Co-operation or clash: a critique of Huntington's hyper-orientalism

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We are meeting here in Algiers to discuss the issues of *the dialogue of civilisations*, I am tempted to say 'yet again' because the subject has been tossed around in many settings the world over, so much so that one sometimes wonders whether there can possibly be any life left in the subject! There is a research topic, probably already attempted, in trying to discover why the *dialogue of civilisations* appears to have such staying power as a subject for conferences and seminars. Whatever the reason, there is little doubt that Prof. Samuel P. Huntington hit a very sore nerve when he first raised the idea of *"the clash of civilizations"* in his article in *Foreign Affairs* in the spring issue of 1993. The first conference on the subject took place only six months later, roughly the minimum time it takes to produce a decently organized conference, and they have been going on since. But the topic has also been adapted to local priorities. Just last summer l was invited to speak on this subject in Kuala Lumpur in a context where the invitation specified"...civilisations such as Western, Indian, Chinese, and Malay..."And Huntington himself has been slippery. In his 1997 book, expanding on the 1993 article, Huntington identified very generally Western, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic (Chinese), Hindu, Orthodox (Christian), Buddhist and Japanese.[1] This was already three more than the six he had identified four years earlier. Malay did not figure (indeed, Huntington's map places Malaysia and Indonesia in the Islamic civilization, while most of the Philippines is considered Western), and he used the term Hindu, not Indian. One notes, further, That Huntington's nine civilizations confuse categories of definition: religions (Islamic, Hindu, Orthodox Buddhist),

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geographical (Western, Latin American» African, Japanese) and ethno-linguistic (Latin American, Sinic and Japanese).

Many reviewers and scholars have sharply criticized Huntington's theory that following the end of the cold war the next stage of world history would be dominated by tensions and conflicts between what he calls "civilizations", although one sometimes wonders whether contemporary events are not conspiring to prove him right. To the first wave of critics, those who responded to his article and whose comments he was able to respond to, in turn, in the book, he acknowledged the reality of the clashes within his civilizations but posited that they tend to be of a lower level of tension and intractability And less likely than those which take place between entities on either side of the Civilisational divides[1]. This is a matter of judgment and dispute between his supporters and opponents, which it is not my brief to enter into here. More closely related to my concern is the essentialism 'implied in the wii6le approach of people such as Prof. Huntington and others who work in the same way. Let me immediately suggest that this includes significant voices in Islamist circles, whose approaches to so-called Islamic "Civilisation and its enemies" often seem a mirror image of Huntington's: there are claimed to he fundamentally common characteristics shared by all Muslim cultures which makes them essentially different from any other parts human society. It is ironic that the attack on Orientalism so effectively voiced by Edward Said over two decades ago[2] should have become so trend-setting among Islamists especially given that his attack on The essentialism of the orientalists by implication is an attack on all essentialism. In fact, one of his critics, Bobby Sayyid, suggests that Said's critique of orientalism by 'implication leads to a negation of Islam and its displacement from being a significant explanatory factor for ail aspects of the Muslim world - or *"Islamic civilizations"* – into specialist fields of ethnicity and ideology[3] |It has been my intention in this brief general introduction to give an indication that I think there are serious problems with the very concept of western civilization. In the following I shall first deal with the concept of civilization before going on to discuss briefly how western civilization might fit into this and then to deconstruct

[1]Ibid. p137.
[2]3 In his *Orientalism*. London Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.
[3] Bobby Sayyid, A fundamental fear: eurocentrism and the emergence of Islamism, London: Zed Books,1997, p.38', see also my *"Orientalism and anti-Orientalism is there a middle way?"* in Antonina Zheliazkova and Jorgen Nielsen (eds), Ethnology of Sufi orders: theory and practice, Sofia: IMIR 2002 pp. 337-351

the whole in a process of relating particularly Islamic and Western civilisations to each other. Perhaps I might this way arrive at something approaching an understanding of what could be implied in a discussion of relations between the two, but it will be rather more complex than is usual in this kind of setting, and it will certainly be more an active interrelationship

The term *"civilisation"* comes from the Latin root civis meaning someone based I a settlement or town. It is thus very similar to two Arabic terms often used in the same way, namely *tamaddun* for civilisation, meaning related to a town or *thaqafa* for cultured, in the sense of being related to settlement. Important is, by implication, that which the term is opposed to, namely those who are excluded: the country bumpkins, the heathens (coming from the heath) and the barbarians or berbers (whose speech is an undignified jumble of primitive sounds) or, in the medieval Arab world, the a'rab, the desert tribes. *"Civilisation"* therefore comes with a very strong tone of superiority, of being *"civilized"* as against *"uncivilized"*, of being the *"citizen"* as distinct from the foreigner Much of this superiority can be identified in social, intellectual and cultural vitality, in economic and political strength, invention and innovation. But it has always vitality, in economic and political strength, invention and innovation, but it has always easily become also a sense of moral superiority, asserting that one's testes, values, learning, order etc, are superior, and possibly the foundation of the material superiority over the others. All too often religion has been mobilised in defence of such a sense of superiority.

