

Keynote address

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Résumé du discours d'ouverture.

Il y a cinq ans, pour expliquer vers quel monde nous allions après la l'effondrement de l'Empire soviétique et la fin de la guerre froide, le professeur Américain Samuel Huntington de l'Université d'Harvard, dans un retentissant article, affirmait: " Dans le monde nouveau, les conflits n'auront pas essentiellement pour origine l'idéologie ou l'économie. Les grandes causes de division de l'humanité et les principales sources de conflit seront culturelles. Les Etats-nations continueront à jouer le premier rôle dans les affaires internationales, mais les principaux conflits politiques mondiaux mettront aux prises des nations et des groupes appartenant à des civilisations différentes. Le choc des civilisations dominera la politique mondiale".

Il poursuivait encore: " le sentiment d'appartenance à une civilisation va prendre de plus en plus d'importance dans l'avenir, et le monde sera dans une large mesure façonné par les interactions de 7 à 8 civilisations majeures: à savoir, les civilisations occidentale, confucéenne, japonaise, islamique, hindouiste, slave-orthodoxe, latino-américaine et, peut-être, africaine. Les plus importants conflits à venir auront lieu le long des lignes de fracture culturelles qui séparent ces civilisations".



Et de dresser une vision Orwellienne d'un monde où l'Occident affronterait une Chine superpuissante et un Islamisme résurgent. De telles simplifications politiques, et ce découpage des frontières civilisationnelles ne semblent pas résister aux mutations profondes qui traversent le monde à la veille du troisième millénaire.

Il s'agit dans le monde multiculturel, multiracial, multipolaire qui se met en place, de sortir de nos registres unilatéraux et d'établir une communication véritablement réciproque avec les autres sociétés et les autres cultures.

Dans ce nouveau monde où l'accès à "l'éducation virtuelle" va se généraliser, il est impératif de ne pas se contenter d'être des consommateurs passifs du "savoir virtuel" et d'apporter notre contribution quant à la production de ces savoirs surtout quand ils portent directement sur nos sociétés.

Et l'universitaire peut jouer le rôle qui est fondamentalement le sien, celui de passeur entre différentes cultures.

Suivent des exemples de contribution que nos historiens, nos politologues, nos historiens de l'art peuvent apporter au dialogue des cultures dans un contexte algéro-américain.



Some five years ago, Samuel Huntington, a Harvard professor published an article entitled "The Clash of civilizations" (1) which created quite a stir in the academic world and which became very fashionable in America's foreign policy establishment. The article developed a disturbing theory in which Huntington explained the kind of world we were about to enter, following the collapse of the Communist block and the end of the Cold War. The gist of Professor Huntington's argument is that, in the new world-to-be, conflicts would not have an essentially ideological or economic origin. The major sources of division and conflicts would be cultural. Huntington developed that thesis still further in, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, the book he published two years ago (2). He writes "spurred by modernization, global politics is being reconfigured along cultural lines. Peoples and countries with similar cultures are coming together. Peoples and countries with different cultures are coming apart. Alignments defined by ideology and superpower relations are giving way to alignments defined by culture and civilization. Political boundaries increasingly are redrawn to coincide with cultural ones... Cultural communities are replacing Cold War blocs and the fault lines between civilizations are becoming the central lines of conflict in global politics".

As evidence of these tendencies Huntington points to the Soviet-Afghan war of 1979-89 and the Gulf War of 1990-1991 as two bloody episodes of the ongoing clash of civilizations. "Both wars began", he says, "as straightforward invasions of one country by another but were transformed into and in large part redefined as civilization wars". Huntington does not dismiss the possibility of a global war that might arise between groups from different civilizations. And he draws a grim, Orwellian vision of the West facing a superpower China and a resurgent, militant Islam. This situation, as he claims, is likely to place tremendous stress on international stability in the early twenty-first century and could trigger off major intercivilization wars.

In an attempt to temper this doom and gloom vision, Huntington concludes that universality or what he calls "The Commonalities of Civilization," are the surest safeguard against the clashes of civilizations. "Peoples in all civilizations", he writes, "should search for and attempt to expand the



values, institutions, and practices they have in common with people of other civilizations”.

Much as I disagree with Huntington’s new version of the age-long East-West struggle, I can only subscribe to his conclusion regarding the necessity for civilizations and cultures to interact with one another.

And indeed, a new electronic revolution is under way. Advances in computing and telecommunication press relentlessly ahead, shrinking distance, eroding national boundaries, and enlarging the domain of trans-cultural encounters. The world is now enmeshed in webs of telecommunication networks that not only transmit information of all kinds at lightning speed, but also convey models of political, social, economic behaviour. What these new developments in communication actually suggest is that the new century will be marked by innumerable human encounters, personal as well as electronic, conducive to a dialogue rather than to a clash between civilizations.

And it is my belief that university scholars and researchers whose work spans different cultures or civilizations -- whether they are concerned with history, politics, literature, or art -- may moderate frictions and actively participate to these global, trans-cultural encounters.

