Crusade Wars, the European control over the Arab World, and the Western support of the Israeli occupation of Palestine are all factors that intensified this spirit. It is in the midst of this conflict that Europe came to know Islam. Knowing Islam and Islamic peoples, says Edward Said, was based not only on dominance and confrontation, but on cultural hatred as well. ⁽²⁾. Unfortunately, most European tended to view Islam and Arabs through a negative stereotypical perspective that ignored their historic role and scientific and cultural contributions to shaping present Europe.

The Crusade Wars, the feeling which Christians had of a possible Islamic threat, and the European colonization of the Arab World played a central role in bringing about the tragedies that the Islamic World has been suffering. The Arab World today is a group of conflicting entities – a state that has caused a profound negative effect at political, economic, cultural and social levels. Furthermore, the European colonization led to the creation of Israel in the heart of the Arab World as a scheme that aims at depleting the area and as an effective instrument to enroot the state of dismembering in the Arab World. “The theme of European colonialism and imperialism, their impact in the past and their continued legacy, remains alive in Middle East politics and throughout the Muslim World from North Africa to Southeast Asia”. ⁽³⁾.

Today’s heritage of the Crusade Wars, Christianity’s feeling of an Islamic threat, and the serious negative effect of contemporary European occupation of the Arab and Islamic World will keep an unfriendly coexistence environment between European and Islamic civilizations. Commenting on “the clash of civilizations” issue, an expert in the

field of Euro- Islamic relations addresses the results of such historical backgrounds by arguing that " The post-communist discourse about the Islamic enemy and the clash of civilizations is reinforced by reference to historical experiences, and mythologised through selective readings and biased interpretations. The result is interpretations of all facts, events and processes within a predetermined framework in which the nature and motives of the "other" are misunderstood, misinterpreted, misconstrued and demonized: conspiracies reign supreme as matter of course. " (4).

To overcome this unpleasant situation, certain radical, cultural, effective and practical steps have to be taken, especially by the European side. It is apparent that approaching this issue through raising the idea of forgiveness, which the Europeans in particular call for, is rather unfair and superficial. Moreover, it skips several basic factors that that shaped the essence of this relation in the past and that still cast shadows over the events of the present and the future.

Forgetting the past means that the Arab and Islamic World, the side victimized, would, for no return, shoulder on its own the responsibility of modern European occupation. On the other hand, the European colonization would be rewarded by skipping its practices which led to disasters that the Arab and Islamic World still suffers from. Just think, for example, of the Balfour Declaration that represents the root of the Palestine Question.

In the Gulf War, America and Europe insisted that the aggressor must be punished. Not doing so, they argued, would simply mean rewarding the aggressor. Hence, Iraq was militarily hit and had to pay for the effect the War left behind. Punishing the aggressor is an absolutely sound principle, but which must also be implemented no matter who the aggressor is. Out of this view, the study raises a practical, rather than

emotional, option to address these negative effects in such a manner that paves the way for a real state of Euro-Islamic coexistence. This option argues that if the Islamic World is expected to forget Europe's colonial history and overcome its negative effect at all levels, then Europe too should do what it is expected to. It should undertake practical commitments, adopt a program for financial and moral compensation, initiate objective cultural and educational programs to acquaint European generations to the Islamic World, endorse certain legislations, and adopt legal and constitutional protection against religious fanaticism or any attack directed to Islam and Islamic holy sites. Similar to the German – Jew pattern, Europe should offer guarantees that it will not invade the area any more. The Germans did not simply extend a romantic invitation to the Jews asking them to forget all about the massacres of the past. Rather, they adopted a practical program to compensate the Jews and the Israeli entity at political and financial levels. Moreover, there is a legal, cultural, and educational program that aims at living Nazism or anti-Semitism down.

Hegemony and Dependency /or Cultural Dependency: The imposition of the hegemony of the European civilization on the Islamic World, or making the Islamic civilization dependent on the Western culture creates a great gap that distorts the principles of co-existence between the Europeans and the Muslims. Unfortunately, the following conclusions can be made:

"The relationship between cultures was never investigated without reference to the struggle between the colonizing powers and the suppressed people. When Europe was mentioned in this topic, the colonizers aimed at imposing the European sovereignty on the whole world through promoting the European culture and suppressing, or devaluating the other cultures. This practice will cause people to lose their identity and

the basis for their independent materialistic and cultural existence. Establishing cultural connections, as viewed by the European theorists, means imposing cultural dependency as part of the economic and political domination"⁽⁵⁾

The European civilization is based on what is called "The selfishness of civilization" or "The selfish civilization". This philosophy is based on the domination of individual ownership (⁶) or materialistic thought inside this civilization. The ultimate purpose of this philosophy is the achievement of political hegemony and economic exploitation of the outside world. This philosophy was manifested in the European colonization of the Islamic World, which paid a high price for this domination. The selfishness of civilization means being selfish in behavior for one's own interest, and for the purpose of dominating and exploiting others and accomplishing more gains with less pains.

The philosophy of hegemony and dependency led Europe, or the West, to view its cultural experience as the parameter against which all other civilizations are measured and judged. Thus, Europe granted itself the right to become a curator through development, economic, political and cultural programs offered by European political, cultural and development institutions⁽⁷⁾. This practice was negatively reflected on the Islamic World in various aspects such as:

(1) Having the right to establish values and norms for civilizations.