The next step is then for the elements which are held in common by a society or group of societies, or at least by the educated elites of such societies, to be metamorphosed into elements, which define a particular civilisation as distinct from others. The term civilisation thus ends up with two distinct but interrelated meanings which Huntington correctly identifies. On the one hand is the civilised as opposed to the uncivilised what he calls the 'civilization in the singular', while. on the other hand there is 'civilization in the plural', namely different civilisations each with its own characteristics setting it apart from other civilisations[1] The discussion on what constitutes a civilisation in this latter sense was particularly lively in 19th century Europe as philosophers and politicians, scientists and colonial administrators sought to agree on the criteria by which they might include the various societies and cultures

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[1] Huntington, pp.40-41.

they came across within the civilised world. At a crude level, of course, that debate is still continuing when powerful world leaders today seek to justify their particular interests and mobilise support for them. The process of identifying and characterising civilisations in this sense became one of the significant factors in the growing breadth of European scholarship, most obviously in the team of scholars which Napoleon brought with him to Egypt in 1798, but also in the increasing interest in archaeology, and the establishment of anthropology and linguistics as disciplines in their own rights, to mention just a few.

At then same time social scientists, philosophers and historians became interested in the rise and decline of civilisations and their interaction[1] This not infrequently produced lengthy arguments for the superiority of European civilisation, as it came to be seen as the culmination of human endeavour building on and going beyond its predecessors in a process of steady historical advance and progress from early civilisations in the East (China and the Indus valley) and Egypt, through the Greeks and then the Romans on till the present - as Hegel would have it?[2] With the passage of time and experience, such optimism did not last. Oswald Spengler wrote his Decline of the West, published under the impact of general disaster of the First World War and more particularly the disaster of German defeat and confusion at the end of that war. In 1934 Arnold Toynbee published the first volume of his massive *The Study of History* in which he distinguished twenty-one civilisations, separate from hundreds of *"cultures"* which did not warrant the epithet of *"civilization"*. At this point the equation between political units, or empires, and civilisations, so common a century previously, had broken down, and Toynbee adopts an analysis of the rise and decline of military states which is familiar from Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima*, His point is that what characterises a civilisation is a spiritual vitality, an *élan vital* as Henri Bergson put it, not the mobilisation and deployment of technological and military superiority[3]

But the pessimism of Spengler and Toynbee, albeit very different in their rationales and conclusions, were not the end of the story. The

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[1] See in particular the study of theories of civilisational decline in Arthur Herman, *The idea of decline in western history*, New York: The Free Press, 1997, a comprehensive overview of the subject, even if one does not have to agree with some of his conclusions

[2] Georg F. Hegel, *The philosophy of history*, transl. J.Sebrce, New York: Dover, 1956, pp.17f.

[3] See Herman, pp.273-282.

much clearer outcome of the Second World War, in which there was a strong sense in Europe and the United States of the civilised world, civilisation in the singular to use Huntington's terminology, of having decisively overcome the barbarism of the Axis powers, seemed to justify a more optimistic outlook on the world and human progress. The weakness of this perspective was obviously that the Soviet Union was a major Victor - but the history was not being written by the Soviets. This optimism really grew in the context of the Cold War, in its discourse of the struggle between good and evil, within which the liberation of colonies and the dismantling of old empires were regarded as further evidence of progress. Optimism turned to triumphalism with the Soviet collapse, as expressed most ironically in Francis Fukuyama's "*the end of history*[1]". Huntington's *Clash*, therefore, continues a long line of theorisation about 'civilisation' and 'civilisations*, in which it becomes clear that the concept is far from having become victim of a consensus. But to allow me a basis from which I can move into the second part of my paper, where I seek to identify what it means to be' western', permit me to quote Huntington's definition of a civilization:

A civilization is the broadest cultural entity. Villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups, all have distinct cultures at different levels of cultural heterogeneity. The culture of a village in southern Italy may be different from that of a village in northern Italy, but both will share in a common Italians culture that distinguished them from German villages. European communities, in turn, will share cultural] features that distinguish them from Chinese or Hindu communities. Chinese, Hindus and Westerners, however, are not part of any broader cultural entity. They constitute civilizations. A civilization is thus the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species. It is defined both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people. People have levels of identity: a resident of Rome may define himself with varying degrees of intensity as a Roman, an Italian, a Catholic, a Christian, a European, a Westerner. The civilization to which he belongs is the broadest level of identification with witch he strongly identifies.[2]

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[1] Fukuyama, Francis, *The end of history and the last man*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992.

