

ISLAM AND THE WEST. BIOPSIES OF A DIALOGUE

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War Or Peace?

Half a century ago, conflicts between Muslims and Hindus in Malaysia, or between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia, were too distant to arouse curiosity and concern from the Western and Muslim publics. The Chechens have had problems with Russia since at least the czars who often repressed them without the Ottoman Empire's Muslims being aware of it. Such events then rather served for Area specialists (diplomats, business people, researchers...)

Today, a Muslim from Senegal may feel personally concerned by the war in Chechnya. Volunteers from the Maghreb, Pakistan and elsewhere may enlist to defend the Bosnian and Chechen brotherhoods under attack... Meanwhile, the average "Westerner" has become passionate against the development of political Islam and the international terrorist threat coming with it.¹ As the world has become smaller, few public disputes leave "Muslims" and "Westerners" indifferent. Our friendships or enmities against each other are public: demonstrations, petitions, chat on the Internet, media news framing, surveys ...

Conflict, of course, has always existed. It was not impelled by globalization but globalization gave it an unprecedented dimension. First, Islam and the West have to live together before agreeing on how to live together. Secondly, whenever conflict occurs, solidarities are internationalized. Dialogue has thus become the alternative hypothesis to an all out war.

The XXIst Century has not started in an atmosphere of dialogue, quite the contrary. On the Western side, the post-9/11² resurgence of war slogans such as "the clash of civilizations", "anti-modernity", "Islamofascism" etc., may be resurging indicators of the global parochial way of thinking that had permeated the systemic studies of International Relations during the Cold War Era.³

On the Islamic public scene, the international newsbeat is dominated by violations of international law, creeping violence, armed aggression, territories occupation, arrogance, abuse of power and discrimination. Watching on television every night those "Western" armies attack Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq, seeing the cartoons mocking Islam and published by a Danish newspaper in 2005 as well as, the next year, the unfortunate declaration of Pope Benedict the XVIth on Islam⁴ have led to very emotional reactions throughout the Muslim World. These events

¹ Political Islam and international terrorism are related yet different phenomena. They should not be confounded, as is often reminded of in the academic literature. See Olivier Roy (2002) and François Burgat (2005) for instance.

² The starting point of this era is ambiguous, of course. There is no exact date. 9/11 is but a symbolic moment in the militarization of international politics implemented by the Clinton Administration. (see Abdelkérîm Ousman and Houchang Hassan-Yari's thesis in Chapter XIV: « Le schéma ami/ennemi: un obstacle de taille au dialogue des civilisations », pp. 343-364).

³ For more information, see Chadli & Garon (2003).

⁴ Unlike his predecessor, Pope Benedict the XVIth has not focused his pontificate on interreligious dialogue, at least not until the present Canadian Political Science Congress (2009). The declaration in question was issued after the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, in front of a scholars and students audience at the University of Regensburg in Southern Germany. His Holiness has just ventured on a very sensitive issue. The words he has just said and the acute ignorance they imply are unprecedented in the mouth of a religious leader. In an attempt to distinguish between Christianity and Islam with regard to the relationship between reason and faith, he quoted a sentence awkwardly

remind us of the urgent need for a universal theory of dialogue of civilizations prescribing social justice, peace and mutual understanding throughout the world. Unfortunately, dialogue of civilizations is not on the scientific agenda.

Intercivilizational dialogue on the scientific agenda

Sociologists who have examined the relationship between Islam and the West have alternatively focused on the historical encounter of the two civilizations⁵, on the phenomena of dominance and hegemony⁶, on the peculiarities of Islam⁷, often seen as unique, even absurd⁸, or on the critique of this latter trend, commonly named Orientalism⁹. In doing so, these sociologists only indirectly addressed the issue of dialogue among Islam and the West.¹⁰

