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# STEREOTYPES ABOUT ISLAM AND *MEDIA COMMENTATORS*' DISCOURSE AFTER 9/11<sup>1</sup>

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University of Bucharest

**Abstract.** Starting from the assumption that after 9/11 discursive patterns on Islam got a global dimension, and exceeded the national usual approach, the present paper is trying to analyze the most frequent stereotypes in “reading” Islam, along with a profound change of experts’ profile in Islamic field, comparing to the classic traditional scholar, that occurred after 9/11 attacks. The research is focusing on media commentators’ discourses in both the United States and Europe (especially France and Italy), by analyzing various types of public discourse: books, articles, blogs, conferences, and TV talk-shows, and pinning down themes, topics and patterns in public Western “talking” about Islam, after 9/11. The research cannot provide a comprehensive perspective, since it would be unrealistic to attempt a comprehensive analysis, but it will try to identify the main influences in shaping stereotypes about Islam and Muslims.

**Keywords:** stereotype, otherness, neo-orientalism, public discourse, paradigm deconstruction.

The main purpose of this study is to identify the most frequent stereotypes about Islam in Western common perception, and the connection between these clichés and the so-called *media* commentators and their activity in this field after 9/11. I started from the assumption that after 9/11, discursive patterns on Islam got a global dimension, and exceeded the national usual approach, while media-commentators’ public opinions on Islam got over the national media networks, consequently acquiring an international coverage. (However, historical and national considerations can still be found in some approaches). First of all, I paid particular attention to define media-commentators’ category and to identify international media networks relating between them. The French scholar Vincent Geisser<sup>2</sup> portrays media commentators as a category replacing in the public arena important and famous specialists in Islam who have lost part of their professional credibility after 9/11. Thus after 9/11 Western media largely stopped to take into

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<sup>1</sup> This study represents a part of a more comprehensive analysis I carried out at Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, under the precious guidance of professors John Voll and John L. Esposito.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent Geisser. 2003. *La nouvelle islamophobie*. Paris: Editions La Découverte: 12

consideration scholars and their works considered too friendly towards Islam and turned their attention to a different category of experts coming from the security area studies who have no professional Islamic knowledge or background. My explorative research focused on media commentators' discourses in both the United States and Europe (especially France and Italy), by analyzing various types of public discourse: books, articles, blogs, conferences, and TV talk-shows from which I tried to pin down themes, topics and patterns in public Western talking about Islam. I had in my attention authors like Robert Spencer, Martin Kramer, Daniel Pipes, Steven Emerson, Pamela Geller or Bernard-Henri Levi, Oriana Fallaci, Philipp Val, Caroline Fourest, Michele Tribalat, René Marchand and others, who have in common not only ideas about Islam, but also a media network through which they are expressing these ideas. The main criteria for the selection of my subjects are their relevance and impact on popular perceptions of Islam. By "relevancy" I mean media shows, published books, number of readers and followers when it comes to blogs etc. The approach has not an exhaustive dimension, but is trying to emphasize the main patterns on public talking about Islam within a media network which became global after 9/11.

### **I. Some considerations on the topic's theoretical background**

An impressive number of scholars, in the aftermath of Edward Said's famous book "Orientalism", have been preoccupied by the academic framework of the ongoing debates about Islam, especially after 9/11. As Bryan Turner pointed out, *contemporary Western understanding of Islam is seeped in a deep historical tradition influenced by early Christian thought. Islam from a very early period was seen as a distinct threat to Christendom* (Turner, 2007: 60). Others, like the French scholar Pascal Boniface<sup>3</sup>, consider that Islam and Muslims and the way in which a large part of Western public media reflect them is nothing but a continuation of cultural phobia exercised during the Nineteenth Century and the beginning of Twentieth over the Jews leaving in Europe (Boniface, 2011: 71-84). Clichés applied in the past to the Jewish minority in Europe are mostly oriented nowadays towards Muslims and Islam generally. Moreover, as Noam Chomsky<sup>4</sup> remarks, anti-Arabs and anti-Muslims feelings represent especially after 9/11

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<sup>3</sup> Pascal Boniface recently published the book *Les intellectuels faussaires* ("The Untruthful Intellectuals") in which he is denouncing several important French media intellectuals and their expertise on the fields they are talking about, Paris: Jean-Claude Gawsewitch Éditeur, 2011

<sup>4</sup> The linguist Noam Chomsky is interviewed during the documentary *Brothers & Others. Noam Chomsky, on power, dissent & racism* by Nicolas Rossier, broadcasted by Arab Film Distribution in 2008.

what he called a “legitimate form of racism” both in the United States and Europe, a racism you don’t have to hide it, as it is the case with anti-Semitism.

It seems that in common Western perception the image of the Muslim didn’t considerably change from the medieval period until nowadays. From colonial period Western world inherited a series of stereotypes about the Islamic civilization deeply implanted in public common perception by literary and pictorial representations. There is a list of the most frequent images about Islamic world during the colonial era and, likely, after its ends: corrupt and irrational despotism, fanatic religiosity, exotic mysticism, teeming markets and dreamy harems, sexually predatory and insatiable men, and sensual, decadent and devious women (Pickering, 2001: 168). The question which comes up immediately is how many of these images are still pervasive until nowadays and what the mechanisms of this perpetuation are. We, as Western culture’s products, are still referring to Muslims by using the same old negative characterization: what the Muslims are not? Basically, they are not like US. We still fall back on categories such “good” and “bad”<sup>5</sup> in shaping the image of the other or his otherness. After 9/11, the American official discourse makes the difference between “good” and “bad” Muslims, distinction with deep implications for the political behavior of Muslims themselves. Thereby, after 9/11 the people were waiting “good” Muslims to express their disagreement and condemnation of terrorism, otherwise they might be assimilated with this phenomenon. As Mahmoud Mamdani remarks *the central message of such discourse was: unless proved to be good, every Muslim was presumed to be bad. All Muslims were now under obligation to prove their credentials by joining a war against bad Muslims* (Mamdani, 2004: 15).

Michael W. Suleiman who is probably the main American researcher in this field uttered his conviction that “among the Americans there is a mind-set, a general picture of Arabs which, though vague, is distorted and incorrect and almost invariable negative, at times, bordering on racism” (Suleiman, 1988: 2). Edward Said believes that present coverage of Islam and of non-Western societies canonizes notions, texts, and authorities. “The idea that Islam is medieval and dangerous, as well as hostile and threatening to us, for example, has acquired a place both in the culture and in the polity” (Said, 1997: 156). In a time in which fostered fears of anarchy and disorder will very likely produce conformity of views with reference to the “outside” world, the production and diffusion of knowledge, claims Edward Said, will play a crucial role (Said, 1997: 160-161).

