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The Controversy of Islam and the West, Aspects of Repulsion and Prospects for Attraction in the Age of Globalization.

جدلية الإسلام والغرب، مظاهر التنافرو آفاق التجاذب في عصر العولمة.

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Abstract:

The debate over the relationship between Islam and the West is one of the oldest issues in both Islamic and Western thoughts. Yet, this antiquity does not mean that it is a classic problem that has been overcome by time. Rather, it is one of the most important topics that must be addressed, especially in the current era, which is full of conflicts and disputes. Many historians predicted that this age would be marked by clash of civilizations. Since the basic task of philosophy is to promote coexistence and communication among human beings regardless of their racial or religious affiliations, the study of the relationship between two civilizations or societies should not take on a conditional or mathematic character. Rather, it should investigate this relationship in each era in order to draw different results and perceptions in figuring out the nature of this relationship, taking into account the changing social, political, and economic conditions. Accordingly, this study will attempt to reach a realistic contemporary conception of the debatable relationship between the West and the East, or more precisely between the West and Islam. This is through addressing the manifestations of antagonism, identifying the foundations of each party, and then exploring the possible prospects for integration, communication, and coexistence in the era of globalization .

Keywords: Attraction; Civilization; Islam; Repulsion; West.

الملخص:

مشكلة العلاقة بين الإسلام والغرب من أقدم الإشكاليات سواء في الفكر العربي الإسلامي أو عند الغرب، والقدم لا يعني أنها مشكلة كلاسيكية تجاوزها الزمن بل تعد راهنية على قاعدة الصراعات والنزاعات التي تملأ الأرض، وبما أن مهمة الفلسفة الأساسية هي تحقيق والتعايش والتواصل بين بني الإنسان بغض النظر عن انتماءاتهم العرقية أو الدينية. إن دراسة العلاقة بين حضارتين أو مجتمعين لا ينبغي أن تتخذ طابعا شرطيا رياضيا بل يجب أن تبحث هذه العلاقة في كل عصر على أن نخرج بنتائج وتصورات مختلفة في تحديد هذه العلاقة باعتبار تغير الظروف الاجتماعية والسياسية والاقتصادية وعلى هذا الأساس سنحاول في هذه الدراسة الوصول إلى تصور واقعي معاصر للعلاقة الجدلية بين الغرب والشرق أو بتعبير أدق بين الغرب والإسلام وذلك بالتطرق لمظاهر التنافر بينهما و تحديد أسس كل منهما ثم استقصاء الآفاق الممكنة للتجاذب والتواصل والعيش المشترك في عصر العولمة .
الكلمات المفتاحية: الغرب ؛ التنافر ؛ التجاذب ؛ الحضارة .

1. INTRODUCTION

People are born alone and die alone, yet between birth and death they do not live by themselves but with others and for the others, that is, within a social environment. Whether we agree with Sartre and say: "The other is hell," or we go in harmony with the German philosopher Goethe, who stated: "There is no harsher punishment for a person than to live in Paradise alone," there seems to be no escape from the other, and there must be a life marked by attraction and repulsion. This applies to individuals belonging to every community, which is the case with regard to the relations of nations and civilizations. When we talk about our Islamic nation, we mean that ego that is distinguished by its specificity and identity, as opposed to the other that represents the West in general. The relationship between the Western-Christian and Arab-Islamic worlds has been characterized by a problematic nature since ancient times. From many perspectives, they are two civilizations that each relied, albeit in different proportions, on the common heritage of Abrahamic revelation and prophecy and on Greek philosophy and sciences, and they both fed on the heritage of other ancient oriental civilizations, their myths and ancient sciences deeply rooted in history.

Despite these common considerations, the two civilizations continued to fight for most of the periods of their common history, and they are still in confrontation until this day. In this regard, there seems to be an apparent contradiction between the reality of connectedness and communication and the tendency towards clash and disharmony, and

this is what needs explanation.

There are two visions: The first is the view that sees the relationship between Islam and the West as one of conflict and disharmony, and this is evident in the West's view of Islam and Muslims. This has been demonstrated in Western discourse, especially the American one, which takes incidents of terrorism and violence as justification for the view of conflict with Islam. The second is the view that perceives the relationship between Islam and the West as one that must be based on fruitful dialogue and attraction. This perception focuses on rare historical moments of communication and rapprochement between the two civilizations on the one hand, and is armed with speeches of religious tolerance and calls for unconditional dialogue, on the other hand. In front of these two perceptions that will be tackled in detail later, the main emerging problematic issues in this research are: What is the nature of the relationship between Islam and the West? What are the causes and manifestations of disharmony and conflict? Is it possible to talk about rapprochement and dialogue, and in what context? Then, what are the prospects for this dialogue in the era of globalization?