It is not through the academic circles that the idea of dialogue - an old idea indeed - was reintroduced into international public discourse. Instead, it was a Diplomat and Head of State, the Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, who urged the United Nations' General Assembly on September 21th 1998 to promote international relations based on "dialogue" rather than "shock" of civilizations and to proclaim a "United Nations' Year for the Dialogue of Civilization". Finally, the United Nations adopted a resolution to name the year 2001 as the year of Dialogue among Civilizations. That year 2001 would thus be marked not only by the 9/11 attacks in the United States but also - which is less known - by a series of international conferences on dialogue of civilizations, organized around the world mainly under the auspices of the United Nations and the UNESCO.¹¹

Meanwhile, the theory of the clash of civilisations, as launched in academic circles by Samuel P. Huntington, then professor at Harvard University, in his famous yet controversial article published in 1993, has remained central in explaining the current events on the international scene after 9/11. Developing a counter-hypothesis - intercivilisational dialogue - to weaken the theory of the clash has thus become an epistemologic imperative.

polemic rather than a dialogue. The quotation dates back to the XIVth Century, when a Byzantine emperor was speaking to an "educated Persian" in these terms: "Show me what Muhammad brought to mankind and you will find nothing but evil and inhuman things, such as his call for disseminating the Muslim Faith by waging wars."

⁵ Abdu Filaly-Ansary (2003) for instance.

⁶ Lucas & Vatin (1982), Amin and El Kenz (2005)...

⁷ Maxime Rodinson wrote many books on this topic.

⁸ From Montesquieu (« Comment peut-on être Persan ? » in *Lettres Persanes*) to Enayat (1982), Lewis (1988)...

⁹ Saïd (2005 for instance).

¹⁰ Chapter I reviews some of these publications. It explains how the issue of dialogue is discussed in its interreligious form only while only indirectly mentioned in the scientific literature, even inside pages entirely devoted to intercultural relations.

¹¹ UNESCO : 2001 (1-2-3) & European Union: 2001. Also see Annexes 1 and 2.

Methodology

The research team. Seventeen academics originating from eight different universities across the world¹² thus undertook to research and discuss the challenges to dialogue of civilizations¹³. The diversity of disciplines represented in our group¹⁴ inspired our multidisciplinary vision of the problem of intercivilizational dialogue. Besides, in spite of cultural differences, or maybe because they are so conveniently available, our research team has adhered to the utopia of a universal sociology capable of making sense of cultural diversity and reflecting the challenges of globalization. Finally, we must confess that the construction of a multicultural research team is due as much to chance in the recruitment process of collaborators (the call for papers issued on the Net in 2004) as to our will to lessen the ethnocentrist bias and bring closer different points of view - those of Westerners and those of Muslims - who rarely have the chance to engage dialogue on issues such as:

1. What is dialogue of civilizations?¹⁵
2. How does it work?
3. And why does it perform so badly?

The Exploratory Research Design. New topics call for a comparative case study approach. *A Priori* research designs, founded in a logico-deductive method, are risky at this early stage. Consequently, we choose and scrutinized “biopsies” (cases) in the West and the Islamic World as well, in order to better understand the process of dialogue at work. *A Priori* research designs will become useful only when the scientific world has developed a sufficient understanding of intercivilizational dialogue.

As for the chosen case of dialogue, between Islam and the West, it is all the more relevant in this Third Millennium. After the Jews in the 1930s and the Communists during the Cold War Era, it is now Muslim peoples’ turn to be taken as a security risk¹⁶. Whose turn will come next? Can next turn be prevented ?

Bearing in mind these questions, our objective has been to impulse rather than conclude theory development on the subject of dialogue. Such theoretical development has not really started yet except at the periphery of the public scene, such as between Muslim and Christian theologians, Muslim and Christian intellectuals and humanists, foreign visitors and local hosts.

¹² The Royal Military College of Canada, the Universities of Dokuz Eylul, Laval, Mohammed V (Rabat Agdal.), Sherbrooke, Tehran, Wilfrid Laurier, the Winano State University, along with a Historian from the Avempace’s Public Library in Oran, Ahmed Renima.

¹³ Their research report was published in French in 2008 by Laval University Press under the title of *L’Islam et l’Occident. Biopsies d’un dialogue*.

¹⁴ International Relations, History, Philosophy, Media Studies, Semiology and Semiotics, Political Communication, Management, Cultural Studies, and Discourse Analysis.