[2] Huntington, p.43.

There are three key dimensions to this definition. First is the implied structure which takes the form of a hierarchy r ch like the patriarchal segmented kinship structures familiar to social anthropologists. Second is the use of culture as a subcategory of civilisation. Third is the definition by objective and subjective elements.

The first of these strikes me as just simplistic, even if we limit our selves to discussing the village example offered. It ignores the fact that the dichotomy village-city is often of much greater significance and a much greater cultural divide than is that between villages in two different regions or countries, both objectively and subjective. Particularly in contemporary Europe there is likely to be a greater objective as well as subjective identification of city dwellers across regions with each other than between a city and its rural hinterland, in certain circumstances. And circumstances are another reason why this hierarchy of cultural subcategorisation is questionable. The choice of subjective identification depends on the circumstances in which and the purposes for which such identification is made. Such choice are made not only on material and ideological grounds but also in relation to the discourse dominant in the time and place and the contest for allegiance to an identification is one in which discourses are also in competition[1].

This overlaps with the second dimension, namely the use of culture as a subcategory of civilisation, a corollary of which must be a growing distance between subcultures at the same level as they are located in various subcultures at a higher level and even more so when they are located within different civilisational 'segmented kingroups'. This can most clearly be demonstrated by a diagram:

Civilisations:				A						B	
Cultures level	a	b	c	d		a	b	c	d		
Cultures level 2	a b	a b	a b	a b		a b	a b	a b	a b		

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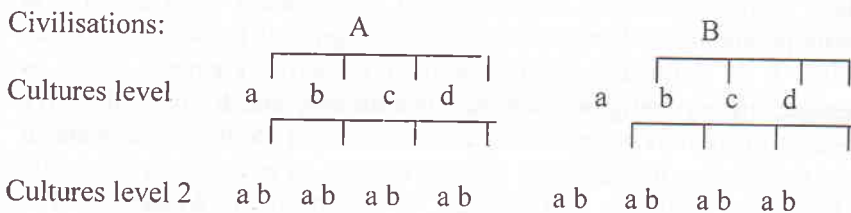
[1] This is illustrated very effectively at the local level in the study of the multicultural London suburb of Southall by Gerd Bauman, *Contesting cultures: discourses of identity in multi-ethnic London*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Here villages (sub-cultures) Aba and Abb (reading downwards through the levels) are closer to each other than either is to Acb, and all three are closer to each other than any of them are to village Bda. Of course, this becomes yet more clear the more sublevels we add. The problem is that the real world does not function like this. 1 have already indicated the complication of different kinds of culture, determined by economy, residential and occupational patterns, and government which are central to the distinction between city and village. But the model also falls down in regions which would represent civilisational borders in Huntington's picture. Directly relevant to my subject here is the Mediterranean region where a host of social anthropological research long since bas shown significant commonalities all round the rural societies of the Mediterranean basin[1], so much so that one is tempted to suggest that it is not the Mediterranean which is the border, but the Alps and the Danube. But the Mediterranean is where the borders between Huntington's Western, Islamic and Orthodox civilisations meet.

So let me now concentrate on the third dimension and see how one might achieve a definition of what constitutes Western civilisation, starting with elements suggested by Huntington himself [2] Let us immediately make it clear, says Huntington, that it is not characterised by modernisation: this is common across the globe. "The West was the West long before it became modem," he says. The distinguishing characteristics are claimed to be:

a) *The classic legacy*: the Hellenistic and Roman foundations;
b) *western Christianity* Catholicism and Protestantism;
c) *European languages* and the absence of a still dominant single language;
d) *separation of spiritual and temporal authority* and the history of clash between church and state;
e) *rule of Law* leading to constitutionalism and the protection of human rights;
f) social pluralism: the significance of groups identified other than by kinship;
g) representative bodies at various levels of society; and

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[1] See, for example, Pitt-Rivers, Julian, Mediterranean countrymen: essays in the social anthropology of the Mediterranean, Paris: Mouton, 1963; and Peristiany, Jean G. (éd.), Honour and shame the values of Mediterranean society, London: Weldenfeld and Nicolson, 1966.
[2]Huntington, pp.69-72.

h) individualism.