This practice represents a snobbish attitude towards other civilizations. Samuel Huntington mentioned this phenomenon in his article "The Clash of Civilizations" as he says: "The efforts of the west to promote its values of democracy and liberalism as universal values to maintain its military predominance and to advance its economic interests "⁽⁸⁾.

Huntington admits that this practice will be opposed and rejected by the other civilizations. On the other hand, there are many European thinkers and politicians (such as Charles, the Prince Regent of Britain, and professor James Biscatory) who disagree with Huntington's view of the future relationship between Western civilization and the other ones, especially the Islamic civilization. This disagreement was about the form and nature of that relationship and not about the essence and materialistic structure of the Western values. Manuel Marin, the former vice-president of the European Commission, emphasizes this idea when he discusses some basic problems in the cultural dialogue between the European civilization and the Muslims. He states that one of the main mistakes is based on “establishing the dialogue between cultures on a European, or even an imperialist perspective. The danger here is that this dialogue may be considered a mono-lateral policy of communication aiming at propagating the Western values and making them comprehensive.”⁽⁹⁾

The right of establishing norms and values made Europe resort to international values by means of which they can penetrate the political and ideological sovereignty of other civilizations. These values include human rights and democracy. Despite the sublimity of these values, Europe exploited them politically against the countries that reject the Western hegemony. The European countries tried to impose their own concept of human rights and democracy on the Muslim countries regardless of the nature of the Islamic culture. This practice does not exclude the fact that democracy has some positive aspects. Huntington emphasizes that when he says: “Differences in culture and religion create differences over policy issues”⁽¹⁰⁾

Undoubtedly, the European domination on the political values very often creates political, cultural, public and private reactions in the Islamic World, which weakens the possibility of permanent cultural co-existence between the two parties.

(2) Viewing Europe as a criterion for progress and giving it the right of determining values and norms motivate it to lead double standards in accordance with the nature of its interests in the Islamic World. Europe criticizes some Arab and Islamic regimes which violate the principles of human rights especially the countries that oppose Europe; whereas it overlooks these practices in other Arab countries. Europe rejects and opposes the occupation of an Arab country by another Arab one; whereas it pretends to be unable to do anything to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The reason lies in the difference in the interests of Europe in each case.

The practice of the double- standards (in addition to other factors) created a big gap and led to a loss of confidence between Europe and the Islamic World. How can people in the two areas co-exist in an environment characterized by lack of credibility and double- standards due to the power and domination of Europe over the Arab and Islamic world?

(3)The political development theories which were developed for the Third World in light of Western concepts or ideologies.

These concepts play an effective role in impeding development in the Islamic World, and preclude equality between Muslims and Europeans. This is due to the fact that the European political development implied dependency and European standards. In this respect, a scholar observes:

"The essence of the concept of European development is making non-European societies dependent on Europe through the concepts of "development through

spreading", "development", "modernization", and "progress". All these concepts imply the need to imitate the advanced people. Furthermore, development can be accomplished by transferring the materialistic elements from Europe to the backward societies so that they will be able to overcome their backwardness and catch up with modernization."⁽¹¹⁾

In view of that, the Europeans linked political development with hegemony and materialism. Many specialists in modernization and political culture and development such as G. Almond, B. Powell, L. Binder and T. Parsons introduced new concepts for development and modernization based on implementing the European pattern of development and transferring the Western values and institutions to be used as criteria for modernization.⁽¹²⁾

In conclusion, one can say that the European political development theories are based on ignoring the dimension of Islamic civilization in the life of the Islamic society. Prince Charles, the Prince Regent of Britain, explains this state of confusion as he says, "We fall into a trap of dreadful arrogance if we confuse "modernity" in other countries with their becoming more like us"⁽¹³⁾.

There are some valuable studies that criticize this trend in the European political development theories.⁽¹⁴⁾

Furthermore, making the Arab and Islamic World part of the Third World placed it in the circle of struggle between the Europeans and Americans on the one hand, and the ex-Soviet Union on the other. This caused the two parties to ignore the Islamic nation as a nation of its own culture and civilization, and as a nation that has the right to live peacefully and independently. In addition, the two parties tried hard to dominate this area politically, ideologically, economically and culturally through offering theories of

development and modernization such as the socialist Marxist theory and Capitalism with total disregard to the culture and civilization of these people and their right to control their resources. This situation widened the gap between the people of this area and the political systems of the European and socialist countries.

On the contrary, the Islamic world was suffering from weakness, degeneration, political and military conflicts and economic dependency.

This state of degeneration caused a great sector of Muslims to resort to negative defence and isolation as they strongly attached themselves to their values, history and culture as a reaction to the Europeans' attempt to impose their domination and hegemony. These people became extreme opponents to the Western culture. Therefore, there was a need for another option to strike a balance between the European hegemony and the absolute rejection of this domination and its consequences by the Muslims. This option was manifested in Muslims coming out of their isolation and moving to a stage of internationalizing the Islamic political and cultural values and disseminating them into the European societies and organizations so as to -guarantee interaction with Europe on the public and official levels.

