

Universitatea „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Iași
Facultatea de Filosofie și Științe Social-Politice

CULTURE AS „SOFTWARE OF THE MIND”.

AN APPROACH TO ISLAM

(Summary)

Conducător științific:

Prof. univ. dr. **Nicolae Râmbu**

Doctorand:

Eugenia Laura Popa (El Bokiadi)

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OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

Talking about religion in the era of modernism, post-modernism and globalization, means above all to seek an answer to the question of modern man's relation with religion, the place of religion in the context of modernity on the one hand, and, on the other hand, about "modernization" and "globalization" of religious belief whose essence doesn't consists of passing concepts, but transcendence above the place and time.

This applies to all three monotheistic religions, but the fact that we chose to talk only about one of them - Islam – is not due to the assumption that it would be a particular "event" in the current context, but because, more than Judaism and Christianity, he continues to be as little known and properly understood, both controversial and accused to be the driving element of Huntington's preached clash of civilizations.

Our research will try to demonstrate that monolithic representations of Islam created and supported by a highly complex system of image producers, experts, academics, lobbyists, policy makers and media that currently dominates Western consciousness, are deeply rooted in the long relationship between the West and the Islamic world.

This work will also support that the deep-rooted fears about Islam and Muslims have led and continue to lead to wrong policy decisions that have a direct impact on current relations between Islam and the West.

Unequivocal identification of Islam with terrorism and extremism in the minds of many Westerners, derived both from historical prejudices that will be analyzed in detail in the content of this paper and the political agenda of certain interest groups who see confrontation as the only way to relate with the Islamic world.

The subject of this paper is to analyze and identify the values of Islamic culture, with emphasis on the need of understanding Islam as a whole, because otherwise we might not understand how an entire social system functions, a political decision-making, we may be faced with interreligious conflicts and frustrations that can take the form of social discontent and terrorist reactions.

A novelty of our research is the similarity of culture with a kind of ‘software of the mind’, used as a metaphor to describe, in this case, Islamic culture. It is a social program that leads our thinking, action, perception of good and evil, formatting each image of himself in relation to others. Culture is considered a form of "mental programming" collectively shared and supported by individuals in an organization or ethnic group.

Another novelty of our thesis is an approach to the idea of "culture shock", the shock of European colonization felt by Arab-Islamic peoples in contact with the European civilization. Before criticizing how Muslims relate to us, we must first understand how our gaze, dominant large-scale, could be long term perceived as an aggression and maintain today’s hostility.

Learning to live together and to build bridges instead of walls, is not a fatality, nor a predestination, but a necessity imposed by our human condition itself, and this truth is the “thread” that guided us in developing this work on Islamic culture and dialogue between religions.

Chapter I

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Culture as Collective Programming of Thought

Culture is seen today as a propelling force of development. Human behavior is increasingly explained by recourse to cultural data, values, attitudes and behaviors.

Economic behavior of individuals and social groups is guided by values, attitudes and motivations that have their source in the culture. American political scientist Samuel Huntington, author of the famous thesis of "clash of civilizations", considers that in today’s conditions, "culture counts" and the cultural factors are particularly relevant for social change and shaping geopolitical relations.

Defining man by culture, modern philosophical thinking imposed the idea that man produces different "cultural worlds". Today it is widely accepted that a human community can not exist in any historical phase of its evolution without minimum "cultural equipment". Culture mediates society’s relations with the surrounding world and with itself, provides

human needs and aspirations, regulating internal correlations of the social system and gives progressive direction towards its historical evolution.

1.1. Meanings of 'Culture' from European and Islamic Perspective

The concept of "culture" is widely debated in many fields (anthropology, sociology, philosophy, politics, art, etc..), giving rise to hybrid semantic construction (digital culture, culture opposition, mass culture, elite culture, artistic culture, popular culture, national culture, organizational culture, etc..) which has often been used beyond fair appearance of a coherent epistemic reasoning, making the term "culture" almost ubiquitous term.

On the other hand, the term "culture" has a sensitive interaction with terms as: civilization, mentality, race, acculturation, identity etc. A clear definition of the concept of culture now faces numerous difficulties. Therefore it is necessary to correctly understand the meaning of the term "culture" and the meaning given to it in socio-human sciences, if we want to substantiate our epistemic approach.