What contribution can our researchers actually bring to the cross-cultural encounters in a Algerian-US context?

A particular attention should be given to areas of common interest, to issues of cultural interaction.

History is one of those issues where an Algerian contribution could illuminate materials of particular relevance to our own immediate context while at the same time bringing back to life whole chunks of history that have faded from the American collective memory.

A good case in point is the historical relations between Algeria and the young American republic, which culminated in the so-called US-Barbary wars between 1785 and 1815, an episode which has traditionally been dismissed as minor and rather insignificant in America and is all but ignored in our own country. And yet the decision to create the US navy by Act of Congress in March 1794 was dictated by the necessity to defend the US merchant navy against the attacks of Algiers corsairs. That marked the



beginning of the US navy presence in the Mediterranean and it has stayed there ever since.

Moreover, the crisis which took thirty years to be resolved haunted the minds of many Americans and rallied public support across the country. The conflict with the Regency of Algiers inspired a campaign of patriotic zeal which was reflected in the very early pieces of American literature and which helped forge a sense of national identity in the formative years of the young republic. It also helped assert the sense of an American national character and establish the foundation of an American national culture.

It is my belief that research on what constitutes our shared historical heritage is essential to any fruitful cultural interaction. And the contribution of the Algerian historians to a field of study that has been neglected by the American scholars could be just as essential.

Historical culture in America lacks that universal perspective that you find in the old European nations for instance. World history is almost absent from American secondary education, and not very present in University education except in the training of history majors. From that point of view, Algerian scholars could help their American counterparts rediscover important moments of their forgotten history and reassess the part those events played in shaping their sense of nationhood.

A few years ago, the American Embassy presented our National Archives with microfilms of material related to that the "Barbary episode". They represent a mine of information, documents, papers and notes that have yet to be exploited, edited, and published for the mutual benefit of both countries.

Let me take another example.

Because memories of the Barbary war episode were still very much alive, the taking of Algiers by the French troops in 1830 was perceived by the Americans as the destruction of a nest of pirates. It is no surprise therefore that the US government chose to ignore Abd el-Kader's plea for help. But reports in the American popular press of French heavy-handed treatment of local populations generated a great movement of sympathy for the Emir's resistance, in both Britain and the United States at the time.

Professor Farida Hellal of the University of Algiers established a list of those articles but we have still to retrieve the texts complete with the



pictorial material so as to better appreciate the American reaction to the Emir's resistance and its impact on the public imagination in the America of the mid-1840's.

What we can assume with a fair degree of certainty is that the American popular press had made the Arab chief familiar to the American public even in heartland America as the naming of a small hamlet in the state of Iowa in June 1846 seems to suggest. What we could presume also is that Abd el-Kader was not unknown to President Abraham Lincoln when he sent him two horse pistols as a token of his gratitude for having saved thousands of Christians, including the American consul in Damascus during the sectarian riots which had opposed maronite Christians to muslim Druzes in Damascus in July 1860.

By the same token, politics is a field where the input of Algerian specialists is highly desirable on such issues as the ongoing Algerian crisis.

An innovative experience in terms of contact-building would be for institutions having the same interests, to pool together their resources and to be integrated in a networking of think tanks to which Algerian political analysts could bring in their first hand experience of the local context. That would break their present sense of isolation and turn them from passive and often frustrated consumers to active participants to the political debate on the region.

A practical goal could be the setting up of a Centre for Maghrib studies on the model of those established in Morocco and Tunisia which are working in close cooperation with The American Institute for Maghrib Studies. AIMS was founded in 1984 to facilitate scholarly research in all disciplines on North Africa and to encourage the exchange of scholars and scholarly information. I understand that the University of Oran was selected to host that centre but that the project was delayed for security reasons. A step in that direction could be the creation of a Web site for the University of Oran. Maybe you can break new grounds there and show the other universities the way they should go.

Turning to the immediate concerns of the teachers and researchers of this particular department, I am sorry to say that we have yet to seriously explore the field of American studies from a cross-cultural perspective. Clearly Algeria did not figure in American literature to the extent that it



has done in French literature. But we have managed to neglect even those precious few American literary works which have direct relevance to our national context.

The general assumption is that the relationship of the United States with Algeria only really began with the Second World War and that American interest in the region is largely concerned with policies, with economic developments, with commercial exchanges. Culture and literature hardly come in to it. I would like to show that this largely accepted notion has to be nuanced.

A quick catalogue of some title of the early pieces of American literature would attest to the place Algiers held in American letters in the late 18th - early 19th century. The Barbary theme, and more specifically the theme of captivity in Barbary is central in Susanna Rowson's play, *Slaves in Algiers* (1794), in Peter Markoe's *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* (1787); in Richard Penn Smith, *Bombardment of Algiers* (1829); in John Floss' *Journal of Captivity and Suffering* (1798); in Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive* (1797); in Jonathan Smith's *The Siege of Algiers* (1823); in David Humphreys' poems, notably "Future Glory".