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<sup>5</sup> Mamdani, Mahmoud. 2004. *Good Muslims, bad Muslim. America, the Cold War and the roots of terror*. New York: Pantheon Books (a division of Random House)

After his famous “Orientalism”, Edward Said talked in “Covering Islam” about how images continue to be shaped in post Orientalist era: *Clearly, today’s climate favors – one might even say requires – Islam to be a menace* (Said, 1997: xx). Moreover, Islam became a common subject that doesn’t request apparently a specific knowledge in this field. *Instead of scholars, we often find only journalist making extravagant statements, which are instantly picked up and further dramatized by the media* (Said, 1997: xvi). Also, as Said remarks, *a corps of experts on the Islamic world has grown to prominence, and during a crisis they are brought out to pontificate on formulaic ideas about Islam on news programs or talk shows* (Said, 1997: xi). On the same page with Edward Said, the French writer Pascal Boniface remarks when an intellectual used to speak for the public media few years ago, and his examples are Raymond Aron and Jean-Paul Sartre, they had as support for these interventions with significant scholarship that allowed them to speak with authority about a subject. In contrast, today things are exactly the opposite (Boniface, 2011: 25). Moreover, several French intellectuals suddenly got an expertise in Islamic matters and, by that, they consequently became public authorities in this field in which denouncing Islam or Islamism together and without any distinction represents a substitute for a real academic background (Boniface, 2011: 106). Some of them became the true stars of the media, only after they wrote about Islam. For instance, the French journalist Caroline Fourest<sup>6</sup> who got her celebrity after publishing in 2003 a book denouncing Islamic fundamentalism and another polemic book which condemn Tariq Ramadan and his “double discourse”. The emergence and ascendance of this new generation of experts in Islamic matters is concomitant with a systematic denigration of those who used to have an academic expertise. For instance, Caroline Fourest argues that they are “prisoners of their own field and in the same time fascinated by this, being so in total incapacity to understand the Islamic movement and to explain its evolutions for the public”<sup>7</sup>.

It is important here to quote Mohamed Nimer (Nimer, 2007: 1), who has noted that a an unwarranted critical study of Islam or Muslims in the current climate couldn’t be considered *Islamophobic*, likewise a disapproving analysis of American history and government it is not necessarily anti-American. Moreover,

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<sup>6</sup> Caroline Fourest, well known in France for being the founder of the *ProChoix* (Pro Choice) Journal in 1997 and her activity pro – *laïcité* and human rights. She was working for a while for *Charlie Hebdo* and now she is writing for *Le Monde*. She is an usual presence on French TV channels, France 24, France Culture and France Internationale (cf. Boniface, 2011: 107).

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Pascal Boniface, 2011: 116

stereotypes aren't solely an American or Western invention, statistics show that Muslims hold strong negative stereotypes of Westerners and Americans in particular, subject to which it should be given a special attention. Inside the Islamic world, the process of manipulating images has at least the same intensity, if we take into consideration the ways in which the ideas are spread out. It seems also that the arising stereotypical understanding of each other is inter-connected, so that Muslims and Westerners are shaping parallel paradigms of self and other's perception. In this process intellectuals and the media through which they express themselves and their convictions play a significant role in both Muslim and Western worlds.

## **II. Islamophobia, the raison or the result of stereotyped images**

For becoming a stereotype, an idea has to be repeated<sup>8</sup>. It seems to be the right moment to call down Harold Isaac<sup>9</sup> and his explanation of stereotype's meanings: (...) *The way we see other people depends on the window in which we look at the world (...) each one's outlook is perhaps most heavily influenced by the larger political, economic and cultural facts at the given time.* Combining myth with purposefully misleading information normally leads to inaccuracies which take hold in the people's psyche. Furthermore, as Nancy Nielsen pointed out *stereotyping is dangerous because it can lead the public to create social scapegoats and focus on the wrong issues and wrong priorities (...). Misleading characterizations can be picked up by the global news services and satellite systems, which have the power to perpetuate the distortion*<sup>10</sup>. Michael Pickering makes an interesting connection between stereotype and power, defining the stereotype as an expression of power emanated from established structures of social dominance. Generally, this kind of images are usually held to be simplistic, rigid and erroneous, based on discriminatory values and damaging to people's actual and personal identities (Pickering, 2001:10). Stereotypes are mental structures characterized by "rigidity and resistance to information which contradicts them"<sup>11</sup>. In other words, the lack of information is not representing the basis for stereotype, because the provision of complex information does not

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<sup>8</sup> *Le stéréotype est un image simplifiée que des groupes humains élaborent au sujet d'un individu ou d'un fait et qui joue un rôle déterminant dans leur comportement et leur appréciation* (Slakta, 1994: 37)

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by Shaheen, 1997: 29

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Shaheen, 1997: 33. Nancy Nielsen was at the moment Vice President of Corporate Communications at the New York Times Company.

<sup>11</sup> Taiffel, 1981:133 quoted by Pickering, 2001: 12

necessarily mean that certain stereotypes will be abandoned, argues Pickering (2001: 12). Psychologists define stereotypes as a way of dealing with the instabilities arising from the division between self and non-self by preserving an illusion of control and power<sup>12</sup>.

Islamophobia is the term which became more and more used to define unfounded fear of and hostility towards Islam (Ahmed, 2007: 15). Professor John Voll argues that, at least when it comes to the United States, discrimination against Muslims was at the beginning an anti-*un-Americanism*, therefore the anti-Muslim sentiments of the 1920's through the 1950's were anti-Muslim because Muslims were different, but nobody thought that time that Muslims were going to conquer America or that there was an Islamic threat (Voll, 2007: 32). Islamophobia has already an important number of definitions trying to clarify this type of reaction towards Muslims and Islam in Western countries. Compared to anti-Semitism by some authors, reduced to fear's feelings towards the Other-Muslim by others, Islamophobia represents a preoccupation for the academic environment. Jocelyne Cesari stresses that academics are still debating the legitimacy of the term and questioning how it differs from other terms such as racism, anti-Islamism, anti-Muslimness and anti-Semitism (Cesari, 2006). Regarding the raisons motivating this feeling, Tzvetan Todorov in his book *The fear of the Barbarians* finds several explanations for what is called Islamophobia<sup>13</sup> in Europe:

*(...) There are many reasons, some of them very longstanding, why Europeans reject Islam. Islam long appeared to be a rival to Christianity. Today, it embodies a form of religiosity from which Europeans have taken a long time to free themselves: the secular-minded thus reject it even more violently than do Christians. Muslim countries were colonized by European powers over several centuries; ex-colonists were forced to return home when decolonization occurred, filled with a feeling of both superiority and bitterness. Members of the formerly colonized populations are now coming to settle in the homes of their former colonizers, though not as colonists: how can this not lead to hostility towards them? (Todorov, 2010: 9).*

Putting Islamophobia in the Post Cold War era context and as immediate result of it, Mehdi Semati defines the concept in the following terms: *Islamophobia is an ideological response that conflates histories, politics, societies and cultures of the*

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<sup>12</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen, 1992: 183, quoted by Pickering, 2001: 47

<sup>13</sup> Todorov is using this term for defining anti-Muslims feelings in Europe and West.

