

## **The need for a dialogue between civilizations**

### **Islamic-Japanese –Western civilizations**

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#### **ملخص:**

في طرحنا لموضوع الحضارة الإسلامية والحضارات الأخرى سنحاول الأخذ ببعض التجارب التاريخية لكشف الحاجة الملحة للحوار بين الحضارات. سأتخذ من الحضارة اليابانية مثالا يسعى للأخذ بالقيم الإنسانية الإسلامية بعد أن أصبحت تعاني من فقدانها للقيم الإنسانية، وذلك بعد العرض لخصائص الإسلام كدين وسلوك وطريقة حياة. ثم سأنقل لدراسة العلاقة بين الحضارة الإسلامية والحضارة الغربية وإعلان هذه الأخيرة الحرب ضد الإسلام، ومسؤولية الإسلام اتجاه مشروع الحوار بين الحضارات. خاتمتي ستكون ضرورة استخلاص بعض الدروس من الماضي من أجل بناء حضارة عالمية حديثة يكون فيها الحوار خيارا استراتيجيا تفرضه التحديات الكبرى التي تواجه الإنسانية، على اعتبار أن الحوار هو الوسيلة الفضلى للتعايش بين الأمم والشعوب بهدف إشاعة ثقافة التعايش والتعاون على جميع المستويات.

### **Abstract:**

In addressing the subject of Islamic civilization and other civilizations I will attempt to draw from some specific historical experiences the need for a dialogue of civilizations. I will look at the specific example of the Japanese civilizational needs to Islamic humanistic values, after considering more generally the historical progress of Islam as a religion and as a behavior, a way of life. Then I will study the relation between Islamic civilization and the western civilization and its declaration of hostility against Islam. and the responsibility of Islam towards the project of dialogue among civilizations. My conclusion aims to draw lessons from history in order to build a universal civilization based on dialogue as a strategic option, mandated by the major challenges confronting the humanity for spreading far and wide the culture of coexistence and cooperation at all levels.

### **Introduction:**

The need for a dialogue between civilizations has, in recent years, been expressed by those who desire to give a thoughtful and positive response to the rather pessimistic view of the future presented by Samuel Huntington in his widely discussed 1993 article, "the Clash of Civilization.". The term "Dialogue " became famous after the united nations adopted a resolution to name the year 2001 as the year of Dialogue Among Civilizations.

In addressing the notion of Islamic civilization and other civilizations I will attempt to draw from some specific historical experiences. I will look at the specific example of the Japanese civilizational needs to Islamic values, before considering more generally the historical progress of Islam and the relation between Islam and the west. My conclusion aims to draw lessons for the modern Islamic civilization in its relationship with nowadays world.

### **Definition of the term civilization:**

First, it would very useful to define the term civilization; there are many definitions given to the term 'civilization', adopted by different schools of thought which adopts them. In his book *A study of history*, the british scholar Arnold Toynbee compared between civilizations in order to discover trends and laws of civilizational organization. For him, comparative study of civilizations were the real units of history. He argues that all civilizations have a point in common, which is the fact that a civilization is by definition a distinct category different from primitive communities, although these communities far outnumber civilizations<sup>1</sup>.

Ibn Khaldoun, the Arab North African polymath developed a theory of the rise and fall of civilizations, in his encyclopedic work "the introduction of history", he defined civilization as "a sophistication in luxury and the mastery of crafts used to advance it in various aspects such as cooking, clothes, decoration, architecture, and all social situations. Each of these requires skills and crafts to achieve it. They are specific and corollary one to another, but vary according to the variation of the inclination of the soul towards the pleasures, delights and enjoyment of luxury that are determined by the decorum. Therefore, the cycle of civilization related to monarchy is necessarily intertwined with the cycle of peasantry, since peasantry and monarchy are consubstantial with one another"<sup>2</sup>. He added that monarchy and statehood are the ultimate expression of nationalism and that civilization is the ultimate expression of rural life. Every

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *Summary of a study of history*, v1 translated by Fouad Mohamed Chebel, Culture Directorate, League Of Arab States, Cairo, 1966.p.21.

<sup>2</sup> Abderrahman Ibn Khaldoun, *Al-Muqaddima*, Dar Nahdah, Cairo,p548.

human entity be it peasantry, civilization, monarchy or the folk, has a limited lifetime like any of its individual constituents<sup>1</sup>.

Bennabi ,The Algerian thinker provides a more elaborate definition of civilization giving equal importance to the material and non-material aspects of civilization. for Bennabi, civilization is the sum total of those moral and material means that enable a society to provide each of its members with all the social services needed for him to progress<sup>2</sup>.