¹⁵ See 1.1 and 1.2 hereafter.

1.1 What Is A Civilisation?

From our exploratory investigation has emerged a vision of intercivilizational dialogue: that of a discussion on how to manage the common life of peoples that are similar and different.

Similar and different: there lies the ambivalence of the concept of civilization and its potentialities altogether, both stemming from the utopic belief in the universal human family - or civilization - on the one hand, and from the vital need for any particular civilization to preserve its dignity and choose its own destiny on the other hand.

This ambivalence is raised in the introductory chapter, signed by Homayoun Hemmati and Azzedine G. Mansour.¹⁷ The theoretical tension between the two senses of the concept – "within" and "among" civilizations - is partially mitigated by the practical obligations of living together.

The concept of civilization is also delicate to handle because of its complex and various dimensions that have kept on feeding discussions in academic circles. One of these dimensions, the "imagined community" (Anderson: 1991), may be considered central to understanding the process of dialogue, as it is less the real world than the partners' viewpoints that influence their strategies of dialogue, whether intra-, inter-regional or global. Dialogue is run intersubjectively by its interlocutors.

Finally, in spite of the common belief in their uniquenesses, civilizations are not watertight blocks to one another. They intersect, imitate and influence each other... Similarly, they are not monolithic blocks on the inside. They are comprised of numerous identities that each actor may adopt like: 'I am an academic, a woman, a humanist, and I stand up for each of my identities', for instance. Understandably, the competing identities inside an imagined community may easily clash in a climate of intracivilizational confrontation rather than dialogue and conversation.¹⁸

1.2 Prerequisites to Dialogue

Dialogue of civilizations requires listening and understanding. In other words, the task of achieving consensus on how to live together has language and hermeneutic requirements.

Language requirements. Dialogue is a conversation aimed at bringing interlocutors closer. It is thus logically possible only through a common language, a common code of communication, that we have called "common referentials". More particularly, two common referentials have been made available to dialogue between Islam and the West on the international public scene:

- The common doctrinal source of the three main monotheist religions lies in the biblical tradition going from Abraham to Moses.
- The universality of the human family enshrined in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* - the founding document of the United Nations – of 1948 and later codified by international conventions and treaties

¹⁷ "L'islam et l'Occident. Qu'est-ce qu'une civilisation ? " pp. 15-34.

¹⁸ Charles Blattberg (2003) developed a hermeneutical concept of conversation somewhat different but not incompatible with ours.

Hermeneutics requirements. Philosophical tradition (Buber, Gadamer, Ricoeur ...) assigns hermeneutical conditions to the task of achieving mutual understanding:

1. The mutual recognition of *the Other's* sincerity
2. The mutual recognition that *the Other* may be at least partially right
3. The mutual renouncement to an utopic agreement on all points of divergence between *the Us* and *the Other*¹⁹

2. How Do Civilisations Dialogue?

Civilizations are imagined communities, not discrete reasonable entities. As *ghair 'aqil*²⁰ actors, like the Arabic Grammarians call them, they cannot run a direct dialogue with one another. Instead, intercivilizational dialogue can take place only through individual interlocutors originating from different horizons.

Actors. Dialogue of civilizations is not the sole prerogative of the State actors (politicians and diplomats).²¹ It takes place in a process of globalization that other actors also wish to influence according to their particular goals and visions of the world. A multitude of non-State actors are practically involved: NGOs, social movements, religious elites, media, trade unions, writers, entrepreneurs, international travelers... Therefore, diplomacy is not its sole channel. Immigrants, the religious elite, tourism, international media, international business... are equally implied. Their impact on *the Other's* representations thus needs to be analyzed.

Besides, after observing the role, sometimes beneficial, sometimes harmful, of the greater powers (Europe, United States of America, etc..) and the less powerful (Israel, Canada, Libya, Iran, etc..), we have come to the conclusion that none of the actors involved in intercivilizational dialogue masters by himself alone the construction and deconstruction process of the consensus on how to live together.