*Middle East into a single unified and negative conception of an essentialized Islam* (Semati, 2010: 258).

The evolution of this feeling could be relevant enough for this research. In late nineties, including Arab stereotypes in media products was considered as attractive: “ it is the thing that is going to be most readily accepted by a large number of audience. It is the same thing as throwing in sex and violence when an episode is slow”, underlined James Baerg<sup>14</sup>, Director of Program Practices for CBS-TV at that time. Besides all these, many scholars underlined the very tight relation between Arabs and Muslims image in Western countries and the official political attitude towards Islamic world as a whole or its different parts. Thus, argued Michael Suleiman, “the clash between the two sides (Arabs/Muslims and Americans/Occidentals) has been on the level of national interests as perceived by successive governments in the United States, on one side and advocates of Arab nationalism and radical Muslim fundamentalism on the other” (Suleiman, 1988: 3).

Trying to find an explanation for the tremendous success of stereotypes in shaping the image of Islam, Mohammed Arkoun<sup>15</sup> advances a very consistent formula – “ignorance institutionnalisée”, understood as a large phenomenon which is growing up with the total support of the two sides concerned, both Muslim and Western sides. Even good willing intellectuals make ideological confusions between Europe and West every time it comes to designate a common enemy<sup>16</sup>. After making a deep incursion in how Islam is taught in the American school, Susan Douglas and Ross Dunn (Douglas, Dunn, 2003: 52-53) pointed out that teaching Islam to young Americans is a relatively recent phenomenon. Moreover, the entire school curriculum, remark the two authors, made no more than passing reference to Muslims in history, in connection with the Crusades or the fall of Constantinople to the Turks. Until the 1970, in the American school curriculum the world history was defined largely as synonymous with the history of Greece, Rome, medieval Christendom, and modern Europe. After the 1970, Islam was included in school’s curriculum, but in a way who encouraged

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted by Shaheen, 1997: 2

<sup>15</sup> Mohammed Arkoun, *Confluences*, Hiver 1995-1996: 19

<sup>16</sup> *Je soutiens depuis longtemps que cette opposition désastreuse entre deux cultures, deux civilisations — dont les racines remontent à l'origine au même héritage grec et qui ont les mêmes références suprêmes —, est généré et encouragé des deux côtés par une forme d'ignorance institutionnalisée. Même les universitaires bien intentionnés acceptent l'amalgame idéologique et géostratégique entre l'Europe et l'Occident à chaque fois que l'Islam — ou l'Union soviétique pendant la guerre froide — est désigné comme "vis-à-vis" (Arkoun, 1995-1996 :19)*

*miseducation* about Muslim society and history. Multiculturalists argued that the curriculum should include Islam and other world religions, *not because world history does not make sense without them, but because Muslims and others now form significant groups within the American population* (Douglas, Dunn, 2003: 55). The review of the main school books and the information they contain about Islam leads the two authors to the conclusion that *Islam is generally not interpreted as its adherents understand it but as the editors believe will be acceptable to textbook adoption committees* (Douglas, Dunn, 2003: 59). Also, *none of these books reflects the Muslim's belief that God is the source of revelation or the fact that Muhammad is not considered the first prophet of Islam* (Douglas, Dunn, 2003: 62).

Michael W. Suleiman remarks, after studying stereotypes about Muslims in American society *in the past twenty-five years* (Suleiman, 1988: 145), that to the most Americans the terms “Arabs” and “Muslims” are interchangeable. Thus, negative images about Islam are readily transferable to Arabs. Moreover, whenever there is a confrontation or a major conflict between a Muslim country and the West, particularly the United States, the results drive the Americans to direct their hostility not only to that particular Muslim country, but to Muslims and Arabs in general (Suleiman, 1988: 147). Suleiman denounces media ignorance which influence over the people common perception is indubitable. In CAIR's 2005 Poll on American Attitudes towards Islam and Muslims quoted by Parvez Ahmed (Ahmed, 2007: 18), almost 60% of respondents said “they are not very knowledgeable or “not at all knowledgeable” about Islam, while 10% among them said that Muslims believe in a moon God. Moreover, with 9/11 a radicalization of the American media happened and even a religious regain could be noticed during the years after, including here the Hollywood's productions. In this religious regained context, “American people believed that they have a holy mission to stand by their warrior president” (Liauzu, 2005: 35).

### **III. The need to deconstruct the European intellectual construct of Islam<sup>17</sup>**

During a historical conversation with Mustapha Chérif, the philosopher Jacques Derrida refers to the need to challenge *the so conventionally accepted contrast between Greeks, Jews, and Arabs (...). Furthermore, I wouldn't contrast the East and the West, especially when talking about Algeria. The Arab and Muslim or Arabo-Muslim culture of Algeria and of Maghreb is also a Western culture. There*

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<sup>17</sup> The expression is due to Jacques Derrida; cf. Mustapha Cherif. 2008. *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 38

*are many Islams, there are many Wests.* (Chérif, 2008: 38). Unlike conservative scholars such Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, Derrida and his interlocutor expressed their fully support for another categorization, placing themselves at the side of some progressive European and American scholars like Olivier Roy and Mahmoud Mamdani. They both agree the distinction Northern versus Southern instead of Islam and the West, meaning by that to interpret them as two parts of a geographical, ethnic, religious, and cultural unit (Chérif, 2008: xvi).