The term civilization has evolved from an era to another. In modern times, the American historian, Diorant, asserts in his large encyclopedia « the story of civilization », that civilization is a social system which allows man to increase his cultural production. Civilization is made up of four components : social resources, political systems, ethical standards and the pursuit of science and art. It begins where anguish and uncertainty end. Because fear prevents human being to be creative, but once he is free the naturel factors will push him to understand life and its flowers<sup>3</sup>.

However, the most comprehensive definition which expresses the general meaning of civilization is the one which views civilization as the expression of a system of beliefs, values and principles as well as the synthesis of human activities in the various fields of science, literature and art, without any distinction whatsoever, along with the ensuing trends, tendencies and tastes

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> - مالك بن نبي : مشكلة الأفكار في العالم الإسلامي، مكتبة عمار، القاهرة، 1971، ص 50.

<sup>3</sup> - ول وايريل ديورانت: قصة الحضارة، ج 1 ، ترجمة: زكي نجيب محمود، دار الجيل، بيروت -لبنان، 1998، ص 3.

shaping the pattern of conduct, the lifestyle, the way of thinking and the standards to be heeded and sought<sup>1</sup>

Based on what is said before, we can say that civilization starts from the interaction between various cultures, whose features and specificities are shaped by peoples of different origins and cultures. Those cultures merge together in one main stream that constitutes civilization. Let us see now what does it mean the term dialogue of civilizations ?

### **Definition of the term dialogue of civilizations:**

Seeking to reinforce the concept of dialogue and coexistence among civilizations and cultures, the General Assembly of the United Nations issued a resolution proclaiming the year 2001 the United Nations Year for Dialogue among Civilizations. The General Assembly affirms in its charter the following principle: "reaffirming the purposes and principles embodied in the charter of the United Nations, inter alia, call for collective effort to strengthen friendly relations among nations, remove threats to peace and foster international cooperation in resolving international issues of an economic, social, cultural and humanitarian character and in promoting and encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all..."<sup>2</sup> this latter declaration expresses the United Nations's firm determination to reject the theories of inter-civilization conflict which should generate lack of confidence and curtail the basis for peaceful interaction among states.

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<sup>1</sup> Abdulaziz Othman Altwajri, The characteristics of the Islamic civilization and its future prospects, Publication of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization –ISESCO-2002, pp10-11.

<sup>2</sup> White book on Dialogue Among Civilizations, Publication of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization –ISESCO-2004, p15.

It should be noted, as Altwaijri said, that The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization initiated a scientific approach to the concept of dialogue, based on a historical, inductive methodology which lead to the conclusion that the concept of dialogue was a brand new notion in the field of modern political and cultural thought. He adds that dialogue was not a term of international law and did not figure in United Nations Charter, nor the universal declaration of human rights, the international convention on economic and social rights, and far less the declaration of the principles of international cultural cooperation. Based on the above fact, Altwaijri concludes that dialogue is a civilizational, political, ideological and cultural concept and not a legal one<sup>1</sup>.

Historically speaking, the process of Dialogue among civilizations might, perhaps, best be described as an almost imperceptible and gradual movement of intermingling and mutual influencing. When this continuous chain of interaction is broken down in terms of centuries or decades, an almost cyclical pattern emerges of "dominant" and "recipient" cultures or civilization with both sides changing roles regularly as a result of various inter-linked factors.

But how to achieve these fundamental goals ? How to define and enunciate these desires ? It is here that the need for civilizational dialogue lies. It is only through a dialogue among civilizations that people's basic needs and desires can be restated and new solutions sought. No culture, no political, social or economic system is perfect. In any part of the world, there are successes, but also defects, abuses, and lacunae. Contrary to the historical optimism popular in the early

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<sup>1</sup> Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, The characteristics of the Islamic civilization and its future prospects, p30.

part of this century, we must recognize that sometimes things get better, but at other times they get worse. Societal and political structures can be improved, but they can also be allowed to atrophy and grow ineffective<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, the civilizational interchange we envision is not founded on any particular ideology nor does it assume that one civilization or culture has succeeded in responding to basic human needs better than any other. Each civilization can show great achievements in some areas, but has much to learn in others. Technological advances and urban accomplishments may be accompanied by a loss of identity and family solidarity. Particular experiments in social welfare programs can result in dehumanization, loss of dignity and discourage initiative. It is only in dialogue that we can share our insight and benefit both from the successes and failures of those of other cultures<sup>2</sup>. So we need for a real and serious civilizational dialogue, and we need to recognize the cultural complexity and variety found in civilization.