First, the Causes of Disharmony and Conflict:

In order for the reasons of the conflict to become clearer, there is a need to take a quick look at the foundations of both Western and Islamic civilization, as the causes are evident in the fact that each civilization was built on foundations and

references that are contradictory and distinct from the other. In this context, some major questions are raised: What are the basics and values of the Western civilization? On the other hand, what is the reference of the Islamic civilization? Where lies the contradiction between them? Does this discrepancy necessarily lead to conflict?

Foundations of the Western Civilization and Its Values:

Many historians of the Western civilization history have a habit of linking the West to Greece, as this latter was the first model of Western civilization, and it is known as the city-state that coincided with the emergence of democracy in Athens, the spread of thought, philosophy, and science, as well as man's questions about the meaning of happiness and its path, in addition to the relationship of morality to this happiness and innate human ambition. In this civilization, of which no two people differ in its virtue over humanity, only some traces of high human values remained if compared to contemporary Western civilization. This latter represents a different aspect of Greek civilization despite being its intellectual descendant. Contemporary Western civilization in its broad and current sense is a mixture of intellectual beliefs and approaches, as well as political, economic, and social philosophies. It is also the result of many experiences that European peoples went through, which made them form a view toward life, toward the world, and from the foundations upon which the Western civilization was built.

Materialism Versus Religious Idea:

The dominance of materialism in Western civilization is undeniable, as the philosophies upon which the West had established its civilization are essentially material philosophies that exclude every spiritual orientation. The authority of the clergy was a substantial source of hostility to the religious idea. The Church had established the Inquisition and fought the scholars and philosophers who sought to liberate the mind. Hence, salvation according to the European was in the exclusion of metaphysics; which led to the spread of material thought, the construction of human relations accordingly, and the organization of the individual's life in a way similar to that found in mechanics and physics. Notably, the decline of the religious idea in the West in front of modern ideologies will have a negative impact on the moral, psychological, and spiritual aspects, as the absence of religious motivation entails the disappearance of spiritual dimension in civilization, and this is one of the indicators of the civilization's collapse. In this regard, the Algerian thinker Malek Bennabi referred to this matter in his book titled *The Destination of the Islamic World*. According to him, religion has become both a burden and an outcast, adopted only by the fearful people exhausted by the conditions of material life and those unable to keep up with its speed, which makes religion as a refuge. It protects them from the misery of overwhelming materialism.

The philosopher René Guénon believes that modern Western civilization has sought through its renaissance to minimize religion, by making it something that is set aside, a marginal issue given a limited and narrow place as much as possible, something lacking any real influence on the rest of life

aspects, isolated by a sort of absolute separation (René, 2016, p. 87).

The denial of the ontology of knowledge that transcends the mind and senses is an evidence of the inability of the European mind to rise to the spiritual level of civilization, and this inability is due to ignorance as the ignorant always feels an instinctive fear of everything that he does not understand, and fear does not easily generate hatred and resentment, even when being diligent in escaping that fear through absolute denial of the truth that is not understood. Rather, there are types of denial that are actually similar to cries of rage, such as those made by “non-religious people” regarding everything related to religion (René, 2013, p. 100). In this way, the modern Western mind will unite, armed with its philosophers and scholars, in order to get rid of this dependency on religion and lead man – according to them – to civilization and progress. The West, as Abu Hassan al-Nabawi describes it, lacks the religious sense, as it “denies the unseen, is arrogant in what is beyond nature, and stubborn in religious meanings (Al-Nadawi, p. 202).

Among other models that can be considered among the references that sift through the outcomes and foundations of Western civilization is the French philosopher Eric Younes Geoffroy. He devoted a large part of his writings to Islam and Western civilization, the most important of which is his book titled *The Future of Spiritual Islam*, in which he emphasized that “the material hegemony of the West exported to the world – under the guise of reason – a utilitarian, self-interest, and therefore weak and one-dimensional vision. It cut off the other spiritual and immaterial dimension” (Eric, 2016, p. 95).

Centrality:

The colonial movement is an inevitable result of an idea that European people believe in. This belief was not the outcome of a moment, but rather is the result of much work carried out by modern-day philosophers. They worked to establish the idea that the other – who is culturally different – is a marginal being who does not meet the conditions for civilization and is not entitled to live like the makers of civilization. Rather, he must be subservient to the West in exchange for what it provides to him in terms of technology and modernity, according to Dr. Mustafa Al-Nashar (Al-Nashar, 2018, p. 47).