Some of the cultural, ideological and value isolation practiced by some activist Muslims, whether they are individuals or states, indirectly enhanced the European role in imposing cultural dependency.

Making and politically Exploiting Stereotypical Images Against Arabs and Islam

Europe bears a distorted stereotypical image about Arabs and Islam, who are often depicted as backward, violent and extreme. M. H. Haikal, an Arab political analyst, presents a brief description of the distorted European view regarding Islam: “We get

surprised that Islam is often simply viewed as terrorism, Arabs as oil, and the Arab-Israeli conflict as anti-Semitism.”⁽¹⁵⁾.

Those who live in Europe or keep in touch with some European media can easily notice the shockingly obvious distortion, which is connected to an institutional process of suspicious motives, against Islam and Arabs be it at the level of individuals or institutions.

Islam and Muslims can be easily held responsible for terrorism. Such fact is best seen through the media coverage of the Oklahoma explosion as well as September 11 attack. It is further noticed in the statements made by several political figures and officials in Europe and America. Media institutions and some Western political figures don't seem to mind taking up such uncivilized trend. They even adopt it easily and with no sense of responsibility in order to exploit these crises to gain benefits to the interest of certain political, party or official figures in the European community.

Distortion is there in the media institution – i.e. press, television, and radio ⁽¹⁶⁾ – the political speeches of a lot of political and party leaders, and the educational institutions.⁽¹⁷⁾ This indicates an institutional process that seeks to enroot this distorted image amongst European citizens and voters. The expanding influence of European rightist tendencies and their hatred towards Muslim communities is, as a matter of fact, just one indicator. We should remember, of course, that there are some individual and institutional efforts in Europe to minimize such distortion. However, these still remain limited.

Talking about Muslims provokes amongst Europeans an image of backwardness, enmity, and bloody violence. In fact, there is no distinction between the practices of political violence – carried out under the slogan of Islam either by governments,

individuals, or groups in the Islamic World – and the human, moral, and intellectual content of Islam that is based on justice, freedom, peace, and solidarity. Such lack of distinction seems as an intentional process by political, party, security, and media bodies. It might be related to what is presently referred to as “the new Islamic threat.” The claim of an Islamic threat is directed in such a manner that affects the building up of many European philosophies and concepts on the basis of meeting such threat in the future. In addition, there have been greatly apparent attempts to confuse between terrorism and bloody violence on the one hand and legitimate acts of resistance. Consider, for instance, those who depict the legitimate Lebanese and Palestinian acts of resistance against Israeli occupation as Islamic terrorism. Such confusion is, by all means, the result of the role played by anti-Arab and Muslims influential institutions in Europe at media, political, cultural, and educational levels.

Bearing this stereotypical image about Islam will definitely deepen the gap between Europeans and Muslims, and support the influence of anti-coexistence political trends. It will also obstruct the integration process of Arab and Islamic communities into the European societies where they live. This situation will, in turn, lead to more crises and to a state of instability in these societies. Moreover, it will keep European politicians and their political platforms under pressure by misled electors – which will force politicians not to deal with Islam and not to treat Islamic communities justly and fairly.

To make discussion fair, we should point out that Muslims too bear misleading overgeneralization about the West and its achievements, particularly that some of the violent practices of certain groups that put on an Islamic mask contribute effectively to creating the necessary atmosphere for those who reject the idea of fair and free coexistence. Besides, the autocratic and suppressive behavior of some governments in

the Islamic and Arab World enhances the stereotypical image about Islam in the mind of European citizens and voters, and pushes them to turn away from developing an objective view towards Islam and Muslims .

Racism against Arab-Muslim Communities in Europe

Arab-Muslim communities and guest labor in Europe are a pivotal factor in the political relations between Europe and the Islamic World whether at positive or negative levels. Despite enjoying the nationality of a host country or at least being legal residents, Arab and non Arab Islamic communities suffer from the distorted image about Islam as well as a lot of racial practices whether at social, professional, or political level. The various racial practices against Arabs and Muslims following the September 11 attacks stress the fact such racial hatred does exist amongst some European and American individuals. It is even there at the lived of relevant legislations and laws that Britain and America have adopted under the slogan of combating terrorism.⁽¹⁸⁾ Their role in political decision-making is marginalized whether in connection to their own community affairs, their relations with the parties and political regime of the host country, or issues pertaining to the Islamic Mashrek. “ The seventies was a decisive period for both Arab immigrants and host countries. In this decade, immigrants were encountered with the issue of adopting a final status as to their future. In the 1970s too, Europe, especially Germany and France, had proposed certain programs and procedures to motivate immigrants to go back to their homeland.”⁽¹⁹⁾. The phenomenon of enmity and racism against Arab and Islamic communities was further promoted in the mid 1980s in the light of the receding economic performance in Europe and the rise of violence that used Islam as a mask.

In general, European countries do not have the same level of racism and enmity, depending on the political and social structures of each country as well as the cultural,

social, and professional status of Islamic communities. It is clear that this phenomenon is most intensified in France and Germany, particularly against Arab Moroccan and Turkish communities respectively.