Huntington acknowledges that the classical legacy is also shared by Islamic civilisation although, he says, to a lesser extent. However, the impact of the classical legacy is uneven across Europe, as it is across the Islamic world. While in southern Europe it survived for many centuries primarily in the structures of the Catholic church, then heritage of classical philosophy and literature was a much later arrival and impacted more strongly in northern Europe through and after the Reformation, and particularly strongly in the 17th and 18th centuries, and only from there did those dimensions of the classical heritage seep southwards into Mediterranean Europe. This view of the classical heritage also profoundly ignores the impact of Arab-Islamic culture on the development of medieval Europe. This is not just a question o the well-known processes of transmitting parts of the Greek literary heritage - aspects of philosophy, the sciences and mathematics - but goes much deeper. My own personal view, in no small measure under the impression of the work of George Makdisi[1], is that Arabic-Islamic culture is as much a part of Europe's classical heritage as is the Greco-Roman. Arabic, I believe, in its lime had as much impact on west European learning as did Latin and Greek. The period of the impact was, of course, much shorter but through Spain and Sicily Arabic-Islamic learning became the model for the appearance of the universities of Bologna Paris and Oxford, in terms both of institutional structure and of structures of teaching and learning. This source had to be suppressed because it fed into the growing Christianisation of western Europe, the establishment of Catholic Christendom, of which the Crusades also were an aspect. The fact of the non-Christian origins of so much of this learning meant that it could not be acknowledged and thus suffered a fate similar to that of some of the writings of Aristotle and certain scientific traditions which were felt to be threatening to the church. In a similar fashion, the Greco-Roman heritage was absorbed, selectively, by Islamic cultures, having a stronger impact in some regions than in others, and in some fields of scholarship and society than in others. So if one analyses simply this one characteristic, it becomes very difficult to generalise and particular difficult to identify a border. The model surely is one which consists much more of gradations and shadings, of transitions and interactions rather than borders and separation. It seems to me that it is possible to engage in a similar analysis of the other characteristics which Huntington identifies. It is

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[1] In particular his magisterial *the rise of humanism,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990.

hardly a century since Latin was still very much a dominant language of learning in much of western Europe, and arguably English is beginning to replace it. And if one looks at other areas of the world one has no difficulty in observing a plurality of languages which far surpasses that of Europe, even in the Arab world if one mobilises more flexible definitions of language than those commonly used in the region. Similarly, it is difficult to see how the Islamic world could not also be regarded as characterised by the rule of law, in this case of the Chari'a.

Someone may then wish to argue, correctly, that in history it has been common for autocratic rulers, often of military origin, to abuse, subvert or simply ignore the law, but the same can equally be said of western European history. One is here in danger of again being seduced into the essentialist discourse which selects one dimension, the rule of law, as being of the essence of European civilisation and another dimension, arbitrary rule, as being of the essence of the other, be it Islamic (Huntington), Arabic (Toynbee) or Asiatic (Marx).

I would be quite happy to raise similar kinds of questions to each of the other characteristics of Western civilisation that Huntington identifies. But does this mean that we are left with nothing? I think not. Firstly, I believe that it is a precondition that the concept of civilisations be exposed to strong and detailed criticism of the kind l have suggested. Above all I believe that the idea that there is something essential which sets one community or civilization apart from another is centrally flawed. But this does not mean that one cannot look at what it is that makes communities, people, nations, etc. different from each other. For the differences are undeniable, even if they are not of the essence.

But to do that we have to be conscious of what it is that we are actually engaged in, which means asking ourselves what it is that we bring Into this enquiry that might have an impact on the way we see things. This is often simply a matter of bias due to familiarity, so that what I have grown up with, understand and am confidently able to deal with tends to be better than the strange. And then there are degrees of strangeness - and before we know what is going on we have ended up with a segmented kinship structure of the kind suggested in my diagram earlier. But it is also influenced by the dominant discourse, the ways of talking about and categorising phenomena which currently dominate. Fifty years ago few people would have sought to explain political events in terms of a clash between, for example Islam and Christianity. In those days, the categories tended to be imperial against colonised, soon to be