1. 2. Global Culture between Spiritual Foundation and Utility

Each country or region of a country has a system of shared values, shared similar experiences or perceptions about the world that supports them. These commonalities form the culture of a region, country or company. So you might say that there is a regional culture, and national culture. In the literature there are different views on the concept of "national culture".

2. Identity, Acculturation and Globalization

It should be emphasized the undisputed truth about biunique relationship that exists between the concept of national identity and national culture in the sense that, on the one hand, culture bears the deep imprint of the elements that make up identity, being, on the other hand, the element composition and its continuous enhancement. Cultural identity is, in the final analysis, the most consistent and impressive heritage that participation in organizing the world as "global village" can bring.

3. Globalization of Culture - between Spiritual and Material

Discussion about these two poles of globalization requires a return to the more general question whether globalization is merely an economic process, material, social and political, or equally, a cultural process? Opinions differ or are refined according to the definitions of culture itself. If, for some researchers, we can not speak of a universal culture, but about the particular cultures that "works" without altering its unity and coherence, for others, globalization of culture is possible, and for this it is sufficient to globalize elements and technical and technological factors.

3.1. Globalization and the New "Cultural Imperialism"

An important issue that interested in culture-globalization discourse and frequently stirs unrest and controversy relates to the manner in which globalization will address the relationships between member states involved in this process. They will be coordination or subordination relationships?

3.2. Globalization and Acculturation

Since 1936, "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation", published in the "American Anthropologist", its authors, Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton and Melville Herskovitz define the concept of globalization as "all those phenomena which result from the fact that groups of individuals of different cultures come into continuous contact directly, resulting changes in the original cultural pattern of one or both groups." Of course, speaking of contact between cultures requires to distinguish types of feedback from receiving culture faced with cultural model it comes into contact and, from this point of view, there are three possible attitudes.

4. Conflicting Civilizations

In light of inter-civilizations conflict' thesis that develops, Samuel Huntington distinguished not less than seven types of civilizations in terms of who is considered the evolution of the world, whose history is the history itself of these civilizations: Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, Orthodox, Western, Islamic, Latin American.

Cultural Change: When "ME" becomes the "Other"

Since Antiquity, the East has always been seen and perceived, by Europeans (and by all European cultures assimilated) in terms of comparison, if not of confrontation becoming a universal representation of "the Other", easily identifiable in the very initial dichotomy which places Europeans in one side and Orientals in the other side, that means the rest of four-fifths of the world. The studies about representations of the "Otherness" have increased in the context of global postmodernism who value difference, multiplicity, and a new eclecticism in the information and communication society.

Chapter II

ISLAMIC VALUES AND BELIEFS

1. Cultural Patterns

Islam bases its tenets on the absolute oneness of God. Above all, the Muslim is subject of God, following the example of Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Jesus and his disciples: "Religion, in God's eyes, means submission." (Qur'an, 3, 19). The religiosity of Muslim society and its members is a massive phenomenon, often exciting, which permeates all aspects of political, economic, social life up to the smallest attitudes. It is, rather, a normative model for the individual and for society, than a religion concerned with individual salvation.

2. Cultural Context of the Emergence and Evolution of Islam

Genesis and Evolution of Islam

Islam was born in the Arabian Peninsula-seventh century AD, on a pre-existing historical background, enjoying a special geo-strategic position, if we consider the linkages between East and West existing at that time, and having all the advantages of a new and original civilization. The term Islam means the monotheistic religion that is based on the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad is its Messenger.

2.2. The Holy Qur'an - as Source of Values in Islamic Cultural Space

Qur'an (Kur'an) is the holy book of Muslims, representing "Divine Word", which brings together revelations (Vahiy) sent to Prophet Muhammad and translated into Arabic language. The purpose of the Qur'an is to give axiological landmarks both to individuals and to muslim society. He urges the man to regulate its relations with the Divine, and with the outside world, to discover his own identity, the "inner self" of his existence as a superior being.