The minority issue is basically a cultural and political problem that should not be confined to the frame of demography, statistics or even tradition differences. The figures given in this context are actually a representation of a universal culture that expresses “the other.” Undoubtedly, most of those who belong to Arab and Islamic minorities are emotionally, culturally and, to a large extent, politically attached to their homeland. Furthermore, they are all emotionally attached to Islam. This is why any unfair European efforts regarding Islam or issues related to the Islamic World will negatively affect the communities’ relations and stands concerning European countries.

There is also another important problem that bears seeds of anti-Islamic racism. Most European countries do not officially recognize Islam as the second largest religion in Europe. It follows that Islamic communities cannot enjoy many of their civil and religious rights. The feeling of confrontation and siege which Islamic communities experience has made them resort to defense mechanisms. They have been seeking to fortify their identity links and to adhere to pride of their religion and morals in response to the political marginalization they have been undergoing. ⁽²⁰⁾. All this means that an effective integration in the European society has not been able to attain the racial reaction showed following the September 11 attacks against Arab and Islamic communities has caused these communities to live in a state of political and social siege. This is a clear indication that there are certain powerful voices that oppose, or at least try to complicate, the integration process of these communities into European societies.

Muslims, on the other hand, are to blame for certain factors obstructing coexistence. The political issues of the Islamic World, for example, render themselves amongst community members. Islamic communities in Europe have many differences regarding political issues according to their culture or the policies of the mother country. It is true that these communities have assumed identical stands towards the Islamic World's pivotal issues such as the issues of Palestine, Jerusalem, Intifada, (Islamic communities took to the streets on several occasions to support these issues), freedoms, democracy, and the feeling of dissatisfaction regarding the positions of most leaders in the Islamic World towards issues pertaining to Islam such as the Salman Rushdi issue. But it is also true that there are certain party, political, and denominational differences that can be best seen at the Islamic cultural and religious centers operating in Europe. Such differences have weakened the role and effectiveness of Islamic communities in Europe.

Besides, these communities lack a "referential leadership," which makes it difficult in many cases for European governments to talk to one legitimate representative of Islamic communities. Lacking unified demands, the political effect of communities is not coherent enough.

Europe, on the other hand, talks about the prosecution and the absent rights of non-Arab or Christian communities in the Muslim World such as south Sudan, Iraq's Kurd, Algeria's Berbers, and Egypt's Copts. In fact, raising such issues is nothing but a political issue determined by the calculations of political conflict between some European countries and some Arab and Islamic political regimes. In other words, it is not a matter of supporting the human rights of these communities especially in the light of the double standard policy of Western governments, and especially further that most of those Arab

and Muslim countries accused of ignoring community rights are known for prosecuting their own peoples.

In brief, the issue of Muslim communities and Muslim guest labor in Europe involves cultural, political, economic, and social dimensions that impose themselves on Euro-Islamic relations. This issue should be approached through a fundamental cultural, political, legal and development method of treatment. It is not just a security and socioeconomic issue, as some would like it to be simply viewed.⁽²¹⁾ We can safely argue that one step to solve this issue is to offer a political and development solution that addresses the reality of the Islamic and Arab World.⁽²²⁾ Any solution has to offer a comprehensive settlement based on total recognition of religious, cultural, political, social, and economic rights. Stated in different words, it should be based on recognition and acceptance of differences so as to achieve a stable, lasting and just settlement that would allow communities to integrate in host countries without losing their cultural and religious unique identity. As pointed out by Roy Jenkins, a British former minister of the interior, "I would define integration, not as a process of assimilation and leveling out, but as providing equality of opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance"⁽²³⁾.

Influence of pro-Israel Groups in Shaping Negative European Role in the Arab-Israeli Conflict

"Israel may have been created by and continues to be sponsored by the West."⁽²⁴⁾ The Jewish presence and the pro-Israel lobby in Europe exercise a significant influence in the Euro- Arab/ Islamic relations issue. It represents a real obstacle encountering mutual Euro-Arab/ Islamic coexistence. The pro-Israel lobbies in Europe have apparent influence over governments, national parliaments, the European Parliament, political

parties, political and public figures, media, leading economic and social institutions, and research centers. It is sufficient in this context to remind of the role of Samuel Huntington and B. Lewis in reviving the idea of “the clash of civilizations” at political and academic levels on international and Western areas.

In general, the powerful influence of pro-Israel lobby influence over European decision-making institutions plays a negative political, ideological, and cultural role encountering Euro-Islamic relations. It goes without saying that a Euro-Islamic approach stands in vivid contrast with Israel’s political interests. Another factor to consider is the fundamental religious differences between Muslims and Jews particularly regarding Palestine. It might be useful to know that Judaism and Hebrew studies are a basic component of the Euro and Euro- Christian culture, particularly in connection to Palestine. ⁽²⁵⁾ Dr. Yousef Al Hassan says that the spread of Hebrew studies across European culture and universities has brought about the following effects ⁽²⁶⁾

1. Accepting the Old Testament’s interpretations especially those related to the prophecies that the Jews will restore Palestine.
2. Persuading college students and researchers that, according to the Old Testament, the word “Israel” refers to all Jewish communities in the world.
3. Accepting the prophecy that the end of the world is contingent to the second arrival of Christ, and that one sign of this arrival is the Jewish return to Palestine.

