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**FINAL PAPER**

“East-West Redemption is Not Beyond Us:  
The Rise of Islam in Wounded French Communities”

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This paper has several main points in view of the themes suggested:

The myths of the traditional strength of the close affinity enjoyed and shared by Moslems thanks to them belonging to the omni-encompassing, ever embracing “Umah” serve as justifications to the sense of defeat in a particular group: young Moslems of North African descent living in the shabby, poor, hopeless suburban neighborhoods known in France as *Banlieux*. The sharp contrast between the fast-moving, impersonal, competitive, and despairing harsh socio-economic conditions endured by many French Moslems, and the promise of universal inclusion in exchange in the French national state for piety is further heightened by internet connection and travel to their family’s ancestral lands.

Thus, groups of disaffected young Moslems are in France, but not OF France. Many young Moslems feel torn apart between loyalty to fellow believers living afar -but within actual travel or virtual reach - and the national/cultural pressure in France to integrate into the largely-Catholic society. As the latter goal becomes increasingly elusive in fragmented cities, and forlorn neighborhoods, the imagined global community of Moslems proves more attractive. This local sense of rejection can turn into personal rage, collective religious anger that blends petty crimes with ideological radicalization, culminating in violence against the domineering, seemingly unhelpful secular, nationalistic state.

It is crucial in this context of “othering” to note that *Banlieux* are frequently self-contained. Many individuals actually exist and function *collectively* in a very small perimeter among relatively few known people. This milieu is self-sustaining, affirming identity and kinship, but also radicalizes disenfranchised people who vent their anger at a system seemingly and often tangibly stacked against them, and gradually move from idle talk into random violence, or even begin planning and executing attacks, against police or other symbols and institutions of what seems to be a racist, hegemonic

state, and even civilian bystanders. As opportunities for permanent, professional jobs in the metropolitan area, especially for young Moslems, become more and more scarce, a critical mass of despondent people who only know their own fellow Moslem North Africans while eking an unsteady, meager living as day laborers emerges as a *bitter* Uman immune to outside influence.

Barely knowing white/Catholic/Jewish neighbors, much less their social and cultural customs, even as co-workers, rarely as friends, leads to further alienation, ruining any nascent integration into the larger society in an internal neo-Imperialism. There is little or no *commensurability*—respectful interface and mutual adaptation based on recognition of legitimacy and aptitude—a fruitful dialogue - between cultures fostering a sense of community.

This problem is exacerbated by the memory of humiliation in the medieval Crusades, the subjugation of modern Colonialism, and the contemporary failure of many Moslem states in the Middle East, North Africa, and southern Asia. Salaheddin's 1187 victory over Christians in the Middle East, however, serves as a role model from centuries ago that an ultimate triumph of this generation in Europe is possible, perhaps likely, if faith, commitment, and organization will run their blessed course to secure long-term Moslem durability and potential superiority.

Finally, the rampant individualism and permissive mores of the West causes emotional reaction in the collective-minded Moslem communities.

There is no need for the French state to abandon or renounce its core democratic and social justice values of liberty, equality, and solidarity. On the contrary: INCLUSION of others, especially of Moslems, Arabs, blacks, and additional ethnic/religious/racial minorities, will enhance these progressive, humanitarian norms.

A typical answer to subjective senses of betrayal by the larger society and abhorrence of its seemingly immoral or amoral norms practically compels disaffected youth to join fundamental movements. Membership in such tight networks substitutes for dysfunctional families whose customary patriarchic structure was destroyed by poverty, parents forced to work long hours to eke a meager living, and confront discrimination due to ethnic particularities, racial stereotypes, and religious superstition, accompanied by social marginalization. This psychological support system is buttressed by ideology, values, and cultural discourse that empower such Moslem teenagers to feel righteous and heroic by highlighting religious rites and ties of kinship. They reject any criticism of the tents of Islam, especially of the presumably perfect life and practices of Muhammad.

The self-perceived redemption of this crisis of identity suffered by a non-Christian minority feeling threatened by modernity in the West, thus, is secured through an aggressive policy of challenging the very civic legitimacy and foundational character (*raison d'être*) of the French state. French leaders toiled incessantly to form a secular-national character, prohibited religious symbols while endorsing tolerance and pluralism for non-Catholics, expressed concerns for individual rights, and highlighted the collective ideals of liberty, equality, and solidarity. The resistance to the very foundations of France by an increasingly assertive minority is a toxic combination that includes self-segregation which compounds existing socio-economic obstacles, and incitement to violence. What is to be done to best integrate Moslems into existing French culture while simultaneously adapt French culture to Moslem contentions?

The delivered paper will offer several insights on this seemingly unsolvable conundrum of avoiding victimhood or “martyrdom.”

1. **Education** is crucial in several dimensions: Informing individuals and groups about each other’s languages, beliefs, values, customs, and practices as ignorance and lack of communication leads to stereotypes, hatred, and acts of violence; knowledge is a positive power through professional training, elementary, secondary, academic, and vocational alike; workshop for cross-cultural enrichment for teachers, social workers, counselors, and civil servants who are mostly non-Moslem in general, but also to disaffected Moslems about useful dimensions of Christianity and Judaism that they might not be aware of in their regular lives; and, perhaps most importantly, wide scale and comprehensive media (print, broadcast, bulletin boards, and virtual) campaigns for information/public diplomacy about what is Islam, what is pluralism, what does citizenship mean, what does democracy provide, addressing women’s rights and other controversial or painful issues.
2. **Better governance, funding, organized activities**, self-support groups, and alike led by professionals such as social workers, educators, and clergy, hopefully Moslem, are a necessity. Public housing projects in many of the communities in which Moslems live should come under a closer scrutiny. Hope, maintenance, and dignity are lacking, police actions are controversial, while crimes, blight, and addictions are prevalent.
3. **Inclusion** of community activists and social advocates in multicultural, poly-ethnic, pluralistic, and tolerant manners in the political process is paramount. Legitimacy to socio-economic grievances is as important as redress of religious and racial concerns. Joining existing political parties through lobbying and membership, or (sometimes less productively) forming unique factions based on identity and parochial agenda.
4. **Job placement** services to empower people personally with hope AND financially to enhance self-esteem and a sense of belonging, while avoiding idleness and unemployment that often doom the prospects of young people, then radicalizing them, making them easy prey for gangs and terrorists.