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## Dialogue among Civilizations Between Hope and Fact

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This article intends to demystify dialogue among civilizations at the dawn of this new millennium, which is a subject-matter of profound discussions.

### Importance of International Dialogues

Dialogue is an important aspect of human life and a significant category of social activities. Abstractly speaking, it is a form of interaction among social forces; a means either for communication or avoiding conflicts and moderating confrontations. Sometimes, it appears as an objective set for ascertain stage and can only be realized before certain conditions are met. According to some politicians, it should be interpreted as a process of “*speaking and listening among civilizations and cultures*”.<sup>(1)</sup> Furthermore, from the perspective of practice, international dialogues could be conducted through various diplomatic contacts, meetings, exchanges, consultations and so on.<sup>(2)</sup>

Promoting dialogues either among civilizations, cultures or states to gain pacific co-existence is, even humanity development which we are looking nowadays in various fields, still difficult but not impossible. As dialogue conditions nowadays is easier than any time ago. For instance, huge development of broadcasting and telecommunication's means makes the world too closer and enable men to understand and considerate each other. So, technical development helps humanity to reach civilized maturity. That maturity which imposes to civilizations, cultures or states to deal each other in pacific and over selfish way.

### Civilization Meaning

It is too difficult to find a common technical definition of the word “Civilization” agreed upon it. Many a western thinker look at civilization as a synonym of “urbanization”: as Will Duirant did in his well known book “Civilization History”<sup>(3)</sup>, While orientalist and

some western thinkers look at it, as a combination of material components and moral essentials, which are necessary for human life' (4)

Therefore, French philosopher, René Guénon (1946) said : *“Orientalists are right where they describe western civilization as a material civilization”*. (5)

Algerian philosopher Malik Binnabi sees that civilization, in brief, has to settle three issues as follows :

1. To solve mankind problems, which requires harmony conditions with history process.
2. To exploit the soil, within a social operation.
3. To give importance to time, in the sense of every body, within the community.

So, briefly, civilization, in his view, equals to = man + soil + time.

In this regard, Malik Binnabi adds to this formula the necessity of combination for all civilization components, which have to guide moral values as well as beauty taste.

The role of civilization, in his view, is to strengthen society members relationship. Thus, religion in different languages means to make a link among people.

On this basis, moral values is a common field between religion and philosophy. So, tolerance, peace and mutual respect are compulsory values for the survival, evolution and continuance of human civilization.

Moreover , he emphasized on taking into consideration beauty taste in ourselves, houses, streets and concepts because beauty is the country face in the world; which must not disfigure it. However, beauty taste should not prevail moral values. for this reason, a balance between these two ingredients must be done. (6)

### **Modern crisis : Dialogue or Clash ?**

If we make a show to civilization process and to conflicts and wars which were spread and dominant every where on this globe, during centuries ago and especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century till the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can achieve a result that there is no domestical or regional peace without international peace. This result appeared especially after high technical development which is going

on today, so that the world becomes a small village, if some body touches any coin of it, it may affects the other, irrespective how far it is.

This issue, made many western thinkers as Francois Burgat, John Esposito, and Gilles Keppel to have an objective and constructive stand, and do a hard working task towards convincing humanity about peaceful coexistence and cooperation necessity.

However, unfortunately, till now we find some western thinkers who see the opposite approach as; Samuel P. Huntington the author of "*clash of civilizations*", and Francois Fukoyama the author of "*the end of History and last man*" who raise a warning to the west that clash of civilization is a natural norm for survival. So, after defeating the traditional enemy embodied in communism by liberalism, under the leadership of USA, it would be a big mistake for USA and its allies to live without enemy in order to be active and dynamic. So, history, in their views, is like nature, it dies with emptiness.

A natural Question arises then : who is the alternative candidate who will replace the defeated communism? It is easy for them, to say at first that the hypothesized enemy for West is Arabo-Islamic Civilization, which is trying to affirm its existence on the world scene as a cultural and civilizational power for future, then, Chinese Civilization is considered as a economical power which put a major threat to the west who decides to keep world leadership. <sup>(7)</sup>

It is important to notify that holders of dialogue and coexistence theory did not find any effective official support, especially within G.W. Bush US radical administration(2000-2008) . Therefore, their studies were bound to be confined within the academic sphere.

As a contrary, clash theory's studies were taken into consideration and appreciated as a ground or justification to implement imperial Plans against so called "3<sup>rd</sup> world" people or "underdeveloped" countries, especially, Islamic states.