The clearest example of this effect is, as argued by some researchers, that “the religious belief in the Old Testament and Hebrew interpretations by Luid George (Britain’s prime minister in 1916) and Arthur Balfour (a former British minister of

foreign affairs) had a great role in shaping their political stands that made them issue the Declaration known as the first international recognition of political Zionism and its right to set up a Jewish state in Palestine.”⁽²⁷⁾. In the light of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the pro-Israel groups, influence, played in an influential role in marginalizing the effect of Arab- Muslim communities in the policies of some European countries towards the Israeli practices in Palestine, particularly that Jerusalem, as an occupied holy city, intensifies anti-Israel emotions amongst Arab- Islamic minorities.

In addition, the Holocaust arrest of the European mentality has played a role in pushing Europe to take the side of Jewish and Zionist powers or, at least, adopt ineffective positions towards Arab and Muslim issues.

The powerfully vivid image of the Holocaust in the minds of the Europeans has always led to pro- Israel Euro stands at the expense of Arab and Islamic rights in Palestine. It is not surprising then that the gap is being continuously widened between Europe and the public Arab and Islamic side. It has even consolidated Arab and Islamic doubts about Europe’s credibility regarding coexistence with Arabs and Islam.

It is beyond doubt that the pro-Israel lobby has – through affecting European political elite and decision-makers – played a central role in shaping the stands of European countries regarding the Palestine question in the sixties and seventies of the 20th century. The eighties and early nineties saw a notable positive change in the European stands. Europe recognized the right of Palestinians to self-determination and to an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Europe also recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and offered the Palestinian Authority economic support. However, European stands remained captive of official declaration and political formal support of Palestinian rights. Acting under the pressure of its American ally, Europe did not adopt any effective

procedures on the ground to push Israel to stick to the declared European stands. Rather, Europe had been the official actor of the American role regarding the Palestine question. On the other hand, some of the European “relatively advanced” stands as to the Arab-Israeli conflict remained shy and held level despite the earnest appeal by Arab governments for an effective European role in this context.

Euro-Islamic relations seem to suffer from a pretended state of European helplessness and a lack of the serious intention to exploit the factors of geographical proximity, cultural contact and economic ties in order to create a situation where the political priorities and foreign goals of Europe are more attached to European and Islamic interests than to Israeli influence. However, one factor that might be motivating the others to adopt a passive attitude when dealing with the Islamic World’s issues and rights is the dismembered situation Muslims are witnessing.

European Backup of the Arab/ Muslim World’s Dictatorships

Many European states believe that advancing political and economic interests with the Islamic World, particularly the Arab World, calls for keeping in harmony with the interests of local political regime regardless of how democratic or dictator this regime is. By ignoring the democratic values and principles it has been calling for, Europe is viewed by Islamic and Arab peoples as the other face of the Islamic World’s dictatorships. It is unfortunate that Europe did not learn a lesson from its experience with Iran’s Shah. Solid relations and long-term interests, Europe should realize, should be based on peoples and ruling political regimes respectively.

It is really puzzling that, in most cases, Europe shows interest in Islam just to figure out how Islam’s effect on the stability of an allied political regime can be minimized,

rather than to understand the cultural and intellectual content necessary for working out mutual coexistence mechanisms based on sound principles.

Also controversial is the fact that Europe defends democracy and human rights only when it stands in conflict with some dictatorships in the Arab and Islamic World. Claiming that it seeks to lift peoples suffering, Europe provides political and military opposition powers with political, financial and logistic support. Decisions to support opposition, as is the case in Iraq and Libya, are taken only if opposition is deemed competent to advance European interests. Opposition political leaders accept support either on basis of pre- coordination or otherwise miscalculations. Reality indicates that European support leads not to the economic and political prosperity of the Islamic World's peoples, but rather to more dependency at political and cultural levels. It is useful to point out that European relations with either opposition or authoritarian regimes are usually received with negative stands by Muslim communities. The latter view any positive relations between Europe and either political opposition or dictator regimes as suspicious and unreliable.

We should state that European relations with the Islamic World's dictatorships, taking the Israeli side, acting helpless in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and falling under Jewish lobbies influence are all good reasons that lead to aggravating acts of Islamic violence against European interests whether in the Islamic World or Europe itself. Europe, therefore, should deeply consider these reasons.

Political Researchers and European Decision-Makers: Relationships and Lack of Objectivity⁽²⁸⁾

Some non objective political researchers, whether of Western or Arab and Islamic origins in the field of Arab, Islamic and Middle East studies have played a significant

role in influencing a lot of Western policies regarding the area as well as how the phenomenon of political Islam should be dealt with. Such researchers distort Islam either deliberately or else fail to distinguish between Islam's theoretical framework and the practices of some political Islamist movements.

The role of political researchers and Think tanks has assumed various shapes such as manipulating media, presenting studies, organizing seminars and closed conferences, and providing advice to foreign ministers or parliamentary committees of foreign affairs. Think tanks in America and Europe “ play an important role in formulating political decisions especially those pertaining to foreign policy, including American [and European] policy regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. In this context, think tanks release structured studies, organize seminars and workshops, issue special reports, and offer advice to decision-makers.”⁽²⁹⁾. These think tanks are closely related to decision-making bodies and institutions, and often witness the participation of American and European officials in the conferences and activities which they hold. In addition, think tanks are a rich source that either provides decision-making bodies with experts or employs former experts and officials who used to work at these bodies.