In the same spirit, the prominent French scholar Jacques Berque dedicated his academic life to the idea of a necessary synthesis between the two side of the Mediterranean culture, both Northern and Southern (Chérif, 2004: 10-11). For the French scholar, it is not possible to ignore the Arabic Mediterranean dimension of the European Culture, especially for countries like France, Spain, and Italy. Moreover, Maghreb's countries cannot ignore the modern cultural acquisitions of the dramatic colonial period. Jacques Berque died in 1995, before the 9/11 attacks, with the conviction that confusion, mingled ideas and malevolent discourse to the Islam which became a daily basis preoccupation in some environments was going to produce a bigger damage than the violence itself<sup>18</sup>. And more than that we have to stay away from the temptation of an apologetical approach, no matter which side we are, it was Jacques Berque's advice, and in the same time, the way in which he did his scholarly work. He blamed both the Islamophobia in the Northern part and the deformed religion intended such as refuge in the Southern side of the Mediterranean. A current observation I could notice as common idea for European writers whose preoccupations are related to define a new paradigm for Europe's cultural representations and its relations to the Other, it is the reevaluation of its cultural roots the way they were before the modernization's process. The French writer Serge Latouche<sup>19</sup> is firmly convinced that Europe has to step back and reread its cultural paradigm, which in this moment is more American than any time before, and rediscover its Eastern and Southern so particularizing dimensions.

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<sup>18</sup> *Le recul des études orientalistes, islamisantes et arabisantes dans les écoles et universités, l'absence de l'étude pluridisciplinaire du fait religieux, la faiblesse des contacts entre les gens des savoirs et les élites scientifiques du Nord et du Sud sont parmi les signes inquiétants qu'il nous faut corriger, sinon les bouleversements, les changements et les transformations se feront de manière incontrôlée et négative* (Chérif, 2004: 16-17)

<sup>19</sup> In his book *L'Occidentalisation du monde. Essai sur la signification, la portée et les limites de l'uniformisation planétaire*. Paris: Editions La Découverte. 2005: 22

#### IV. Who speaks about Islam after 9/11?

After 9/11, scholars in Islamic field had to face a series of accusations to side with the US and West's enemies. *Visit an American university, however, and you'll often enter a topsy-turvy world in which professors consider the United States (not Iraq) the problem and the oil (nor nukes) the issue*, wrote Daniel Pipes<sup>20</sup> in an article published on November, 12, 2002. Daniel Pipes raises some questions on the academic behavior of some important professors who currently had an anti-Iraqi intervention's position. *Why have university specialists proven so inept at understanding the great contemporary issues of war and peace, starting with Vietnam, then the Cold War, the Kuwait war and now the War on Terror?* So, mainly, Daniel Pipes argues that American scholars are fighting academically against America's interests and the society should be more careful to the "long-term effect of an extremist, intolerant and anti-American environment on university students".

Martin Kramer's attacks are more questioning than that, because he calls in question an entire school, the American and Western Middle East School and its scholars. Published by Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a well known think-tank in Washington DC for its neoconservative Zionist political orientation<sup>21</sup>, in 2001, Martin Kramer's book "Ivory Towers on Sand. The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America" advances serious accusations towards American scholars specialized in Middle East matters. *If one had read only the analyses of academics over the last two decades, one would have concluded that Islamic movements were moderate forces of democratization, and that "civil society" was about to sweep away authoritarian regime*, says Kramer. The author finds MESA, the Middle East Studies Association, the largest and most prominent professional organization of scholars of the Middle East, with its over two thousand members a completely inutile organism spending a lot of money for huge and irrelevant annual meetings and programs (Kramer, 2001: 8-15). Kramer's critique is orientated also to the way in which American scholars invented a new type of specialist in Middle East Studies' field, by living behind the old European tradition in this domain: *American Middle Eastern studies proposed to leave the*

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel Pipes, *Profs who hate America* in New York Post, November 12, 2002, [www.danielpipes.org](http://www.danielpipes.org), 30/11/2011

<sup>21</sup> The French writer Claude Liauzu properly remarks that, comparing with Europe, in the United States the Middle East studies' field is more related to the political environment, thus groups of scholars sustaining Israel or Palestinians are opposing to each other inside the American universities (Liauzu, 2005: 64).

*demanding labor of philology and textual analysis to Europe. American academics would be social scientists; and also MESA's concept was purely American. In Europe, there had been "learned societies" that admitted scholars and antiquarians, and published "proceedings"* (Kramer, 2001: 19).

Following the line of the distinction Martin Kramer makes between Europe and the United States, in his *Covering Islam*, Edward Said remarks the existence of some differences between American and French reporting about Islam. He is referring to a very specific moment in which American and French media and media intellectuals were covering this subject, it was the moment of Iranian crisis, also one of the main stances participating into shaping the image of Islam in Western societies (Said, 1997: 127).

I would go further in this comparative paradigm enounced by Edward Said and I would say that even after 9/11 when stereotypical images about Islam are generalized and universalized, we'll be able to identify two different models and two distinct backgrounds for the two countries, the United States and France, in referring themselves to Islam. Certainly, the two countries have very particularizing historical relations with Muslim world which I consider relevant in shaping the image of Islam among French and American societies. Moreover, the two countries are both democracies, but the emphasized elements inside their systems are different. Thus, Muslims' image in France has been shaped in relation with the principle of *laïcité* which is the basis of French republic, while in America the very same image is shaping by emphasizing the religious side of the subject. In France, Islam is perceived as a danger for the state's *laïcité*, while in America the main problem could be related to religious otherness, or in other words non-Christian and non-Jewish identity. Vincent Geisser<sup>22</sup> considers that several patterns of ancient French politics towards the colonies are still influencing the contemporary approach in the debate about Muslims leaving in France, without being in the same time the only explanation for all the current representations and images on Islam or for the identity's crisis that the French Republic is passing trough right now (Geisser, 2007: 10). Here the comments of French political scientist Dominique Moïsi about these two Western cultural models are important: (...) *if European are asking, "who are we?", Americans are wondering "what have we done to ourselves?". (...) Unlike Europeans, Americans are not preoccupied by the ghost of their past. America has always seen itself as a future, a project more than a history.* (Moïsi, 2009: 109).

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<sup>22</sup> In his book *Marianne et Allah. Les politiques français face à la question musulmane* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007:7-8)