In a significant way, captivity in Algiers provided American abolitionists with a cause and reinforced the anti-slavery movement in America. It is interesting to note that one of the earliest works of fiction in American literature was centrally preoccupied with the question that interested Americans more than any other, that is the anti-slavery issue.

Based on the accounts of travellers and ransomed captives, Royall Tyler's narrative, *The Algerine Captive* is a pamphlet denouncing the institution of slavery in America. In this fictitious autobiography, Dr Underhill, a native of New England describes slavery in the southern states and exposes the appalling way in which the African slaves are captured and treated. As a surgeon aboard a slave ship bound for Africa, he is captured by corsairs and taken to Algiers where he is sold in bondage. The second half of the volume is a fictitious account of his seven years of captivity in Algiers. Ironically, the conditions of the slaves in Algiers are shown to be more humane than those of the African slaves in America.

In a significant way, the Barbary episode impinged upon the American imagination in the early years of the republic. Barbary provided American



abolitionists with a symbol of enslavement and a new way to mobilize anti-slavery feelings. It reinforced the anti-abolitionist lobby in Congress and challenged the young American republic to put her ideals and principles to the test, a fact that has generally been neglected by both the American and Algerian scholars. It informed the themes, notably that of patriotism mixed with strong anti-slavery feelings, that the very first American writers introduced in their drama, poetry and fiction.

Here again, there is an opportunity for Algerian scholars to undertake the archeological work that would uncover that literature and breathe life again in the ideas, perceptions and representations it conveyed in relation to our country.

Moving to the twentieth century, we have yet to properly explore the themes developed by Paul Bowles, the American expatriate who lives in Tangier and who set his first major novel, *The Sheltering Sky* in Algeria.

The novel actually begins and ends in Oran.

For reasons that I will try to explain in my paper on "The Algerian desert in the American imagination", Bowles's works have elicited little interest from American researchers. A unique opportunity is presented to our specialists to re-invest grounds that have been allowed to lie fallow and contribute to the rehabilitation of an American writer who has made such remarkable fiction out of North Africa.

These kinds of development are vital for the emergence and success of cross-cultural encounters.

To complete the picture, I would like to take an example from the world of Art to show how we could help Americans rediscover forgotten aspects of their cultural heritage while at the same time, rediscovering for ourselves our own cultural past.

The name and the works of Frederick Arthur Bridgman have fallen in almost complete oblivion in his native country. And yet he can be considered as a rare exponent of American Orientalism. A native of Alabama where he was born in 1847, Bridgman discovered his Orient in Algeria. During the 1870s and 1880s, he spent a great deal of time in Algeria, travelling to Constantine, Tlemcen and pushing as far south as the oasis of Biskra where many French Orientalist painters had preceded him. At Algiers, Bridgman chose to live in the old Moorish Casbah rather



than on the heights of the city where a British colony of wintering residents had established its quarters by that time. Bridgman explored the streets of old Algiers, the moorish cafés, the shops, the mosques. The Courtyard which is shown in the exhibit is a representative example of the works generated by his contacts with Algeria. It reflects the attention to detail, to traditional attire, to attitudes, to domestic artifacts which were to characterise his style and which turned his paintings into invaluable documents on Algerian life in the late 19th century.

In 1890 Bridgman published *Winters in Algeria*, a narrative account of his three trips to Algeria. The book, illustrated with his own drawings, provides a first hand, objective account of the country and its peoples, its major cities, sites, and popular customs.

In a significant way, Bridgman's works contradict the theory developed by Edward Said in his book Orientalism. An examination of the works of Bridgman would clearly reveal that far from being a projection of western prejudices and fantasies, they reflect the real concern of the artist to record faithfully images of a national culture while it was still untouched by foreign encroachment.

I would like to conclude these remarks by pointing out to those new developments which we can hardly afford to ignore in this day and age.

Firstly, the growing global "interdependence" in virtually all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life has dramatically changed the basic characteristics of the international system.

Secondly, in the age of the internet, self-imposed isolationism is an illusion.

Thirdly, in today's increasingly interdependent world, the capacity of development and strength of both individuals and societies depend upon their ability to inter-relate and cooperate for common goals, upon their capacity to actively participate and compete in the marketplace of ideas.

It has become quite clear nowadays, that maturity for both individuals and societies is a willingness to welcome diversity as an enrichment, as a vital form of openness and participation to the common good. And that it is sustained by a staunch commitment to the dialogue of civilizations as a rampart against Huntington's "clash of civilizations".



What is at stake here, is the future of our own societies. It is a question of understanding modern civilization as a multicultural, multilingual, multiracial and multipolar civilization, of striving to expand the values, institutions and practices we have in common with peoples of other civilizations, and, above all, of turning our attention to our own culture and drawing from it the vision and the confidence for our own participation to the new global village that is emerging under our own eyes.

Notes:

(1) "The Clash of civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, No 3, summer 1993.

(2) Samuel P. Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster, 1996.