This is why most historians in the West attribute to themselves all the scientific and philosophical heritage, and thus deny the contributions of other nations in building human civilization and tend to classify them as a less perfect human race compared to Western man. According to them, there was no progress, civilization, science or intellectual achievement except from the West. They are the source and center of civilizational contribution. The idea of civilizational centrality has dominated the West, and they considered themselves as the source of all civilizational content in all its types, scientifically, culturally, artistically and socially. Many Muslim thinkers fell in the trap of believing this discourse, especially when seeing the technological and scientific progress that the West is achieving in the current era and considering it the first model of civilization. This vision has been fed by the pens of many orientalist, who – in a negligence by the Arab Islamic world – established a parallel reading of heritage that considers it empty of any civilizational achievement, but rather a

model of stagnation, immobility, and lack of creativity. That moment was an opportunity for the enemies of Islamic civilization as Muslims were busy in bloody wars to protect themselves, and at sometimes exhausted by internal conflicts for doctrinal and political reasons. The Western belief that they are the makers of civilization pushed them to seek to carry out the mission of exporting it to the rest of the underdeveloped world, according to their vision. Since intellectual and ideological wars and the obliteration of the scientific and intellectual heritage were not sufficient, there was a real necessity for colonizing these peoples, seizing their wealth, and introducing them to civilization.

Guardianship of Humanity and Colonialism:

This colonial movement took two forms. The first is classical colonialism, which is represented by the seizure of lands by force of arms and the maintenance of an army that guarantees colonial interests. The second form is modern colonialism, which is represented by the economic, political, social, and cultural control exercised by the great powers over the newly independent countries. Notably, the second form is much more dangerous than direct colonialism because it has a soft power that addresses thought and focuses on hidden weapons such as the media and various globalization devices, and everything that would facilitate control over conquered peoples.

Foundations of Islamic Civilization and Its Reference:

The Spirit and the Idea of Succession:

Islam has viewed man with honor, considering the enormous material and

spiritual energies he has and the abilities and preparations that qualify him to dominate the universe and subjugate nature for his own benefit and that of his kind. Islam called on him to develop these capabilities through accurate knowledge and deep research, and urged him to test all of this with the use of mind in whatever surrounds him, and in the results he achieves. Besides, Islam drew for man the broad lines that organize life and social relations, starting from the small community, that is, the family, to the large community, and it left the details to the man's effort and adaptability according to the surrounding circumstances and requirements, all of this is for populating the Earth and improving the means of livelihood. Amidst all of that, God created man in the best of his abilities and provided him with tremendous preparations for knowledge, science and discovery, and had taught him all the names and everything that would help him in the task of establishing succession on the Earth to populate it with justice. Still, the succession of the Earth cannot be achieved except by liberating man from the inclinations that distort his humanity, tear apart his bonds, and send him into disharmony and conflict. Therefore, religion commanded man to live free from everything that hinders his mission in life and the requirements of his succession on the Earth.

Monotheism and Honoring Humanity:

Islam came as a revolution to restore man's dignity and his true status after the desire of some societies and authorities to direct the worship of man from heaven to earth. Therefore, the mission of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, aimed at making man aware of his

being and dignity and enabling him to exercise that dignity in his real life and relationships. According to Islam, man is a favored and honored creature whom God chose from among his creation. He breathed into him his spirit and made him a successor on the Earth. He charged him with the responsibility of constructing the universe with the authority of the mind and the power of work. His responsibility is to guide the world by basing its affairs on the values and principles of Islam. One of the manifestations of human honor in Islam is that it considers the human self to be sacred and honored, and any attack on the dignity of the individual or group in Islam is considered a threat to the social order in general. Therefore, such practices must be resisted and its perpetrators must be punished, according to the Almighty's saying: "And there is for you in legal retribution [saving of] life, O you [people] of understanding. That you may become righteous." (Surat Al-Baqarah, verse 179).