### **The new experts of the fear<sup>23</sup>**

A current school of thought on stereotypes about Islam argues that contemporary security and strategic considerations, nor merely cultural and ideology, have a central place for America's and West's preoccupations towards Islam (Gerges, 2003: 73). Edward Said deplored the disappearance of the humanists in this field such as the great philologist Maxime Rodinson in France or the famous historian Albert Hourani in England. "Such persons are disappearing, however, and in both France and England, American-style social scientist is likely to replace them in the future. Similar scholars in the United States are known only as Middle east or Islamic experts" (Said, 1997: 153). Vincent Geisser suggests the term "islam sécuritaire" in his attempt to identify the subject of the new wave of experts (Geisser, 2007: 24). Nobody is talking anymore about the history of Islam or even more its literature or arts, but exclusively, or all most, about Islam as risk and threat to be taken into consideration for European or Western security. We can easily observe that the research's emphasis moved from the classic analysis' perspective into security studies area. The nature of analysis is also very different comparing with the classical one: is more generalist, and by being so more superficial, and oriented to security and diplomatic implications. Regarding the profile of the expert in Islamic matters, Vincent Geisser provides a comparative picture. Thus, whether the classic scholar was generally a scholar of literature or historian, the new expert in Islam is coming from academic fields as political sciences, sociology, and other domains related to them (Geisser, 2007: 30-34). Moreover, in France the classic institutions traditionally specialized in Arabic and Islamic culture, have to work nowadays in the shadow of some new or reformed academic structures like INHES (National Institute for High Security Studies) which dedicates its research's programs to topics as it follows: Islam of suburbs, youth's Islam in France, and other several research' items as the content of Imams' sermons or Tariq Ramadan's double discourse. It is no doubt that the 9/11 attacks affected in a very profound way the Middle East studies area, in both the United States and Europe. Thus, after 9/11 the Bush administration steered clear of diplomats who were specialists in this area and suspected to have sympathy for the Islamic world (Liauzu, 2005: 70). In France, specialists in geopolitics and demography replaced very quickly in the media preference traditional scholars in Islamic studies.

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<sup>23</sup> Expression due to Vincent Geisser (2003: 54)

Looking at data on French public discourse, which I consider representative for a certain attitude towards Islam and Muslims, very “French”, but also very influential within European discourse about Islam, I easily observed that experts in political sciences, history or demography are passing for the most credible authorities when it comes to Islam in generally, and, Islam in France, in particular. Michele Tribalat is a well known French specialist in demography and a permanent presence in French media shows when it comes to demographic matters. During the last decade, her preoccupations included Islam in French society such and its growing presence inside Western civilization. As a result of similar preoccupations Michele Tribalat published in 2002 *La République et l’Islam. Entre crainte et aveuglement*, a book which benefited from excessive publicity in French mass-media comparing it with other scholarly products in the same field (Geisser, 2003: 49). Michele Tribalat’s book warns against those who allegedly show a friendly and naïve attitude towards Islam especially in France but also in Western countries<sup>24</sup>. The author believes that the French society made a huge concession to Muslims immigrants by renouncing to assimilation’s principle for the much more permissive integration system, for the sake of *le droit à la différence*. (Tribalat, 2002: 26-29). Tribalat deplors the disappearance of the assimilation social model in France that she describes as an utile and efficient concept (Tribalat, 2002: 48).

But, as I noticed regarding French intellectuals I studied for the current research, discussions about Islam are always put in relation with the *laïcité*’s principle and its intangible dimension. Time and again, French elites are accused to not react, to be passive, to abandon the struggle for a laic society for the sake of Muslims rights<sup>25</sup> (Tribalat, 2002: 67-70). Within this discussion about how France is throwing away her most important principle for the sake of Muslim immigrants, the author points out the danger of revisiting the *laïcité* law, adopted by the French parliament in 1905 and considered the basis of the French Republic. The struggle for maintaining the principle of *laïcité* seems to be the biggest provocation that French society has to face. In this occasion, the author thought useful to denounce a series of myths about Islam considered an explanation for its

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<sup>24</sup> *Ce livre n’a d’autre ambition que de nous dégriser d’un engouement exagéré pour l’islam, produit d’une représentation magnifiée de cette religion ...il y a en France un aveuglement enthousiaste à l’égard de l’islam* (Tribalat, 2002: 11-13)

<sup>25</sup> *Par lâcheté ou pour des raisons idéologiques, la France a consenti à divers arrangements conduisant à une laïcité à géométrie variable dont les musulmans intransigeants ont su tirer profit. Une adhésion purement formelle aux valeurs républicaines les autorisent à déclarer désormais l’islam compatible avec un simulacre de laïcité* (Tribalat, 2002 : 107).

incapacity to integrate laic values. The short presentation of some important moments in Islamic history is all most hilarious by the simplistic and non persuasive way in which they are portrayed.

It is not difficult to notice that “media commentators” in both Europe and the United States are related and interconnected to each other within an international media network. Thus, French intellectuals are usually quoted in American media as Wall Street Journal, and are generally a well known public presence, such Bernard-Henri Levy and others. If in the United States, this network has grown up around Wall Street Journal, Fox News, New York Times and some important neoconservative think-tanks such the *Investigative Project on Terrorism* run by Steve Emerson or *Washington Institute for Near East Policy* whose the most vocal member seems to be Martin Kramer or Daniel Pipes’ *Middle East Forum* or Pamela Geller’s *Stop Islamization of America*, in France there is a series of journals and TV channels which are hosting the so-called *anti-Muslim commentators*, beginning with the satiric journal *Charlie Hebdo* and going on with *Le meilleur des mondes*’s Journal and TV station *France Inter* and several top shows in other TV French stations. Moreover, there is a number of publishing houses in both America and France giving preference to anti-Islamic or anti-Muslim publications. Names like Daniel Pipes, Steven Emerson, Martin Kramer, Robert Spencer, Pamela Geller or Bernard-Henri Levi, Oriana Fallaci, Philipp Val, Caroline Fourest and others are related to each other not only by their ideas about Islam and Muslims, but also by a media network within which they express themselves. For instance, Robert Spencer is, among other, associate director of Pamela Geller’s organization “Stop Islamization of America”, and in her public interventions Pamela Geller is frequently quoting Robert Spencer’s books on Islam. In the French side, it is notorious the friendly relation between Bernard-Henri Levy and Philippe Val who is managing France Inter TV station. A closer look to these relations between our media-intellectuals gives us the whole picture about this type of public discourse. Moreover, it couldn’t be just a coincidence that Pamela Geller, for instance, and other American intellectuals whose products I studied for the current research are closely related to the Neoconservative environment.

## V. Patterns in writing and talking about Islam<sup>26</sup>

### Generalization: mixing the things and maintaining confusion.

“Generalities are impossible to verify” said Edward Said denouncing an unacceptable generalization<sup>27</sup> in presenting Islam in Western public debate. Though, Islam is represented as the unique regulator of Islamic societies from top to bottom, furthermore the redundant *dār al-islām* is depicted as a single, coherent entity. Also, a very common assertion on talking about Islam is that in this particular system church and state are really one entity (Said, 1997: xvi).