In this regard, West modified its imperial plan, and made a new comprehensive one, which enables him to motivate the others, through a remote control mechanism.

Creation of a new enemy to the west, was a reason to proceed further to develop its armament arsenal, investigation agencies, and to cooperate together to control universal economics and politics.

At the political level, it did a hard working to mobilize many countries and interfere into its national affairs, through different claims; as human right preservation, or democracy protection, or peace keeping and so forth.

Nowadays, we use to hear that some countries are not allowed to obtain a nuclear or offensive weapons and are bound to sign treaties for that. We use to hear that underdeveloped countries are bound to obey western will, each time they want to form a regime, or modify economics, frame statutes, or even to find out their ideologies or predict their futures.

It is not strange at all, that such an individual, organization, or even a country is threatened to be described as a terrorist because he could not get a good conduct certificate from USA and its allies.

After communist empire's collapse at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, West, under the leadership of USA, emerged as the sole super power in the world. This situation, encouraged it to create a "*new world order*", which means that all must motivate in different fields according to western will. While it is, according to many, "*a new world disorder*", which gives *De facto* jurisdiction to USA and its allies to practice the upper hand and partial policy, which was seen clearly in many regions in the world.

In spite of technical development in different fields, humanity is coming back to anti-civilized means, as it is happened by American military interference in Vietnam, Iraq, and it still happening right now for instance in Afghanistan away of *De jure* supervision of United Nation Organization.

To illustrate to this point, no one denies that Israel government was put and still get support for only one goal is to destabilize and threaten ; not merely the middle east region but all the humanity, whenever it is desired by the super powers.

These issues and others, was a topic of large discussions by jurists, politicians and thinkers, that : is there, in fact, an international law, while there is no means to implement sanctions upon some who violates it?

## Unity in diversity

It is material to mention that individuals, groups and nations differ in respect of cultures and ideologies. So, to claim that it is possible to unify humanity in these sphere is a sort of imagination as Hollywood fiction's movies.

Let's show a pattern of uniformity sought by West. Ben Gamin Constant (1813) said : *"Hot issue nowadays is to speak about uniformity of symbols, criteria, codifications and rules. Afterwards, it may lead us to unify language, try to achieve perfection in every social system, and we feel a sorrow that we are unable to destroy all the cities, and rebuild it according to a single model, and to level mountains in order to make a straight soil. Moreover, I am astonished that we could not impose people to put on a same wear in order not to disturb the sir (he means Napoleon) while he is looking at bad sights"*.<sup>(8)</sup>

After emerging of a new world order led by USA, there is a big discussion on cultural globalization, and its capability to erase all cultural particularities of non-western people. That dreams, indeed according to many thinkers, are not only useless, but harmful and impossible task.

In this regard, it is worth full to quote some western thinkers point of views on the topic. René Guénon (1946) while writing on this issue, he said that civilizations are always many, each has its own characteristic. Distinction, in his view, doesn't means at all opposition. Therefore, he called for dialogue, conversation and peaceful co-existence, between "traditional civilization" people, and "modern civilization" people; as he called. However, this role ought be made by elites.<sup>(9)</sup> This civilized job, he added, is so important, otherwise, humanity will suffer a lot, because no one can prevail the reality.<sup>(10)</sup>

Bertrand Russell (1962) is also one of those who criticized Western approach. He said once : *"I think, if human mankind will not destroy itself by a new huge war, that the big danger will be in following of the policy of uniformity among all the people according to a same criteria..."*.<sup>(11)</sup>

After talking about peacekeeping mechanism in the world, he said again that *“we must preserve diversity and multiplicity of literature, art and language, and cultural aspects”*.<sup>(12)</sup>

This topic, is a matter of interest of many research institutes. One of them, is National Humanities Institute at China. His chairman Mr. Claes Ryn claimed that Unity can be achieved only through diversity. Therefore, he said : *“the Union of States would help harmonize diversity ,draw strength from diversity, and not to abolish it”*.<sup>(13)</sup>

Joseph Baldacchino a member of NHM claimed that *“diversity of cultures is a necessity, even within one country as USA where there is a multiplicity of cultures : “USA is a nation of immigrants, and yet - at least for time – that fact did not prevent its essential unity ...”*.<sup>(14)</sup>

### **Basis of Dialogue especially between West and Islamic world**

On what basis can a dialogue of civilizations take place? Actually, I will deal with this issue in the following points:

#### **1. Recognition of Other’s culture:**

Some different interpretations have been offered for dialogue among civilizations in the Chinese academic community. Professor Zhang Yijun held that *“Dialogue among civilizations should emphasize on dialogue itself. This signifies the recognition that all kinds of civilizations possess the grounds and value for existence”*. (ZI Zhongyun, for her part, put it this way, *“As I see it, the significance of the current stress on international dialogue rests with the spiritual side. Our goal should be set for counterbalancing the phenomenon of mankind being overwhelmed by its pursuit of and contention for material things ”*<sup>(15)</sup>).