interrelated to capitalist versus communist or socialist. Local and regional conflicts were national or tribal in nature, and national was often defined in racial-linguistic terms. In the Middle East it was still common to talk of tensions between Persian and Arab in terms of a clash between Semitic mid Aryan or Indo-European, as if there was a 'Semitic mind' which was essentially different from the Indo-European. In Europe itself, what Huntington identifies as a distinction between Western and Orthodox would in those days have been talked of in terms of Western versus Slavic. But as religion in recent decades has become an increasingly preferred flag of convenience, especially for the media (the Lebanese civil war, starting in 1975, was one of the key factors in this development, in my view), so we tend to look to religion as a primary element of the essence characterising one group over against another. And each time then discourse changes, so the groups change to fit new identities and, with them, the borders between them.

Another reason why we today tend to be so easily allured into the analysis of essential differences Is, I suspect, long-distance travel, first by sea and then by air. We leave one city in one continent and land in another city in another continent, and we are struck by the marked differences. It becomes easy to say, having landed in Istanbul after a four-hour flight from London, to remark at how 'oriental' this is, so obviously different. It is not the same if one travels between the two cities at a more leisurely pace overland. No\v one experiences the slow and gradual changes and mixtures on the way: the eastern Mediterranean styles of architecture, very Mamluk, in some of the monumental buildings of Florence; the social life in the streets, families of several generations window- shopping in the evenings; the gradual changes in the appearance of towns and village as one travels into the Balkans. Are Sofia, Thessalonika and Edirne 'European' or 'oriental' in this shaded and graduated spectrum? Where is the alleged border between the two alleged civilisations? I am sure the same exercise will lead to a similar uncertain picture of shades of grey, of mixing and interaction, anywhere else.

My own suspicion is that the attraction of the idea of civilisations in clash, which has seduced so many sectors of the media, politics and academia, is primarily a consequence of the globalisation of the media. On the one hand, it is difficult for the ordinary person living in a small-town in the English or French provinces to understand what is going on in, say, northern Nigeria in terms of contests over the control of local, regional and national political resources, or of contests between the economic interests of cattle herders as against landowners, peasants and

urban traders. It is easier to understand it in terms of Muslim-Christian conflict and thence to fit it into something they have learned in their history lessons and generations of story-telling. On the other hand it is therefore also easier for the conflicting parties to appeal for support across continents, for which the modern media are eminently suitable, on the basis of the only perceived element of possible sympathy and solidarity, shared religion. We have seen the same process taking place in the internationalisation of the Sudan conflict, of the collapse of former Yugoslavia, of war in Chechnya and instability in Indonesia and the southern Philippines.

There is a further dimension which I find lacking in most of the discourse of civilisations. In many ways it is an elitist discourse whose greatest danger lies in its simplistic transmission into popular discourse. Almost by its nature, it seems to me, the data and analysis which are mobilised are those of the elite. So it is the culture of the urban scholars and literary classes which defines, in part because they have produced the sources we use and also because the members of those classes today are the ones who are producing the discourse. So it is that western Europe and its heirs in the Americas (including Latin America) and Australasia appear to be a common civilisation. We have a shared intellectual heritage which bridges across the varying intellectual traditions of individual national- linguistic groupings. This heritage is the product of a commonly held foundation of learning which arose out of the structures of the medieval Roman Catholic church. As the church lost its monopoly over learning, so new more secular trends arose but built on a common reference foundation. As French and German became the languages of a more secularised ruling elite in eastern Europe, so also the intellectual production of, above all, Russia became part of the European intellectual space. But it was this same space which produced the pollution of national racist and absolutist ideologies and the barbarism of two word wars, the experience of which, surely, must be the major challenge to Huntington's claimed characteristics of Western civilisation.

But there is more to the life of communities than intellectual heritage, If we delve below the surface of the literary elites, other things are going on. A massive *"European Values Survey"* undertaken during the 1960s-80s suggested that the so-called Christianisation of Europe was itself a quite superficial phenomenon. The symbols and the language of Catholic Christianity became dominant during the middle ages, but they often only provided a thin covering over older values and practices. Some of these resurfaced centuries later; for example in the production of folk-

nationalist practices during the 19th and early 20th centuries. At the level of village cultures, or in the trade and craft guilds of the medieval towns, Europe did not become one common civilisation. As already indicated above, at this level there remained a great deal of common ground across the Mediterranean Sea.