Jack Shaheen writing about stereotyping in American popular culture ascertains that “despite nearly 40 percent of America’s Muslims are Afro-Americans, though they belong to various persuasions, media systems tend to identify them all with Louis Farrakhan’s radical Nation of Islam and wrongly perceive that they are all his followers (Shaheen, 1997: 7). Mehdi Semati also remarks that the American Muslims are perceived as a unique entity:

*Although the population of Arab Americans is highly diverse in terms of national origins and ancestry, religious background, and phenotypes (even if Hollywood has reinforced the ‘brown’ skin type), a monolithic image of Arab Americans in the popular imagination persists. The diversity is even richer for Muslim Americans: although two-thirds are foreign-born, their national origins represent eighty different countries, from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, with 77 percent of them holding US citizenship. Again, despite such diversity, the monolithic image of Muslim Other persists in the popular and political discourses (Semati, 2010: 264-265).*

John L. Esposito points out that “the US perception of a monolithic Islamic threat often contributes to support of repressive governments in the Muslim world (Esposito, 1999: 208). Interviewed television show “Great decisions”<sup>28</sup> by Peter F. Krogh, Professor John L. Esposito had to face all the stereotypes thrown off by the common sayings about Islam (Islam is a culture of people’s humiliation, authoritarian and non-democratic system). John L. Esposito

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<sup>26</sup> In this study I mapped out only the most repetitive images of a long series of clichés and stereotypes I identified during my research.

<sup>27</sup> *The assumption is that whenever there is an explosion or some horrible act, an Arab or Muslim has something to do with it. I have never seen such mass hysteria and incompetence in my life* Said’s declaration was set down after Oklahoma City explosion, April 19, 1995 (quoted by Shaheen, 1997: 36)

<sup>28</sup> Cf. “Great decisions”, 1994, “Islam and Politics”, MPG4 H.264 in Digital Georgetown, Georgetown University’s Library (accessed in December 2011)

pointed out that when it comes to generalizations about Islam, only bad examples are used so that the Iranian model is extended to the other Islamic countries rather than referring to the Malaysian Islamic model and its democratic quest, argued Professor Esposito.

Usually, Islam is presented as a unique entity, dominated by a unique political and cultural frame. So, no distinction between ayatollah Khomeini and Bin Laden, neither between Yasser Arafat and the 9/11 attacks. Oriana Fallaci wrote immediately after 9/11 in her notorious book *The Pride and the Rage*: “After Khomeini’s death millions of Muslims have chosen Ben Laden as their new leader (Fallaci, 2002: 29). Moreover, the Italian writer is convinced that the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is the main responsible for 9/11 (Fallaci, 2002: 64) Islam also is terrorism, and it seems Fallaci doesn’t any doubt about this: “Behind every Islamic terrorist there is an Imam and Khomeini was an Imam (Fallaci, 2002: 37).

Talking about Nazi roots of the Arab and Muslim extremism, the French philosopher Bernard Levy makes no difference between various Arab movements, mixing Hezbollah’s ideology with Osama bin Laden’s political attempts, the Palestinian and *anti-Semitic* Hamas and finally the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (Levy, 2008: 172). In fact, the whole chapter of his book “Left in dark times” – *Fascislamism* - is meant to spread confusion over the Islamic/Islamist movement. In the same manner, the American blogger Pamela Geller explains during an interview for RT Washington DC station, on August 3, 2010 that jihad is the common motivation for all world’s Muslims, whatsoever it would be their ethnic definition, from Bosnia’s Muslims to China’s Muslims. She ignores national and ethnical motivations for all these conflicts, because they are irrelevant. “You have to read the Koran and the *Hadith* to understand this violence”, said Pamela Geller to her audience.

**Semantic relativity.** *We have to name the enemy properly!* It is the motto, around which David Horowitz Freedom Center has organized “The *Islamofascism* debate” in February, 2008<sup>29</sup>. We are here in the presence of what the specialists in pragmatics are identifying as discursive conflict. The purpose of the discursive conflict is to attain a victory of interpretation and ensure that a particular viewpoint triumphs (Bhatia, 2003: 3), therefore it is of a great importance the way in which we are naming things, realities and images. Linguistics are teaching us

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Jamie Glazov, *The “Islamofascism” Debate*: [www.front.pagemag.com](http://www.front.pagemag.com), posted on February 8, 2008

that naming is to identify an object, remove it from the unknown, and then assign to it a set of characteristics, motives, values and behaviors (Bathia, 2003: 6). Let's have an example: Cordoba House's Project. Probably, just a few people remember what represents Cordoba House's Project, because its name was rapidly changed to Ground Zero's Mosque. Bloggers like Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, founders of the group "Stop islamization of America" were quickly renamed the project by a term with strong impact on the American public – Ground Zero's Mosque. The story attracted national media attention: *the "media circus" started moving along the story of a Mosque right in the heart of Ground Zero a lot more dramatic than the one of a cultural center, only "near to" or "two blocks away" from Ground Zero. Understanding the potential buzz of this "slogan", local and national politicians, started using it as a political campaign issue for the 2010 midterm elections, remarks Laura Cervi*<sup>30</sup>. She is calling Ground Zero Mosque's episode a non-event, a story completely constructed, because media *built* a mosque instead what was meant to be an Islamic cultural center in low Manhattan.

Mohammed Arkoun pointed out that a *dangerous semantic disorder* reigns over the public discourse when it comes to Islam (Arkoun, 2006: 21). Probably the richest public discourse in confusion and semantic relativism was promoted by the former American president George W. Bush. Motivating the famous "war on terror", he was placing both Iraq and al-Qaeda in the very same conceptual category by lexical descriptors associated with the concept of terrorism. Though, the remarkably different aims and aspirations of a national state (Iraq) and a militant terrorist group are erased and both entities are categorized in relation to terror. In his October 2, 2002 discourse president Bush said: "We must confront both terror cells and terror states" (Hodges, 2011: 72), doing by this a very strong campaign for a gradual preparation of the public for a future intervention against Iraq by focusing on the terrorist threat both groups' and states'. Another method intensely used in public discourse is *erasing*: "in general, erasures are forms of forgetting, denying, ignoring, or forcibly eliminating those distinctions or social facts that fail to fit the picture of the world presented by an ideology"<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Laura Cervi & Juan Francisco Martínez Cerdá. 2010. *Islam and Europe: The role of media. The "Ground Zero Mosque" in Italian and Spanish News Outlets.*

[http://www.mediamilion.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/130Com-laura\\_juanfran.pdf](http://www.mediamilion.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/130Com-laura_juanfran.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> Susan Gal. 2005. „Language Ideologies Compared: Metaphors of Public/Private“. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15 (1): 23-37, quoted by Hodges, 2011: 74

**Islam and its incompatibility with democratic values.** Robert Spencer (2003: 22) explains why Islam represents a danger for the Western civilization: “ the dominance of Islam may erode many of the civil and human rights we now take for granted. Remember – Islam is not merely a religion; it is a social and political ideology that makes sharp distinctions between Muslims and non – Muslims, particularly regarding right and status”. Whom those are familiar with Bernard Lewis’s ideas (Lewis, 2002) about how Islam can’t be compatible with democratic values will be able to recognize the same paradigm of understanding and explaining Islam. Nowadays, this stereotype became very popular in social currents. Thus, democracy and Islam are as close to each other as Paradise and Hell, argued Anwar Ibrahim, while democracy is associated with rule of law, Islam is invariably linked to the rule of violence (Ibrahim, 2007: 38). Moreover, the historical partition Islam traditionally has operated between Muslims and non – Muslims (also known as *Kuffār*) is mapped out carefully.