One of the challenges of Dialogue among Civilizations is the no recognition of the other party. For instance, some in the West has a general ignorance of Islamic culture and teachings, and too often a self-righteous conviction that it alone represents democratic values and a respect for the freedom of the individual. On the side of Islamic cultures, some has a preoccupation of past and a lack of creative engaged thinking on the issues we face today.

In that regard, Western people face an Islam phobia towards Islam and Islamic world. Muslims outside the West seem to have little comprehension of the kind of fears that non-Muslims have about Islam, they have little understanding of the urgent questions that Western people are asking about Islam. It is time for Muslims,

especially in the West, to clarify the values and beliefs they stand for in certain critical areas. (*Does Islam tolerate other religions when it comes to power? Is there any basis for religious pluralism under Islamic orthodoxy? What is Islamic teaching on the position of women? Are they second-rate citizens under Islamic Law? Are they to be under the domination of men? Do they have less rights than men? Does Islam recognize freedom of conscience, thought, expression, and dissent? What are the limits on freedom of religion? Why do some propose the death penalty in the case of a Muslim changing his religion? Does Islam condone the use of force in achieving political goals? What is meant by a kafir (usually translated as "unbeliever")? Does the Qur'an ever condone killing of non-believers? Can Islam coexist with secular democracy or should the worlds be on guard against Islam's will to dominate the world?*).<sup>(16)</sup>

In my view, all these questions can be answered in a way that would allow the minds and hearts of the non-Muslim world to find a positive relationship with Islam. However, Muslims, nowadays, have not yet seen a clear and practical presentation covering issues such as these, because they are living in critical issue as underdevelopment, controversies, lack of sovereignty and strength balance status; especially, with West who consider only those who are in a strong position. Therefore, Muslims must solve their problems and gain all sort of power in order to be appreciated by others.

On the other side, Muslims still not understand partiality and double standard policy towards Israel against Palestinian people in middle east crisis which is the core issue, not merely for Islamic world, but for humanity as well, as it appeared clearly in last Israeli aggression on Gaza (Dec 2008- Jan 2009). Apprehension to wear a specific wear (Hijab) for women in France is also a clear illustration to show hate of West to Islam.

This status represents that still there is a typical international cultural crisis. To solve this crisis, Régis Debray (2007) made a brief essay in his book entitled « Un mythe contemporain : le dialogue des civilisations »<sup>(17)</sup>, in which he thought that dialogue process among civilizations is a kind of myth. In his view, same multiple cultures divide, because it encourages ethnocentrism, while universal techniques (telephone mobile, satellite, codes) unit, as it is always a new even at Globalization. In the field of civil international aviation, he quoted an example that when there are 3000 spoken languages there is only one technical language, that is English. Therefore, he

called for universality movement; that is open for diversity and coexistence instead of techno-economical Globalization which looks like politico-cultural Balkanization which gathers cultures rather than means without disappearing separations among people.

**2. Principles of equity:** By civilized spirits we mean scientific rationalism and humanism which can be found in the world's major civilizations. There are quite a few of expounds in this respect given by advocates of and commentators on dialogue among civilizations. Here the author will just highlight those points required for international dialogues:

**2/1. “Do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you.” This should be the prerequisite for dialogue.** Mr. Herzog upheld this spirit on many international occasions as a universal ‘golden rule’. He once said “We all too easily forget, for instance, that Sakyamuni, Confucius and Socrates were virtual contemporaries, all bent on the same quest for humanity, reason, wisdom and distinguishing good from evil. My response to the Clash of Civilizations is to insist on the ‘golden rule’ of ‘Do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you’, which is formulated in almost identical terms both in the writings of Confucius and in the Bible, and indeed in some form or other in all great civilizations”<sup>(18)</sup>. “If we could only to some extent succeed in making this ‘golden rule’ the maxim of practical politics, that in itself would be an excellent point of departure for safeguarding international peace and no less the rights of the individual”<sup>(19)</sup>. Indeed, this should also be an excellent point of departure for dialogue among cultures, civilizations and states because it embraces also the well-quoted spirits of tolerance and mutual respect, namely acknowledgement and tolerance of differences and respect for diversity.