2.3. The Five Pillars of Islam (Arkan)

There are five basic rituals, each reflecting the beliefs of Islam, which Muslims practice every day. They are called "five pillars" or "pillars" of Islam. The analyst Maurice Gaudefroy Demombynes considers that "Islam is a syncretism." Indeed, Islamic doctrine is a mixture of religious elements, of different origin, most of them borrowed from Judaism, Bible and Talmud, others from Christianity and the old traditions of Persians and Arabs.

2.4. Jihad (Holy War) as the struggle for spiritual values

Jihad (d jihad) is a part of the concept of "defense" of Islam. Primary meaning, of the word *jihad* is to strive with all our strength, to fight. Derived from the root j-h-d, *jihad* means using absolute power of one person, and move towards a target with full force, enduring all difficulties.

2.5. Branches of Islam

As Nadia Anghelescu says in her *Introduction to Islam*: "belonging to a unique religion does not exclude diversity born of political, social, historical, geographical circumstances". In this sense, Islam like other religions is divided into many branches including: Sunni, Shia, khariji etc.

2.6. Modern Islam

In this historical stage between the years 1950-1960 Arab-Muslim world record certain events intended to define its contemporary or postmodern era; particularly the strong "comeback" of religious and ethnic identity is related with the awareness of their cultural identity.

3. Cultural and religious identity

By its nature, cultural identity is evolving feature of current global conditions, namely globalization. If culture is fluid, expression of human nature is being renewed, is refined, enriched, but always kept and handed down from generation to generation, cultural identity is often requested and used in the national interest.

4. Religious Values in Islam

Islamic morality is based on the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet. In the Quran, the Islamic community is the one who advocates good and forbids evil. "Good" means primarily ritual obligations and then a series of virtues among the social ranks high: hospitality, protecting the orphans and the weak, respect for the people and for its assets, respect for parents, good relationships with family, neighbors, etc., respecting given word.

5. Fundamentalism as a major disturbance of axiological consciousness

Western media often creates the impression that combative and occasionally violent form of religion known as "fundamentalism" is a purely Islamic phenomenon. Their assumption is false. Fundamentalism is a global phenomenon that has appeared in every major religion in response to the problems of our modernity. There is Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and Confucian fundamentalism.

5.1. Islamic Radicalism in the Digital Age

Assertion that terrorist organizations are increasingly using current technological facilities has become practically a commonplace. The extension of this phenomenon is insufficiently studied. Also, using modern technology to transmit to large groups of people posts related to liberal Islam is an extensive practice in the past years, with effects hard to predict.

6. The impact of modernity on Islamic awareness

They talk a lot today in the Western world, rather than in the Arab-Islamic world, about a crisis of modernity, which crosses from one end to the other territories under Islamic

scepter. Modernity, in its common meaning, western, is a concept associated most often in Islamic environments with Western lifestyle, with secular Western social structures.

7. Islam versus democracy: conflict or compatibility?

"Neither Islam nor his culture is a major obstacle to political modernity, even if, sometimes, undemocratic leaders use Islam to justify their decisions." Democracy is underpinned by the concept of *Ijma* in Islam (Arabic equivalent for "consensus"). The Prophet knew that *Ijma* was superior to any leadership of one person. Prophet even emphasizes this, according to the *hadith*: "My community will not agree to any mistake." This shows God's preference for the many.

Chapter III

Intercultural Encounters

1. "Shock of the West"

Started in its mercantilist phase, in the time of foreign trade companies and agencies (India and Senegal) for the most distant lands, colonization of the largest Muslim countries was made in the imperial period. In those times the European nations started the race for power. Since the thirteenth century, the agony of Islam and the progress of Christianity became evident.

2. "World War" of Values

In the globalization era, the power of states is based not only on defense. In peacetime, it becomes imperative completing military power with a civilian force, which is essentially economic. In this confrontation of forces on economic realm, each is fighting to keep a semblance of national independence. Treasure to be protected is not just territory, but the pattern of society.

3. Symbiosis and Conflict

When talking about "upgrading impact" we mean implicit relationship between Arabs and West, the way it is viewed. This attitude has changed over time, because circumstances have changed.