### **The need for a dialogue between Japanese civilization and Muslim civilization:**

My starting-point will be the concepts of Islam and civilization. Before we come to what Muslims have done, thought and achieved over the centuries, it is relevant to recall what Islam itself is as a religion, a faith, a way of life and, more importantly, a

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Michel, Contemporary Civilization: Trends and Practices, AbdulAziz Public library, Riyadh 1425-2004, p 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid; P23.

motivating force for individual Muslim and Muslim societies the world over.

Like every Muslim, I turn for guidance to the holly Koran, and, in this holly book, to the Surat-ul-Fatiha. These seven most repeated verses have been variously referred to as Umm-ul-Koran. The prayer contained in the Surat-al-Fatiha, is addressed to Rabb-ul-Alamin, Lord of all creation, and not as we tend to believe these days, to Rabb-ul- muslimin. So what is recognized in Islam, was the universality of its message, not just to Arabs or Turks, but to any soul who wanted to connect to the one Maker of this universe. The meaning of the word " Muslim" means one who has entered into peace and safety through recognition and loving obedience to the Creator; the God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus (Peace Be Upon Them) and Muhammad (Peace and pray Be Upon Him) the seal of the prophets.

Islam ,on the other hand, is a dynamic and simply enunciated recipe for social reform, and for rectitude, honesty and fairness of human conduct in worldly affairs, and for the direction of all human activity toward the understanding of Allah 's immutable laws, even though it is known that they will always remain only partially revealed. For the Muslim, there for, the material world around us is not only real but worth discovering, cherishing and improving in the direction of the Divine Path. Salvation in Islam is admitted by faith, yet it is faith in the validity of works<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Arif Hussain, Islam and Other Civilization, Paper presented in the conference of Islam and the Dialogue of civilization, Volume 2, King AbdulAziz Public Library, Riyadh 1425\_2004, P 10.



In the religion of Islam, all the acts of worship are oriented in two directions: to Allah and to people. When a Muslim makes an act of worship, it brings him not only closer to Allah but also closer to his brothers in Islam. The worship dedicated to Allah helps him to consolidate his relationship with other people of the same belief.

In addition, the Islamic civilization is the outcome of the interaction between the cultures of the peoples who converted to Islam either out of faith and conviction or out of allegiance and affiliation. It is the offspring of the cross-fertilization of the cultures and civilizations that were existing in the regions brought under the umbrella of Islam during Islam's expansion, and the product of their melting in the pot of the principles, values and ideals that came with Islam as a guidance for all the people on earth.

The specifics of the Islamic civilization do not isolate it from other human civilizations. They are rather elements of force which incite for dialogue and push for coexistence. Based on what is said before, the aim of all civilizational efforts is to promote the condition of man himself, for ignorance, barbarism and errance lead to utter decadence. What would then be the significance of material progress? Western civilization has so far been unable to achieve this human progress in full consonance with the faith in the might of Allah, the Creator of the universe, a faith liable to secure quietude, contentment and feeling of rational and emotional security. The Islamic civilization, by contrast, was and is still founded on this vital element of faith. It is really a civilization of faith, intrinsically and heartily, humane and merciful.

In this respect, it is worth pointing out that Japanese civilization is suffering from the lack of human values. Nowadays, Japan is a civilized and advanced society which all people think that it has preserved its language and its identity, and is able to compete

with the west in frontier scientific and industrial domains, but has been so far unable to achieve human progress.

Habeebah Nakata <sup>1</sup> tries to make a comparison between the Japanese community and Muslim community. She said humanity is in danger in Japan. People living in urban areas are suffering from the lack of humanity. She explains in the same article that Japanese isolate themselves from each other by erecting a high mental barrier and they try to have the least contact with strangers possible. In public they shut their mouth firmly and speak rarely to a stranger as if they don't even share a common language. When one of them loses his way in a street, for example, he prefers walking and walking until he find out his way by himself to stopping somebody and asking him the way. To address a word to a stranger means for him to break the barrier. Far from exchanging a word, they do not even have any eye contact with strangers. Their eyes never meet others' eyes. They show a perfect indifference to the passengers sitting in front of them as if they had nobody in their sight. They keep their indifference even when somebody loses his step and falls down in front of them. They pass by him as if nothing happened and it makes him feel more ashamed and miserable. Nobody stops by him, asking : "are you all right ? " Nobody even looks at him with concern<sup>2</sup>.

The above example is one among many examples that show the cool-heartedness or selfishness of the Japanese. I have chosen

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<sup>1</sup> She is editor in chief of Muslim news magazine in Japan, and a lecturer in Islamic culture at the university of Yama Jouksh in Japan. She authored a number of books in the field of Islamic Culture.