**Perpetuating old medieval clichés about Islam: religion of violence.** Violence is likely the most frequent image about Islam in our times, but also Islam in history. There is a struggle in all the references I searched out for this research for showing the propensity of Islam for violence. Michele Tribalat, for instance, refers in sustaining her theory about Islamic native violence to Edgar Quinet who, she argues, we cannot accuse of Islamophobia<sup>32</sup> (Tribalat, 2002: 78). In his book *Onward Muslim Soldier*, Robert Spencer makes a natural connection between Muhammad’s appetite for fighting in wars and the modern jihad oriented mainly against the West and its democratic values. *Muhammad didn’t just teach about jihad. He led Muslim armies in battle against non-Muslim foes, such that by the end of his life Islam was virtually the sole religion in Arabia and Muslim armies were in a position to threaten the great empires of Byzantium and Persia* (Spencer, 2003: 151). All long the fifth chapter of the book, Spencer makes a really fearful portrait of Muhammad, especially that this portrait stands on Islamic reliable sources such Bukhari’s Hadith collection and *Sahih Muslim*. Thus, the writer finds out that the prophet of Islam himself took part in nineteen battles, or, *according to his biographer Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad participated in twenty-seven raids and battles, ordering and directing all of them and actually fighting in nine* (Spencer, 2003: 151).

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<sup>32</sup> *Sa révélation éclate dans le bruit des batailles, son paradis est à l’ombre des épées, il emprunt ses paraboles au mouvement des combats ; pour sacerdoce il a le cimeterre ; son livre de la loi est la proclamation du Dieu des armes* (Tribalat, 2002 : 78)

A sample of perpetuating the image of innate violence of Islam came out again during the recent events in post revolutionary Egypt (October 2011). In an article published on his blog (called Hoeiboey) and taken into analysis by Arab – West Report<sup>33</sup> (November 5, 2011), Dutch Arabist Hans Jansen states that the Copts who were killed recently in Egypt violated the laws of the Islamic Shari’a. Why should we take into account Professor Jansen’s blog? Because “ the arguments of Jansen are important since he knows Islam and Islamic scriptures well. He translated, for example, the Qur’an in Dutch and wrote numerous scholarly but also populist books on Islam”, explain Arab-West Report readers.

**Two different cultures: our culture and “their presumed culture”...** After 9/11, the culture was said to be the dividing line between those in favor of a peaceful, civic existence and those inclined to terror, remarks Mahmoud Mamdani (Mamdani, 2004: 18). It seems that culture paradigm of understanding the world’s relations divided people in moderns and pre-moderns. Within this kind of discourse, Muslims were generally presented as *they presumably made culture only at the beginning of creation, as some extraordinary, prophetic act. After that it seems Muslims just conformed to culture. According to some, our culture seems to have no history, no politics, and no debates, so that all Muslims are just plain bad* (Mamdani, 2004: 18). The “pre-modern” qualification has two aspects: one explaining pre-modern as “not modern yet” and which encourages relations based on philanthropy, and the other aspect that translates pre-modern by “anti-modern” producing fear, and, consequently, preemptive police and military action, argues Mahmoud Mamdani (2004: 18-19). The second explanation seems to be prevalent over the first one at least for those who believe and sustain the West answers to 9/11 aggression.

An interesting observation I made during reading the literature for the current study, it was to see the still ongoing medieval old paradigm in explaining Islam, at least when it came with Islam as religion or faith. Robert Spencer suggests in the introduction to his book *Inside Islam: A Guide for Catholics* “to provide the reader with an explanation of Catholic teaching on the topic, to illustrate more clearly the deficiencies of many Islamic beliefs” (Spencer, 2003: 17). Although the author is trying to assure the readers from the beginning that the book is written in fully respect of the Islamic faith, numerous attributes portraying Islam show us the opposite: “Islam is the religion of more than billion of people on earth – a far cry from its *humble* and *obscure* beginnings in seventh-century

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.arabwestreport.info/publishers/arab-west-report>, published November 5, 2011

Arabia” (Spencer, 2003: 19). By using a range of adverbs discretely placed beside nouns such Islam, Muhammad et cetera, Spencer throws a shadow of misbelieve over the Islamic faith: “Allah *supposedly* tells Muhammad’s followers that – your companion is not seized with madness” (Spencer, 2003: 49). Moreover, Spencer (2003) is continually underlying the *simplicity of Islam’s teachings*, which induce a inferior looking over it, for instance: “the simplicity of Islam is attractive to people”, or “in an information age such as ours, a religion that confidently teaches simple and clear beliefs is going to have the competitive edge over religions that timidly present vague or relevant assertions (...)” (Spencer, 2003: 21) or “In sharp contrast to the multifaceted complexity of Christian theology, Islam is a religion of simplicity. When trying to win converts among the Christians, Muslims frequently make use of the simplicity as a key selling point” (Spencer, 2003: 27).

**Muslims as demographic threat.** One of the major themes used to identify Islam’s threat to Europe and West generally is its demographic dimension. Very influential news papers in both Europe and the United States are repeatedly take into discussion this subject usually quoting specialized opinions. The information about demographic trends for Muslims living in France is not presented in a neutral way, but always compared with “us”, Catholics and Protestants. Their number is growing, ours don’t, in other words, very soon France will lose her identity and her historical definition. The French political scientist Dominique Moïsi makes a logical liaison between Western fear and others, new-comers’ overwhelming demography:

*the fear of the Other grows out of demography and geography. “They” are too numerous and without hope where they are. “We” are too few and so wealthy where we live. The more we need them for the growth of our economies, the more we reject them emotionally on cultural, religious and racial grounds (...) Fear of the Other expands to include actual conquest by the Islamic world, the possibility that Europe will be demographically and religiously conquered by “them” and transformed into “Eurabia” (Moïsi, 2009: 102-103).*

The necessary opposition “us”/ “them” is accentuated by negative emotion: *they become more and more like a plague which imperils our monuments, our art masterpieces, our history’s treasure, our Western culture (Fallaci, 2002: 38).*

Meanwhile, Muslims are becoming more and more until their number can’t be counted. *In recent years, Islam has grown rapidly in Europe – especially*

*in such historically Christian nations as Germany and France – and in North America as well. The United States now has more Muslims than Presbyterians. Every month, new mosques are being established in all parts of the country, particularly in our major cities* (Spencer, 2003: 16). The author is cleverly creating a really frighten image of Islam who is growing and growing, taking over Christian world. It is also, we have to admit it, another medieval persistent image of Islam.