Universality of the Islamic Religion:

Islam is considered as the final religion of all divine revelations, and the history of the Islamic civilization is a witness to the spirit of religious tolerance and approval of pluralism. This civilization was unique in its acceptance of all sects and religions within its civilizational order. During the period of the Islamic state's dominance, all the various religions and religious minorities enjoyed – under the shadow of Islam – pluralism that controlled and preserved on peaceful relations for the first time in its history, as Islam put an end to religious wars between followers of all religions and was historically promoting the pluralism of sects within various religions. This did not exclusively apply to the peoples of divine

revelations such as Christianity and Judaism, but rather included other religions such as that of the Persians, Indians, and Chinese. This achievement in the field of pluralism is considered as an evidence of the human value within the Islamic civilizational system as one of its basic goals – man is an end in himself and not a means to another end. Therefore, there is a big difference between a civilization that does not want the religious other to exist on the map of its countries and a civilization that maintained and is still preserving the presence of the religious other on its land, and also respected the various religious rituals in order to draw closer to God Almighty and implement the Sunnah of his Messenger, God's peace and blessings be upon him. If the Western enlightenment presented by the West as a secular enlightenment – replacing religion with reason – ignores the value of heritage and favors materialism at the expense of the spirit, the Islamic enlightenment carried by the Islamic civilization is a divine one in which Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet constitute the lights that create for Muslims a distinct Islamic enlightenment different from that adopted in Europe and the Western world.

Second, the Prospects and Opportunities for Attraction:

Limits of Attraction:

The West has become a source of technology, trade and culture for Muslims. Therefore, it is possible to talk about attraction based on those shared human values between Islam and the West, in addition to common challenges. Yet, what imposes limits on attraction are the differences and conflicts between the Islamic and Western civilizational projects. First, for Islamic thought, it must overcome

its isolation towards the self and avoid exaggerated reaction toward the West. In fact, factors like the state of weakness, exposure to colonialism, and then to the Westernization movement made some fundamentalist thinkers grow skeptical about everything that is Western, and by that we mean the fear of the culture of surrender to Westernization and fascination with its civilizational project. As for the West, it must overcome its exclusionary and centralist philosophy that despises the other and looks down at him. This racist philosophy, which Abdullah Ibrahim – one of the most prominent scholars of the concept of Western centrality – considers to be one of the most important philosophies in building modern Western consciousness, has led to the West being considered a center for the activity of the human mind in its most extreme forms and purest manifestations (Ibrahim, 2010, p. 128).

Dialogue and Coexistence:

Difference is undoubtedly something inherited in human societies and is not canceled or rejected by any religious law or moderate human philosophy. As long as difference is part of human life, it must be accepted, coexisted with, and tolerated with living within its frames. Among the tools that help us live in the shadow of cultural, civilizational, and intellectual diversity are the tools of dialogue and coexistence. Accordingly, the advocates of Islam and its societal institutions are called upon today to restore their civilizational role in initiating the request for dialogue. This task entrusted to Islam is to emphasize the keenness of the Islamic world populations to establish the rules of dialogue, away from the prejudices that relied either on the hostility and rejection of the different others or the

endeavor to assimilate them and undermine any personal privacy. In this regard, the Islamic civilization has adopted openness since its inception, and we must remember that we are charged with acquiring knowledge wherever it is found, and benefiting from it to strengthen the nation, develop its resources, and ensure its prosperity (Al-Farouqi, 1977, p. 32).

In a world characterized by misunderstanding and lack of trust between the interlocutors, dialogue between civilizations contributes to consolidating peace, mutual understanding and reconciliation. Dialogue does not lead any party to melt in the other. Rational dialogue neither wants to merge identities nor to form any type of absolute religious agreement. It is up to the two parties, whether the West or Muslims, to establish tools for education on dialogue and reject all forms of extremism and fanaticism, especially in Islamic thought, sects and denominations that branch out from it, reflecting a false image of Islam and Muslims.

Conclusion:

This paper has dealt with the sources of discrepancy between the foundations of each of the two civilizations, and has concluded that Islam and the West are neither homogeneous nor completely contradictory blocs. It revealed that they contain diversity, multiplicity, and contrast in thought, behavior, and practice, and this necessarily leads to adopt dialogue and coexistence between Islam and the West, based on understanding, respect, tolerance and pluralism. This can be achieved by the West abandoning its unilateral vision of the world and its contempt for Islam and Muslims, and therefore they must be treated as a society worthy of companionship and recognition of

their virtue in Islamic civilization; and secondly, by getting rid of the inferiority complex by Muslims and their fear of every Western achievement. Importantly, this does not serve the contemporary Muslims' lives and does not conform with the efforts and objectives of Islamic law, which emphasizes the universality of the Islamic message and its ability to confront the challenges of the era and adapt to its changes and requirements, since Islam is a religion of reconstruction and succession on Earth. Therefore, it was logical that it should not contradict anything that elevates man's both spiritual and material sides, and the increasing number of economic partnerships and political relations between the two sides. Hence, dialogue and acculturation become the necessity of the era that imposes itself on the West and Islam to the same extent, as education in dialogue is the pavement for settling disputes. This requires encouraging studies that are concerned with developing new trends within the educational systems of each civilizational and cultural group.

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