4. Islamic Revival and the Problem of Tradition in the Modern Arab World

Leading feature of the recent history of Islam is a revival that swept the Muslim world. This revival has been fueled by the memory of outstanding achievements obtained in the first six centuries (VII-XIII) of existence of Islam.

4.1. Problem of Tradition in the Modern Arab World

In general, one can distinguish three point of views on Islamic tradition in the modern Arab world: first, orientalist thinking together with secular Arab thinking, especially Arab-Marxist tradition in the context of challenging the effectiveness of the westernization of intellectual and industrial progress. Second, Muslim thinking, especially the conservative, traditionalist one which claims the revival of the past in a modern landscape. Third, a middle view, which claims a reconciliation between Islamic tradition and Westernization, this is best represented by the works of Hichem Djait and Muhammad A. Lahbabi.

4. 2. The Main Features of Islamic Revival in the Arab World: a Multidimensional Approach

For Hisham Sharabi and the "radical school of critics" of Arab society, Islamic revival is one of the fundamental manifestations of neopatriarhal structure and discourse in modern Arab society.

Islamic radicalization movement accompanied the "modernization" and was inextricably linked to it. Islamic fundamentalism, as well as westernization and "modernization", was a psychosocial phenomenon that emerged under European domination and as direct response to it.

Chapter IV

East as "Invention" of Europe

Following the events of 11 September, the long relationship characterized by ups and downs between Islam and the West took another step. Attacks were interpreted as the fulfillment of a prophecy that existed in Western consciousness for some time, namely, the coming of Islam as a threatening power whose manifest intent was to destroy Western civilization.

The long history of Islam and the West, from theological debates in Baghdad in the eighth century and the ninth century, the experience of "living together" (*Convivencia*) in Andalusia, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, explain current perceptions and fears to each other civilizations.

1. Perception of Islam During the Middle Ages

As a new religious system which claimed to have completed the cycle of Abrahamic revelation, Islam was seen from the outset as a major challenge to Christianity. References to the Hebrew or Christian prophets, other stories and themes of the Qur'an and prophetic traditions (*hadith*), sometimes in harmony and sometimes in disagreement with biblical stories, both contributed to a sense of dismay and uncertainty as well as providing a reply to the Islamic claims of authenticity.

2. Europe Discovers Islam as an Universal Culture

Christian perception of Islam as a pagan religion was offset by the admiration of Islamic civilization in the works of thinkers of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Islamic scientific and philosophical culture has played, among others, an important role in this process. Here we mention only two examples that show the proportions of enthusiasm that Muslim philosophers were received.

3. Nineteenth-Century Perceptions on Islam

Outside theological, philosophical and literary environments were many Europeans whose thirst and curiosity for the Orient could not be extinguished by reading. So they traveled in the Islamic world and produced a considerable literature consisting in travel stories about Muslim countries, their customs, cities, etc.. The wealth of information they brought back to Europe contributed to popular perceptions, if not academic, about Islam and Muslims that the murky world of Saracens and Orientals has now been revealed for many Europeans through imaginative discourse of travelers.

4. Islam as “The Other”

In modern times, and here we refer to the twentieth century and the present century, the relationship between the Islamic world and the West continues to be analyzed by inherited

images and stereotypes. Islamic societies representing communities like sensual, despotic, backward, underdeveloped, tribal, promiscuous, aberrant, irrational and mysterious penetrated into American popular culture.

Chapter V

Bridges between Islam and the West, or the Need for Mutual Understanding

1. For Dialogue

Speaking of modernity and especially about its globalization, we must acknowledge the reality that religion was the first manifestation of human identity and consciousness that experienced globalization, polarizing expectations and confidence of majority of human communities from ancient times and especially in times of profound change in the spiritual life and social condition of the people.

Leaving aside the academic clichés of debates about religion, we believe that the starting point in the construction of a global humanity must be that of a profound ethics that today may come only from religion.

2. Islam between Collective Identity and Individualism

In the last twenty years we have witnessed a crescendo of Islamic issues in many aspects. Be it public opinion or the vast field of social sciences, Islam is carefully studied, analyzed and classified. Muslim societies are an interesting overall observation of this so-called "return of the religious". In the dynamics of today, the religious language is not so much trying to obtain a return to traditional society, besides extinct due to modernity, but building a new kind of individuality, whose expression, in line with a myth tradition, expresses the interaction between devastating modernity in many ways and the new subjectivity of the individual.