Issues at Stake. The dialogue between Islam and the West tries to reach consensus around the issues of living together: equity in the distribution of power and wealth between groups that share the same territory or the same planet²², peace²³, freedom²⁴, security²⁵, social cohesion²⁶, mutual

¹⁹ For a better insight of these requirements, see Ali Zaïdi's Chapter II, "entitled Islam, modernité et sciences humaines. Les promesses de la compréhension dialogique", pp. 35-64.

²⁰ In English : not endowed with reason.

²¹ In fact, the latter two also participate in what we have called "non-dialogue". Such is the case of the "dialogic of complacency" that drives the Canadian-Libyan dialogue (as analyzed by Richard Godin in Chapter III): " 'In short, the tendency of leaders is then to display the business card of the members of 'mutual admiration societies. From this encounter follows the story of a media dialogue founded on unreal amalgams of human rights, democratic reforms and business contracts.' (p. 65) [...] Inevitably, the actors share the same objective: not to undermine the promise of a dialogue which, this way, can never extend beyond the enclosed space defined by diplomatic circles. Such ritual serves as the business card of the 'mutual admiration societies' members. Each Head of State plays flattery and friendship in order to cultivate his relationships with his interlocutor. Gaddafi acknowledges the democratic features of Canada and Martin, the historical value of the former. " (p. 87)

²² See chapters IV, V, X, XI, XII and XIII.

²³ See chapters I, IV, V, VII, IX, XI, XII and XV.

²⁴ See chapters I, XII and XIII.

²⁵ See chapters I and XI.

understanding²⁷, economy and trade²⁸, truth²⁹, secularity in the sense of the neutrality of the State in front of religious differences,³⁰ modernity and its benefits, as well as other universal values which can at times come high on the public agenda: dignity, happiness, freedom ... Such are some major questions that civilizations have faced and that have inspired public debates in human societies.

Three General Findings And One Plausible Explanation

Does Islam threaten the West? This question is in itself an indicator of the poor understanding of the Muslim World in Western societies, due to two flawed visions. The first vision makes Islam the enemy, that is, the bearer of a model of society and a projected future capable of competing with the Western model and replace it. The second vision, against all historical evidence to the contrary, reduces Islam and the West to two "civilizations" hermetic and alien to one another, as if no common history had never linked them. However, it is a different story that we reconstituted:

1st Fact. The war between Islam and the West is far from being a constant in World History. Chapter IV reveals the vanity of the vision of a the fatal clash between two irreconcilable blocks by reminding us of the Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula from the 8th to the 15th Centuries, when many cultures shared not only time and space but also the mission of building a common humanity.³¹ Casting a historian look on this exceptional encounter between Islam and the West, Chapter IV reviews two competing theories on the nature of this encounter that lasted close to seven centuries. It strives to explore the different ethnic components of the Andalusian society and their relationship to each other in order to identify the factors that have enabled these different components, apparently dissimilar both in the religion and culture, to coexist in a harmonious way and to develop one of the most brilliant civilizations in history, thanks to peace, mutual respect and tolerance. From this fact, we must conclude that cultural differences (whether real or imagined) do not necessarily stop dialogue.

2nd Fact. Throughout history, whether in times of crisis or times of peace, dialogue between Islam and the West has been continuous. Sometimes underground and marginal but nonetheless continuous. Chapter V by Ahmed Renima deals with an actor of interpersonal relationships between Islam and Christianity at the worst moments of the Catholic *Reconquista* of Andalusia and the Spanish Inquisition in the late XIIIth Century: Raymond Lulle, a Franciscan scholar who, by his metaphorical paradigm of the three Wise Men - one Jewish, one Christian and the other one Muslim - has largely contributed to soften the rigidity of the Catholic doctrine. Lulle's writings might serve as a hermeneutical model of conversation at times when dialogue between civilizations is inevitable.

²⁶ See chapters XI and XIV.

²⁷ See chapters II, IV, V, VI, VII, IX, XI and XIV.

²⁸ See chapters III, VIII, X and XI.

²⁹ See chapters III, IV, V, XI and XII.

³⁰ See Chapter VII, "Le dialogue islamo-chrétien. Les obligations manquantes de la modernité" by Sami Aoun, pp. 206-207.