Commenting on the relations between think tanks and decision-making institutions, an Arab ambassador to America thinks “ it is formulating agendas that think tanks try primarily to achieve. In other words, a researcher or more try to work out certain proposals, policy or ideas to be propagated so as to make it an official stand adopted by press and administration.”⁽³⁰⁾.

“Though think tanks (in America and Europe) emphasize their objectivity in approaching various issues, the objective of their studies is to seek the best method to serve (Western) interests or those of certain pressure groups. This lack of objectivity is

reflected in the manner any problem under study is described as well as in suggested solutions. In some instances, bias takes an explicit, direct pattern.”⁽³¹⁾.

Several leading Western research institutions and colleges interested in political studies in the Arab and Islamic World and in the phenomenon of political Islam had been dominated either by security mentalities or by those who view political Islam through the perspective of “terrorism.”⁽³²⁾ In some other cases, they were run by politically and ideologically steered researchers, some of whom were supports of Israel, which lives in conflict with the Arab-Muslim World over the Palestinian issue. In addition, there are American research centers, such as Washington Center for Near East Policies, that fall under the influence of the Jewish lobby. Explaining the powerful influence of this center over American decision-makers, a former Arab ambassador to America believes that “papers usually cover what WCNEP experts say. Not only that. Papers hardly approve any article on the region without WCNEP permission. It seems the Center has succeeded in giving the impression that it enjoys geographical experience as well as experience in Middle East issues.”⁽³³⁾ One researcher ascribes the influence WCNEP enjoys to the fact that it “has intimate and various relations with American official departments, Israel, and the Zionist lobby in the USA. Furthermore, WCNEP releases special reports and structured studies which the US administration considers when working out its Middle East policies. Like other leading think tanks, WCNEP represents a pass gate for those who seek influential official offices. Besides, a number of officials either work for or coordinate with the Center after they have resigned.”⁽³⁴⁾

As indicated previously, though most studies in this field are released in America, they do have effect on European decision-makers. Among such studies are those advocated by Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis who called for the idea of “clash

of civilizations” as a basic steering agent of future international politics. They most particularly advocated the idea of West-Islamic cultural clash. Yet, American studies have been a primary source in directing the policies and stands of American and European decision-makers towards the Arab and Islamic World. This, of course, does not mean that objective Western researchers do not exist. Researchers like John Esposito (America), James Piscatori (Britain), and Francois Burgate (France) represent a stream that attempts to get Western decision-makers develop an objective understanding of the Arab and Islamic World in general, and of political Islam in particular.

On the other hand, another group of Western researchers, who come from Arab origins, offer Western decision-makers a different understanding. While researchers like Mohammed Arkoun, Albert Hourani (deceased in the mid 90s) and some other academics instructing at European universities call for supporting Arab political stands, they adopt a negative view regarding the political phenomenon of Islam in the Arab and Islamic World.

We can argue that the non-objective understanding, motives and goals which these research institutions and streams bear towards political Islam and the Islamic World have represented a great obstacle for developing sound and factual understanding by European decision-makers regarding Islam. Furthermore, lack of objectivity has led to the birth of many wrong European stands and decisions. This has contributed to reinforcing negative relations between many Europeans and Muslims.

One reason why Western researchers do not objectively comprehend the political process in the Islamic World is that they do not relate this process to its Islamic cultural and social dimension. They only focus on the security, ideological, and economic

aspects. In other words, they view Islam as a threat against European culture and interests.

In some other cases, Western researchers do not possess the skills and tools essential to have an objective political understanding of the region. They are not, for example, deeply enough familiar with Arabic – which deprives them of the chance to benefit from authentic Arab and Islamic sources.

It is necessary for the relation between political researchers and decision-makers in Europe to be a relation which corrects misperceptions and offers an objective guide for European policies regarding Islam and Muslims. This calls for deciding on the nature of such relation. In this context, Edward Sad raises important questions: Is the objective expert supposed to be above politics or should he act as a political attaché for governments? ... Is there a certain means which independent thinkers employ to maintain independence when directly serving the state? What is the relationship between explicit political loyalty and deep vision? ⁽³⁵⁾. Readers might have noticed by now that we have not touched on the relations between political researchers and decision-makers in the Islamic World. The reason is that we believe that academic researchers have little, or even non-existent, ability to generate effective relations in this field.

Conclusion

The political obstacles we have reviewed are profound and complicated. It is really difficult, yet possible, to overcome such obstacles. Great concessions of the giant privileges that the West has been enjoying through relations with the Arab and Islamic World must be offered.

Though interest in mutual dialogue mechanisms has increased, Euro-Islamic relations are those of non-existence, and are expected to remain so as long as they are based on

strength versus weakness or the dependent versus the independent. Things will also remain the same unless the Arab and Islamic reality gets powerful enough to impose a mutual-dependency relationship based on justice. Unless a European initiative to change such relation is proposed, Arabs and Muslims might adopt a long-term future option to impose, through pressure and power, a new structural map for their relations with the West.