5. Western Islam

It might sound strange, but in the diversity in Islam, appeared a special type of Islam that could be called rightly "Western Islam" or "European". In fact, it is often known as

the "transplanted Islam", a term designating today, legal immigrants of Muslim origin population in the industrialized countries of Western Europe, this adding to the hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants present especially in Spain and Italy.

6. Postmodern Islam

Most political regimes in the Arab world are facing rapid demographic change societies and govern over population increasingly "post-historical" in terms of Judith S. Yaphe. But these populations are already in different forms and with different levels of commitment to the three global *ummah* that forge the identity of postmodern Islam - between liberal reformism and fundamentalist extremism.

7. Cultural Crisis of the Islamic world - a Critical View

There is a remarkable diversity of approaches and views of both the intellectual elites in Islamic spaces and of the extra-Arab and non-Islamic, about the general condition that the Arab and Islamic world faces this moment.

8. Islam and Secularism: Conciliation or Confrontation?

Here's a question that sociologists do not stop to ask when addressing a variety of ethnic and religious elements and the relations between them. Underlining the fact that the religious factor is a principal component of the today's world, scientists believe the phenomenon of religion should be addressed not only generating conflicting relations, but also a vector of understanding and conciliation. It should be seen as a solution, not just as a problem.

Conclusions and perspectives

The rise of Islam on the international stage is one of the major characteristics of the contemporary history. Object of continual debates, most of them in the two past decades, Islam is now part of daily reality.

Object of endless debates, especially in the last two decades, Islam is part of the current reality. Source of concern for some, formidable enigma for others, it represents a kind

of challenge to Western thought, based on the orientalist scholarship, believed for over a century that Islamic phenomenon was decoded in all its dimensions.

Ever since the Crusades, Christian Western nations have created a stereotypical and distorted image of Islam, considering it the enemy of civilization. Prejudice blended with perceptions of Europeans about Hebrew, the other victims of the Crusaders and often mirrored repressed fears about the behavior of Christians. For example, during the Crusades, when Christians were the ones who sparked a wild series of holy wars against the Muslim world, Islam was portrayed by erudite monks of Europe as a violent and intolerant faith by definition that only managed to spread by sword. The myth of the so-called fanatical intolerance of Islam has become one of innate ideas of the West.

The shock of Western modernism in the Islamic world, accompanied by military offensives and political, diplomatic and cultural interference produced, no doubt a number of 'earthquakes', - both cultural and ideological - in the social and political edifice of Islamic community. These earthquake aftershocks continue to be felt today.

The "Conflict" between Islam and the West results especially from cultural and religious differences, plus the rooted traditions of Muslim societies. Islam, complexes of Western superiority has a defensive attitude manifested by extremist movements, terrorism, rejecting the values that come from it. The territories of Islam, "Dar al-Islam" are designed as a "house of peace", which opposes the rest of the world, "house of war" or "Dar al-Harb".

Fundamentalist's reaction must be understood in relation to coercive secularization. Moreover, Islamic fundamentalism is not unique; this form of protest is present even within democratic societies. Muslims consider that they fight for survival, and therefore, must fight back, opposing secular divinity's exclusion from the public sphere and desperately trying to make so that spiritual values prevail in the modern world.

This is the today's relationship between the Western world and the Islamic world. Hard logic of national interests, a profound cultural disparity, and a deeply rooted irrational mistrust on both sides, leaves only a narrow margin for real communication between these two major areas of civilization. Added to these historical realities, imperatives inherent in the new

economic order: these are just some reasons to encourage both the West and the Muslim world together to forge a common understanding and cooperation in all fields.

All these considerations call the need to glance inside Islam and its current realities. We can not say that nothing has been done in this regard. In Europe as in America, more and more voice calls Western world to know Islam in its true light, to appreciate its manifestations depending on the actual and not the substituted images of often distorted and derogatory. Implying an objective and honest observation to mobilize the resources of intelligence and heart to overcome prejudices cultivated by a long European cultural tradition.