³¹ "Al-Andalous: terre de dialogue et de coexistence pluriculturelle ?", by Azzedine G. Mansour, pp. 97-140.

3rd Fact. There is no theological hatred between Islam, Christianity and Judaism that could explain intercivilizational tensions. None of the three monotheistic religions condemns to hell the followers of the two others. Not surprisingly, tensions between the two civilizations and collective delusions in response to collective anxieties do not stem from doctrinal religious antagonisms, even if a discourse of religious conflict sometimes supports mobilization and contestation. In the name of Allah, Ben Laden did not bomb the Vatican but Manhattan.

One Plausible Explanation. The major obstacles to dialogue have not been cultural nor religious but political:

1. Ideologically biased representations of one another
2. Instrumentalizations of collective fears by State and media actors
3. The recent militarization process of World politics.
4. The unbalanced power relations between the powerful and the weak

One first major obstacle lies in the ideological biases forged throughout the centuries by writers, politicians and philosophers from Islam and the West as well. As a result of these biases, the West is seen as an essentially predatory power by millions of Muslims. In turn, Arabs and Muslims (the two terms being usually counfounded) are targeted for the sake of civilization or, in the postcolonial language, in order to curb their natural violence and barbarism. This way, both the people and the elite of either civilization are obsessed by the desire to avoid the dangers posed by on its future *the Other*. A rhetoric of suspicion has so spread on both sides, dominating public discourse and hiding the complexity of reality. Xenophobic fears are then raised more or less consciously and rationally: the fear of losing one's identity, of seeing one's lifestyle change... Understandably, such fears are a major hindrance to dialogue of civilizations.

Chapter XI by Duygu Oztin³² reminds us of a second obstacle to dialogue: collective fears, far from providing an opportunity for the power elite to improve the civic education of its citizens, are rather instrumentalized by the politicians for electoral purposes and by the media in search of sensational stories, as the public debate on the accession of Turkey to the European Union is framed in terms of its "Europeanness" versus "non-Europeanness" rather than the bridging role it could play between the West and Islam. The later frame would have been more favorable to the process of dialogue, however. To institutionalize trade and cultural ties through a contact point between Islam (Turkey) and the West (The European Union) would have represented a golden opportunity to weaken the irrational fears and misunderstandings on both sides. However, this issue has remained marginal or even ignored in public debates in France.

In Canada, similarly, Chapter XII shows that the press in Canada is less prone to discuss with *the Muslim Other* than to animate an intracultural monologue on what *the Us* should think about *the Other*.

The weight of the old stereotypes are thus being reinforced by the insensitivity of media and State actors, more concerned about the expectations, real or imagined, of their national publics and who nourish for that reason this new form of racism that Edward Saïd (2005) has called Orientalism. By definition, orientalism proceeds to design and embellish, on the mirror of an imagined collective *Self* these culturally friendly features that can be found throughout the

³² "Les discours, politique et journalistique, en France à propos de l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne", pp. 289-304.

human species, while dismissing on the mirage of an also imagined *Other* those universally spread negative attributes (Said, 2005).

As one third obstacle, these negative images of *the Other* forged throughout centuries foster the process of militarization of World politics, starting with the most powerful State the beginning of the Third Millennium: the United States of America, while develops the narcissistic reflex to marginalize and even forget the existence of large swathes of the Globe, including Africa and, more particularly, Muslim Africa.³³

These three major obstacles to dialogue add to a greater and fourth one: the unequal power relations between the powerful and the weak. This imbalance, amplified in turn by the strategies of the dominant media and State actors, has created injustice, arrogance from the powerful, resentment from the weak, lack of trust and collective delusions on both sides.

At the micro level of private actors. Let us now consider the role of a few private actors of intercivilizational dialogue: political scientists, international entrepreneurs, refugees and other international travelers. Can they influence intercivilizational dialogue?