On the other hand, there is a strategy very well planned by the so-called Moderate Islam, which would be a “disguise for the real and unique form of Islam”, as told us the French journalist René Marchand<sup>34</sup> who strongly believes that Islam’s secret purpose is the conquest of Europe. The secret war against Europe is not anymore a classic fight, but is a subtle demographic strategy trying to bring here as many Muslims as it’ll be possible accordingly to a very efficient plan. Thus, in a few years, Muslim population leaving in Europe will be able, accordingly to the number of this religion’s fellows, to impose the *sharia* low as juridical system which basically means the *dhimmi* status for all Christians and Jews. *If you don’t believe me, just take the metro!*, finally argues Marchand. In his book *La France en danger d’islam. Entre jihād et reconquista* the French author warns his readers over the number of Muslims living in France which exceeds by far the Muslim population in Lebanon, Libya, and Palestine (Marchand, 2002: 9).

Moreover, European architecture is changing its classical landscape under Islamic intrusion into the Western society. Thus, several intellectual talk about transfiguration of Western public space by the Islamic style of the constructions that have built up during last years: “Our civilization dies out and we end up with the minarets”, remarks Oriana Fallaci in *The Pride and the Rage* (Fallaci, 2002: 129). The debate around “Cordoba Center” project and especially the opponents of this construction used time and again a series of stereotypical images about the ‘canker’ of architectural public landscape. During a TV show on Fox New, in May 16, 2010, Pamela Geller explained to the audience the meanings of building a mosque in the Ground Zero area: it is about symbolism of such a contraction, she said. *We know from history that Muslims usually build mosques in territories they conquered, as a sign of their supremacy* added Pamela Geller during one of her interventions on CNN, June 6, 2010. Street prayers in Paris and other cities in France determined similar reactions from Caroline Fourest who interpreted it as the most clear expression of Muslims secret desires: to occupy public space, to

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<sup>34</sup> in his intervention during the *Assises Internationales sur l’islamisation de nos pays*, an European meeting discussing Islam in Europe, that took place in Paris, on December 18, 2010.

bring religion into public secular place specific to France (Boniface, 2011: 105-121).

#### **VI. Some final considerations**

As first remark, I noticed (along with a series of other scholars) a profound change of experts' profile in Islamic field comparing to the classic traditional specialist. Thus, if the classic specialist in Islamic field was generally literate or historian, and an Arabic speaker, after 9/11 the expert in Islam is focusing exclusively on contemporary matters with immediate political consequences, and he is a political scientist, sociologist, demographer or philosopher, without any academic credentials in Islamic field. They occupied the public debate about Islam exploiting the vacuum created immediately after 9/11 while Western media gradually turned its back to professors, academics and other specialists coming from American and European universities, considered as having lost their credibility. Thus, the rise of a new wave of experts led to highlight new fields within Islamic area studies which gave prevalence to the security approach of the subject. As several specialists remarked, security dimension on studying Islam turned to be prevalent in the injury of Islamic literature, history and arts. Moreover, the rising of the new generation of experts seems to be concomitant with a systematic denigration of traditional specialists in Islam who "have proven so inept at understanding the great contemporary issues of war and peace" (Daniel Pipes, 2002).

Secondly, public discourse about Islam after 9/11 has a generally negative approach within a negative discourse frame. Old clichés about specific negative otherness represent *common loci* for discourses I analyzed, concomitant with a new added security dimension. The lack of accuracy and intellectual probity is probably the most frequent remark that could be done regarding the wide majority of public discourse on Islam. Purposely or not, the things are mingled and the confusion maintained: Islam is represented as the unique regulator of Islamic societies, while categories as *dār al-islām* depicted as a coherent, undistinguished entity. From Bosnia to China, Islam should be the only right simplistic, and general explanation for a very large number of conflicts, especially because "generalities are hard to verify", as Edward Said ironically remarked. Generalities, confusions, semantic relativism, *dangerous semantic disorder* in Muhammad Arkoun's terms reign over the public discourse when it comes to Islam. New and confusing concepts are invented; *Eurabia* and *Islamo-fascism* or *Islamo-nazism* are just a few examples, other categories like *crusade*, *infidels*,

*jihād*, *dhimmī* are semantically reactivated. All these characteristics among other make media intellectuals discourse very contestable, despite its large audience.

Associated with pre-modernism and, consequently with violence and obscurantism, Islam is supposed to spread fear within a civilization built on fear, as Tzvetan Todorov characterizes Western civilization. All kinds of fear. Probably the most fearful stance of Islam is its overwhelming demographic tendency in Western countries. Specialists in demography publish tremendous statistics confirming the continuous growth of Muslim population leaving in Western countries. Occupying Western public space represents another concern and constant preoccupation for media intellectuals' discourse. European architecture is changing its classical landscape under Islamic intrusion into the Western society. Mosques built everywhere in the heart of the Christian cities, street's prayers in Paris in the absence of mosques became a symbol of the Islamic aggression towards Western public space (Fallaci, Geller, Fourest, Spencer) and its tendency to occupy it.

Associating Islam and violence is a common idea, activated anytime it is needed for denouncing "the so-called moderate Islam" (René Marchand), concept used as disguise for the real and unique form of Islam-*the extremism*. This image of Islam as religion of violence gets back from the medieval era a cultural schema according to which, as Albert Hourani remarked, Islam is a false and violent religion, Allah is not God, Muhammad was not a prophet, and Islam was invented by men and propagated by the sword. It is really interesting to notice that for both Islamic and Western sides, this kind of cultural discourses use the same series of historic referents by way of Other's exclusion.

The general frame for the growth of such images is drawn by what Muhammad Arkoun called "institutionalized ignorance" of the Western societies or in other words by a generalized *mis-education* of the people. This lack of information or *mis-education* creates a vast place for media manipulation campaigns. Most probably we can use the very same arguments when analyzing Muslim societies and their common perception on Western civilization. I finally believe that Jacques Derrida's sayings are still to be taken into consideration: "we need to deconstruct the European and Western construct of Islam".

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