The interaction spread much wider and at the same time there remained significantly distinctive regions. On the one hand, the exchange along the Great Silk Route meant that cultural goods-whether material artefacts, ideas, or methods and structures of economy and governance-moved around and influenced each other from the far east of China, through Central Asia and the Persian/Turkish regions into the Middle East and the Black Sea region and on to the Mediterranean regions, south and north, and along the rivers and coastlines into northern Europe from Kazan to Dublin -and back again. On the other hand, there remained right into the modem period distinct regions which were internally much more integrated than they were externally. They changed over history. Twelve centuries ago one might have identified the Celtic north-west as contrasting to the Viking north-east or devoted attention to the contest between the Latin Christendom of southern Europe and the Celtic version of the north. These are not just historical curiosities because the ultimate victory of the Latin version was to set the tone of what became the Catholic Europe of the Renaissance. But at the same time, the consultative nature of tribal governance in pre-Christian northern Europe is arguably much more important in the development of European democracy than is the more common reference to the *"democracy"* of ancient Athens, although the latter provided much more of the language and vocabulary in which it was expressed. Even the Mediterranean unity posited by Fernand Braudel[1], which I have suggested is much more than just that of a border region, may have to be thought of very much in eastern and western terms, in which the eastern became much more heavily influenced by a combination of Ottoman and Orthodox in terms of its external images and self-perception while hardly impacting on the whole sea as an economic unit[2]. Other research suggests that by some criteria one can, at a certain period, identify a common cultural region of the Atlantic seaboard stretching from Morocco to Scotland to parallel

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[1] Femand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*, 2 vols., London: William Collins, 1972
[2] See Molly Greene, *A Shored World: Christians and Muslims in he early modern Mediterranean*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

other water-based ones of, for example, the Rhine and Danube basins, and the region from the Baltic along the Russian rivers to the Black Sea.

Today, it is no different. Does the rush of formerly communist states in central European to join the European Union and NATO suggest that the border between the Western and the Orthodox civilisation is moving eastwards, or that the initial categorisation is basically flawed? Are the tensions between Morocco and Spain over everything from fishing rights, the management of migration and trade (licit and illicit), and sovereignty over imperial remnants such as enclaves, part of a clash between Christianity and Islam or simply what they are, namely the kinds of conflicts of interest between states which have always been the main course on the menu of politics and history?

So two basic questions remain, namely what is the basis on which Huntington has identified his civilisations, and what is the basis on which we today so commonly talk of Western or, for that matter, civilisation? My own view is that the definition is primarily a political one. By Huntington's own definitions it is difficult to justify the distinction between Western and Latin American, unless it is a political one (NATO and the others). It seems to me that he grossly underestimates the continuing commonality between Spain and Portugal on the one hand and Latin America on the other, but Spain and Portugal are not located in his Latin American sphere. His African civilisation, effectively the non-Islamic sub-Saharan part of the continent, receives the least attention in the book and is usually presented in terms of how it is not 'Western' rather than in terms of what it is. It becomes a civilisation by default because he really does not know what to do with it on his own terms. His 'Orthodox' comprises the Balkans (although without Albania, which is 'Islamic') and the former Soviet Union, including Kazakhstan leaving the remaining Central Asian states transferred to the Islamic. On his own terms one would have expected Kazakhstan and large swathes of Siberia to have been excluded from the Orthodox - elsewhere, especially in Africa, he does not hesitate to run a civilisational border through existing states.

Because the criterion is, in my view, primarily a political one it is also only speculative and essentially temporary. The eastern border of" *Western civilisation"* has, in fact, during the last decade or so been extended eastwards to include the new NATO member countries as well as those on the waiting list. This is going to be difficult to maintain, if the internal opposition within some of those countries to EU membership increases in tandem with growing hesitation among certain EU member

states to the expansion project. But these political alliances are not congruent with other dimensions of cultural and human interchange which continue strongly across the borders. One can think of the Mexican membership of NAFTA, the global transnational networks of Chinese culture and business and of the Roman Catholic church. And so on.

Given this, we can also start to work much more constructively, especially among scholars, in progressing the dialogue of civilisations. On the one hand, the task is to deconstruct the whole manipulative approach to the concept of civilisations in ways such as those I have touched on in this paper. On the other hand, it is to identify the many areas of criss-crossing commonalities and shared Interests and to develop them for their own sakes. This means that for some purposes we will have natural colleagues in one network of countries, locations, institutions and disciplines, while for other purposes the network will look different. In this way our mutual understanding can be enriched and diversified and we can break out of the sterile and futile attempts to create monoliths and borders where none exist.