<sup>2</sup> Habeebah nakata, Barrier-free in Japan and in Muslim countries Dialogue through Welfare. paper presented in the conference of Islam and the Dialogue Of civilization, volume 3, King AbdulAziz Public Library ,Riyadh 1425- 2004, P5.

Japanese community as an example because all the world and specifically our Algerian thinker Malik Bennabi were excited by the historical experience of Japan, which had been brought from the medieval to the modern age in only fifty years. Bennabi said that despite Muslims and Japanese similar had attempted to learn from Western civilization, the Japanese alone had refused to borrow the destructive ideas of the west and remained faithful to their culture and history<sup>1</sup>.

This kind of advanced community used to look to the advanced countries such as the USA in order to learn from them about the material welfare. But they also used to look to Muslim countries, which are less industrialized and consequently poor in equipment for people with disabilities, only to show them a model. Habeebah Nakata stated that: "it is difficult for us to imagine that there is anything to be learnt about welfare from these less advanced countries. But is there really nothing to learn from these Muslim countries?"<sup>2</sup>.

These days, a lot of Japanese who visit Muslim countries are impressed by the warmth of people and their spirit of mutual helpfulness. This warmth and spirit of mutual helpfulness are the very things which Japanese people have lost on their way to modernization and the very things which are indispensable for the realization of a true barrier-free society. for Nakata, it is time for Japanese to turn to Muslim countries and to open a dialogue in this domain with Muslim people to learn from them how to recover the

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<sup>1</sup> Fozia beriun, Malik Bennabi His Life And Theory Of Civilization, Budaya Ilmu Sdn Bhd, Mlaysia, 1993. p 5.

<sup>2</sup> Habeebah nakata, Op; cit., P1.

humanity which is now in danger of disappearing from modernized societies.

### **The need for a dialogue between Islamic civilization and the western civilization:**

The subject of relations between the Islamic world and the west world has been widely discussed in political forums, scientific seminars, research centres. The interest taken by these latter in studying the subject of relations between the West and Islam is and was characterized by a tendency towards serving the colonialist forces. The result was that studies were weak in terms both of methodology and of political analysis, and were never meant to be objective.

In this context, researchers tend rather to analyse the situation of the Islamic world from a colonialist background, and make judgements on the political, economic and social phenomena based on views favouring the stance of the super powers whom they represent and not on the grounds that cultures and civilization, like human beings, can not be kept artificially alive. They live or die in accordance with their vivacity and, in this case, vivacity must mean their capacity to be able to adapt to new challenges and to new knowledge and, thereby remain relevant to the living needs of the population<sup>1</sup>.

Turning to the theme of the western civilization and its Islamic counterpart, it would be worthwhile investigating the dynamics of interaction at somewhat greater length. Both have seen

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<sup>1</sup> Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, *The Islamic World and the West : Challenges and future*, Publication of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - ISFSCO-2010, p7.

spectacular growth, and both have dominated by each other, experienced mid-life fatigue and in all these phases, grown together or apart depending on how creatively each has succeeded in responding to the challenge of maturing <sup>1</sup>.

If we examine the early years of Islam we see, in contrast, a dynamic force bursting upon the world, and instantly gaining spectacular successes on every front. The early Muslims were seen as taking on the whole burden and opportunity of government and of cultural creation in the noblest sense. They executed this assignment with great distinction. soon they began to look upon the society they had created with justifiable pride. Their norms of government, their judicial system, their administrative and social order was acknowledged by all as the best the world had seen.

What are the lessons and conclusions we can draw from the few examples from history that we have just mentioned ?Is it at all possible to draw any general conclusions as we make our way through the broader evolution of human history ? Can we see, for instance, any pattern in the past to make it easier for us to understand where we stand now and, what we might do to procure a better future for the human race ?

The most important policy that should be exercised is : those western researchers must organize symposiums rejected the theories of inter-civilization conflict such as Samuel Huntington' theory of a Clash of Civilisation between the western and the Muslim world which has received wide publicity. In addition, these symposium have to develop a strategy for dealing with the challenges described above because since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the

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<sup>1</sup> Arif Hussain, Islam and Other Civilization, Volume 2, King AbdulAziz Public Library, Riyadh 1425-2004, P15.

topic of Islam and its compatibility with western world's values and mores has arisen as a key public policy debate in many countries include concerns about security, and the compatibility of Islam with human right.

For the historian or the philosopher, there is no such thing as dramatic clashes of cultures or civilization. Even wars need not, most often do not, represent clashes of cultures or civilization. they tend rather to be provoked by conflicts between vested interests and socio-political groups within cultures or civilizations, rather than between them <sup>1</sup>.