**2/2. Exchanges on an equal footing and two-way communication:** This should be the process of sincere dialogues. President Khatami put it this way, “In a true dialogue, one party cannot impose his ideas on the other. In a true dialogue, one must respect the independent existence, the ideological, intellectual and cultural attributes of the other. Only under such stances can dialogue become a prologue to peace, security and justice”<sup>(20)</sup>. This reminds one of the “hegemonic words”, much talked about in China's cultural circle. If you fail to see that “every drop of water can reflect the seven colors of sunshine, every life has its own dignity and the culture of every ethnic group has its reason to exist”<sup>(21)</sup>. then, even sitting across a table, the dialogue



can hardly be a process of exchange on an equal footing and mutual communication. Further more, a dialogue full of “hegemonic words” can only lead to the direction of confrontation.

**2/3. Mutual understanding based on seeking common ground while reserving differences. This should be not only the process of sincere dialogues but also the outcome to be striven for.** It is important for international dialogues to pursue and expand consensus. Differences and contradictions, which cannot be solved for the moment, may be shelved till later days. As a dialogue principle and diplomatic tactic, *seeking common ground while reserving differences* played a unique role in ensuring the success of the 1955 Bandung Conference. Its spirit of respect for reality, shelving differences and seeking common interests is still of great significance today. It demands mutual understanding, which surely comes from observing the spirit. As was expressed in a joint report on dialogue between Central/East European and Japanese scholars, “The road to mutual understanding between civilizations involves, first of all, a mutual recognition of differences, visible and invisible, Secondly, a recognition of the existence of a deeper universality within human society at the root of these differences, and finally, the formulation of moderate and universal rules and norms in the social order for the sake of multipolar stability and interdependence”<sup>(22)</sup>.

Like many others, advocates of dialogue among civilizations believe in a basic logic that peace and cooperation can be realized through mutual understanding derived from dialogue. This is both a realistic and idealistic logic. Realistic because dialogue does approve to be an effective approach to eliminate differences, remove confrontation and avoid conflicts in modern times. Idealistic because of the complexity of the source of conflicts, the evident lagging spiritual civilization progress behind material civilization of human society and the long process involved in purifying human souls. Chen Luzhi, a Chinese expert on international relations, maintained that, “Dialogue is meant for removal of obstacles rather than creation of new ones...It should not deviate from the basic values for international relations such as equality, justice, human rights, freedom, tolerance and good neighborliness, which have been stipulated in the UN Charter. Of course, it cannot replace other measures and means also stipulated in the Charter for maintaining international peace and stability”<sup>(23)</sup>. This is a rational attitude, which has practical relevance.

Finally, dialogue among civilizations is a dream which we can achieve it. out of many, it appears that education is the fundamental and effective tool by which we could clean the present mental mine fields and pave the way for the introduction and the establishment of such coexistence through which we can move to transcend the existing cultural, national and ethnic barriers. It is in this way that we can overcome the ethnocentric concept of culture and history in order to create a climate in which a constructive and meaningful dialogue among civilizations is able to thrive. European union is a good example for this issue.

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  - 3- Dr. Abberresak Guessoum, "Civilization problems in Malik Bin Nabi's Concept". MuafaQat magazine, p. 292, High Institute of USSULUDDIN, N° 5, June, 1994
  - 4- Ibid, P.295 Quoted from "Algerian horizons" P. 46-47 of malik Bin Nabi
  - 5- La crise du monde moderne, P. 129, Editions Gallimard, 1946.
  - 6- Dr. Abberresak Guessoum, Muafaqat magazine p. 294-295
  - 7- Dr. Guessoum, Al Muwafaqat, P. III-XI, English section, N° 5, June 1996
  - 8- Al Moun-ataf magazine, Wadjda, Morocco, N° 11, 1995, P. 45
  - 9- La crise du monde moderne, P. 37
  - 10- Idb. P. 168-183.
  - 11- Bertrand Russel Speaks on contemporary issues, , Translation of Mariam Jabiry, National Association of Publication, Beirut, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 1962, P. 211
  - 12- Ibid, P. 67
  - 13- Lecture series, P. 12 see: [www.nhinet.org/Rvn-China.Htm](http://www.nhinet.org/Rvn-China.Htm), updated on 25 July 2000
  - 14- Out of many, one or chaos, [www.nhinet.org/many-one.Htm](http://www.nhinet.org/many-one.Htm)
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