The volume of these political obstacles indicates that there is a pressing need not only for high politics and a political will, but also for a long-term public and official civilized method of treatment. The call for launching a civilization dialogue through semi or non-official conferences as well as some cultural activities is, in fact, too simple to handle such complicated issue. We can even consider this call as a way to evade the costly and actual expenses at political, economic, cultural, technological, and social levels. In other words, it is an attempt to avoid a state of mutual dependency and cooperation where the Europeans might have to take care of the largest portion of expenses. This does not mean rejecting dialogue between European and Islamic educated figures. But the dialogue should be a process of negotiation on the strategic framework which, in turn, should both determine and change the strategic and cultural costs and commitments that each side must offer the other.

Though non-existent and will be so, a state of absolute idealism in Euro-Islamic relations can't be attained. But it must be sought through proposing long-term, just, and objective principles that are not subject to the dominance of any side. Gains, benefits, and costs alike must be equally and objectively shared. Stated more clearly, Muslims should not be given scraps of technological consumption nor superficial relations of political and economic support while the Europeans enjoy the lion's share. Such state of inequality has

caused violence to reach Europe itself. At a Euro-Islamic Dialogue conference, Swedish Foreign Minister commented that “foreign policy and international cooperation should not focus exclusively on acute problems but must also deal with fundamental issues for the future. A preventive foreign policy is becoming increasingly important, and this includes what might be called confidence-building measures in the cultural sphere.”⁽³⁶⁾

The political obstacles indicate that Europe’s interest in having relations with the Arab and Islamic World is subject more to the cultural, security, social, and political obstacles as well as to the instant interests which Europe faces than to its will to build up civilized ties based on social and cultural dimensions. As a result, Euro interaction with civilization dialogue is subject to these challenges. This means that Europe is more interested in adopting response strategies envisaged to face the challenges the Arab and Islamic World is feared to pose than in establishing strategic relations based on civilized dimensions and public interests as well as on a moral, spiritual, and value content.

It is essential to study Islam beyond the Western attempts to politicize it, i.e. beyond the stereotypical image of violent and backward Islam. It is politics that promotes this distorted image so as to serve its interests. Instead of holding a position of dominance over the Islamic World’s potential and policies, Europe should assume a closer position to cultural Islam in general and political understanding of Islam in particular⁽³⁷⁾.

Unless Europe considers such trends, it might in the relatively long- run undergo tough experiences that would bring back the bitter memory of the Crusade Wars, the Islamic movements of independence in the early and mid 20th century, and the recent Iranian experience. In that case, the theory of “civilization clash” would prevail at the expense of civilization dialogue.

In turn, the Islamic side is responsible for developing such relations with the West that will ultimately lead to real coexistence. To achieve this, they should adopt a policy of cultural openness and get rid of a lot of these practices which lead the Europeans to formulate negative images about Islam and Muslims. Furthermore, they should overcome the weakness and degradation they suffer from in many fields. Finally, Arabs and Muslims are supposed to be creative and able to develop and exploit their immense resources and capabilities in all fields so as to have the ability to impose a state of real balance with the West

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¹ See : A.S. Al-Dajani, “Islam and Europe: Towards a mutual, objective understanding between Europeans and Muslims”. Paper presented in the conference on *Islam and Europe*. Al al-Bayt University, 10-13/6/1996 (in Arabic). See also the same author in “ The Arab-European Dialogue” in *Al Mustaqbal Al Arabi*, Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut , Vol.2, Sept. 1979.

² Edward Said, “Knowledge and Power” in Bernard Lewis and Edward Said, *Fundamental Islam in Western Media from an American Perspective* , Dar Al Jeel, Beirut, 1994, p. 126. (Arabic edition)

³ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* , Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 47.

⁴ Jorgen S. Nilsen, “Europe and Islam”, paper presented at Euro- Islam Conference. Organized by the Swedish institute in Cooperation with Al al-Bayt University of Jordan, Mafraq, Jordan, 10-13/6/1996

⁵ Muneer Shafiq, *Islam in the Battle of Civilization*, 1st Dar Al Buraq Linasher, Tunisia, 1991, p.33. (in Arabic)

⁶ Ibid. p.33.

⁷ See for example, Euro-Mediterranean Development Programmes which was supported by European Union.

⁸ Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations" *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72.No. 3. 1993 ., p.29.

⁹ M. Manuel Marin, Former Vice President of European Commission, L'avenir de l'Union européenne et du monde musulman sera commun speech presented in the Euro-Islam conference, Stockholm 15-17/7/1995. Documentation, p29.

¹⁰ Huntington , "The Clash of Civilizations". p 29.

¹¹ Nasr M. Aref , *Political Development Theories :A Comparative Critical on the light of the Islamic Civilized View*. International Institute for Islamic Thought, Virginia, 1992,p.236 (in Arabic)

¹² For more details, see: Ibid. p. 94-95, 191-196, 240.

¹³ Islam and the West, Speech of Prince Charles .Oxford Center for Islamic Studies, Univ. of Oxford, October 27,,1993

¹⁴ See, for example, Nasr Aref , , *Political Development Theories* ,Chapter .1.op.cit.