No civilization can advance from a position of ignorance, and that is why both the civilization of Islam and the west need to learn more about each other. It should not be a simple trade of " oil for fast cars ". Both civilization still believe in the advancement of mankind, and that's exactly where a shared vision for the future begins. The clarity of the teaching of moral guidance and mysteries of the unseen which Islam possesses can balance beautifully with the modern systems of science and technology and organizational ' know-how ' that the west is admired for <sup>2</sup>.

As human beings we all share the same ultimate concerns, and have to live together on this one earth, whether we like it or not. This leads us to what I believe to be the fundamental question. If civilizations do not clash, what is the process of their meeting ?

### **Islam and the dialogue of civilization:**

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid: P13.

<sup>2</sup> Yusuf Islam, Dialogue Of Civilizations : The Future, Make or Break, volume 1, King AbdulAziz Public library, Riadh 1425-2004, p 2.

The word "dialogue" is now in current use not just as a slogan but as a profound appeal for attitudes of mutual respect. It can be understood as a practical tool towards building peace and justice for all. Therefore the particular role of Muslims towards dialogue needs to be studied and supported both for the social and spiritual well-being of Muslims and others but also in terms of their sometimes separate and sometimes joint relationships with people of other religions and ideologies. It is significant that prominent Islamic leaders like Abdullah bin Omar Nassif and Prince Hassan of Jordan have given dynamic leadership to multi-religious organization like the World Conference on Religion and Peace /International. It is significant that Islamic states such as Iran gave strong initiatives for the International Year of Dialogue between civilizations.

A dialogue based on ready access to education and to guidance in values of sharing and caring will not only promote social equity and stability but should promote environment security and sustainability. One of the increasing focal points for Muslim-Christian dialogue and for all inter-faith and inter-disciplinary dialogue in the last ten years has been the response to the environment threats and promises which affect all humanity and all of nature <sup>1</sup>.

One of the features of Islam is the ability to accommodate different cultures within the broad shores of the faith. The Quran is full of references addressed to all mankind, whether of Christian, Jewish or Polytheist faith, calling people to believe in the unity of God and acceptance of all his Prophets and Messengers. *"Oh 'people of the book, come to common terms between us and you ..."*(Al-

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<sup>1</sup> John Taylor ,Thirty years of Muslim-Christian Dialogue, AbdulAziz Public library, Riadh 1425-2004, p 10.

Imran 164) *"Say : We believe in God and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail, Ishaac, Jacob and the tribes... "*(Al-Baqarah 136).

The fact is that even if people refuse this message and remain in their Faith, Islam gave right to continue enjoying protection of life honor, property and religious conscience within the jurisdiction of the Islamic state. Muslim Spain is the empirical evidence of that. As the Quran laid down the tenet : "there should be no compulsion in (sprcading ) the religion; Truth stands clear of error. "(Al-Baqarah 256) The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) confirmed this when he said, *"Every child is born with original nature, it is his parents who make him Christian, Jew or Magian. "* This enshrines the principal of Parental rights in educating their children according to their faith.

What is recognized in Islam, was the universality of its message, and the clearest reference to Multi-culturalism is the Quranic verse which says : *"Oh Mankind! We created you from a single(pair)of a male and female, and mad into Nations and Tribes, that you may know each other(not you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (who he is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)."*(Al-Hujurat 13).

### • Conclusion:

Let us admit, we the Muslim, that The world has changed radically as phenomenon of globalization has touched every human being in one manner or another. Muslim society, like most societies who find themselves on the outer fringes of the mainstream of growth and development, complain about the unfairness and brutalities of an external environment over which they have no control. But dissatisfaction is no substitute for corrective action. Let



us begin to look at ourselves for discovering the reasons why things have gone so seriously wrong.

Let us recognize that what is needed today is a civilizational dialogue which admits that, while no single civilization has all the answers, every civilization and culture has part of the solution to the problems of modern life. Every culture, with the religious faith that shapes civilizations, and at the same time, transcends every cultural system, has its own contributions to make to the dialogue. The dialogue of civilization seeks a humanism that supports the genuine advances of modern life while, at the same time, maintains a critical stance towards modern values.

To say that there is a pure or immaculate civilization or to expound the idea of the uniqueness of civilization is a kind of Nazism or what can be termed as civilizational racism that no civilization can accept. The world has always been a forum for civilizations wherein the civilizations of all nations interact, while preserving their own cultural identity and religious, civilizational specificities.

The Islamic civilization is the most responsible to fulfill the mission of dialogue, given its underlying faith and its universal dimensions that are hardly present in other civilizations.