¹⁵ Seminar on "Arabs and Europe", 1992 , Muhammad H. Haikal (comments), *The Arab Researcher*, Arab Research Center, London, p. 31.

¹⁶ See for example: Francis Ghiles, "Reporting the Muslim World in the Western Media". Also Augustino Velloso, "Spanish Attitudes towards the Arab World: From Ignorance to Mistrust", paper presented at the conference of Arabs and West. Mutual Images, University of Jordan, Amman, 3-5/4/1994.

¹⁷ See, for example: Marlin Nasser, *The Image of Arabs and Islam in French School Books*, Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 1995 (in Arabic).

¹⁸ For information on racism and discrimination against Muslims, see, for example: Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia: Features and Dangers*. The Runnymede Trust (London), February, 1997. See Also, David Browning, *Building Bridges Between Islam and the West*, Wilton Park papers 138, Report bossed on Wilton Park conference 520, 9-12 February 1998, pp33-36.

¹⁹ Burhan Ghalion, "The Future of Arab Communities in Europe" *Al Mustaqbal Al Arabi*. Centre for Arab Studies Unity, Beirut, No. 209, July 1996, p. 57(in Arabic)

²⁰ Kate Zebiri, "Relations between Muslims and Non –Muslims in the Thought of Western-Educated Muslim Intellectuals" *Islam and Christian- Muslim Relations*, Vol. 6, No. 2,1995, p.255.

²¹ for example, Clude Chesson (a former French Foreign Minister) attempted to confine this issue to an economic issue of social and security dimensions, thus ignoring the cultural and human dimension of the Arab-Islamic communities in France. He says that " Europe will not be able to gain acceptance by guest labor fluxing from Turkey and Arab ports. Fear seizes me when I think about such suppressive feelings that can change into depression if not violence unless the youth are provided with reasonable opportunities. All this can be attributed to economic factors. Thinking politically, we can argue that we need instant competent Arab development. We also need a future based on how well this can be planned." Seminar on "Arabs ... and Europe in 1992", *The Arab Researcher*, op. cit. ,p.22.

²² For deep analysis in this regard, see :Waleed Abd Al Nasser, "Mediterranean Cooperation Between Immigration And Years of Hard line", *Al Siyasa Al Dawliah*, Vol. 124, April, 1996,p.111-118 (in Arabic)

²³ Robert Bistolfi, *Islam-A New Flement in the Culture of Europe*, CISC Papers No. 15 July 1955, CSIC, Birmingham. P9

²⁴ David Browningm *Building Bridges Between Islam and the West*, Wilton Park Papers 138, Report bossed on Wilton Park Conference 520, 9-12 February 1998, p.41.

²⁵ For the Jewish and Zionist influence over Christianity and European Culture, see: Yousef Al Hassan “The roots of Zionism in European Fundamentalist Christianity”, a Chapter in, *The Religious Dimension in the American Policy Towards Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Study on the American Fundamentalist Christianity Movement*, A series of Ph.D. Theses(15), Centre for Arab Unity Studies , Beirut, 1990.(in Arabic)

²⁶ Yousef Al Hassan, *Ibid.*,P.23-24.

²⁷ The declaration of Luid George and Balfour believes.” This fact was stressed was largely dependent on their Old-Testimony- by Tuchman, a Jewish historian , *Ibid*, p.34.

²⁸ Though we basically focus on Europe, this section calls for exploration of American researchers, studies and Think Tanks. Many justifications can be explained. First, most of the studies related to this aspect are released in America. Such studies, due to the universal nature of English language, have profound effects over European researchers, intellectuals and decision-makers. Second, the extensive contact between Europe and America and the generally common political and cultural roots of Western countries have been reflected in formulating a structured research policy amongst European researchers.

²⁹ Abu Amre , “Think Tanks and the American Middles East Positions”, *Al Siyasa Al Dawliah* , Vol. 109, July 1992, p.80.(in Arabic)

³⁰ Marwan Al Musher (Jordanian Foreign Minister & the former Jordanian Ambassador to the USA): A discussion session on The Mechanisms of Decision-Making in American Institutions, Organized by the Jordan Center for Studies and Information, Amman, December, 1997.

³¹ Abu Amre, “Think Tanks and the American Middles East Positions” .p80.

³² For the opinions of some European security decision-makers in this context, see, for example: Stella Rimington, “ Director General of the Security Service in UK”, *Security and Democracy – Is There a Conflict?*, The Richard Dimplebly Lecture, 1994, BBC Education, 1994.

³³ Marwan Al Musher , A discussion Session on The Mechanisms of Decision-Making in American Institutions.

³⁴ Abu Amre, “Think Tanks and the American Middles East Positions” ,p.83.

³⁵ Edward Said, ”Knowledge and Power”, p.54.

³⁶ The Opening Speech by Swedish Foreign Minister Lina Yalem Valin at the Conference on Europe and Islam, Stockholm 15-17 June 1995.

³⁷ Ghassan Salama presents a valuable view on how the West encounters Islamic violence. See: Ghassan Salama, “ Islam and the West”, *Foreign Policy*, Spring 1993.