1. The role of sociologists and other observers of social phenomena is to improve the understanding of the world and disseminate knowledge. Accordingly, there is a large literature on the Muslim World. However, this literature remains problematic in many respects:

- Most sociologists who study Islam originate from the West rather than Islam
- Most funds invested in research on the Islamic civilization are from the West
- Sociologists of the Muslim world do not study Western civilization³⁴
- Sociology has been more interested in the radical Islamist movement than Islam as a whole.³⁵

This problem pertains more to the sociology of knowledge, which was not studied in our collective book. Nonetheless, just think about how difficult it is for a researcher, if he/she is not well known but wants to bring about an innovative point of view, raise research funds and publish his/her findings in a scientific journal? Understandably, fundraising and getting published are influenced by the uneven balance of power between the powerful and the weak.

2. International entrepreneurship is another important category of non-state actors of intercivilizational dialogue. The management of cultural differences has an important place in the scientific literature on Management. Zhan Su and Hamid Yeganeh in Chapter VIII outlined the importance of entrepreneurs in the dialogue of civilizations.³⁶ Entreprises do not only run this daily dialogue but they develop intercultural management rules at their level. In international business, Islamic and Western actors share a common interest which should transcend cultural differences: the survival and development of the enterprise. As long as there is international

³³ See Chapter IX, "Image de l'Afrique et investissement étranger direct" by Charles Moumouni, pp. 275-288.

³⁴ This fact was noticed by Said (2005) among others.

³⁵ This question has triggered a rich debate between dialogue supporters and opponents.

³⁶ "Acculturation, intégration ou laisser-faire : problématique de la gestion interculturelle", pp. 211-236.

business, there will be dialogue between civilizations. With time and experience, the management rules of dialogue are likely to be improved to minimize the tensions caused by ignorance and arrogance at work within enterprises.

However, this is only an internal dynamic; nothing indicates that this momentum can influence power relations among religions, cultures and civilizations in the public arena.

3. While analysing the problem of adaptation of refugees³⁷, Ridjanovic observed that the media in the host society play a mediating role between the refugees and the host population itself, by informing and educating the refugees. Similarly, the media in the society of origin of refugees and other travelers enable them to maintain contact with their culture of origin and their families and friends left behind. It's in the media on both sides and through their transborder networks of interpersonal communication that refugees and other international travelers thus draw the necessary knowledge to, in their turn, maintain a daily dialogue between the host societies and societies of origin.

As a matter of fact, sociologists, business people, travelers and other private actors run a daily dialogue but for special and private purposes bearing little functional link with dialogue of civilizations in the public arena. At the macro level of social life, these private actors of dialogue merely reproduce the power relations that govern the manifestations of hegemony and power. They are not equipped nor mobilized for building a better world. Their role does not consist of curbing the uneven balance of power between the powerful and the weak, between the unaccountable leaders and the voiceless. For them, transcivilizational dialogue is not an end in itself but a practical necessity of daily life. That may also explain why these actors carry on dialogue of civilizations even in the worst historical circumstances, but without claiming to resolve the macro level problems that hinder dialogue between Islam and the West.

Perspectives for a culture of dialogue

In sum, public and private actors of dialogue have failed to bring Islam and the West closer. The climate is not to mutual trust on the public scene. Being daily fed by the international media, mankind thus keeps on reproducing Islam and the West as two antagonistic worlds, two incompatible macrocultures. The categories of "Islam" and "the West" formerly referred to as plural realities but have later deteriorated into mere clichés of recurrent and obsessive consumption. *The Self* is nothing but the hidden antinomic face of *the Other*. These clichés are found in dualistic and manichean public discourse themes such as: good vs evil, modernity vs archaism, freedom vs oppression, democracy vs dictatorship, debate vs terror, individualism vs parochialism...

After our common history has been so restructured in a binary opposition between *the Us* and *the Other*, the call for dialogue sounds like lip service, if not an empty slogan. As El-Mostafa Chadli writes it³⁸, it is meaningless in a context of political, economic and cultural domination and the threat of open war between countries, movements or groups of combatants belonging to different civilizations.

Given this ideological divide, it is hard to imagine a culture of dialogue that could:

³⁷ Chapter VI, "The adaptation of Bosnian war refugees in Quebec," by Amra Curovac Ridjanovic, pp. 163-186.

³⁸ Chapter IX, "The War of Images", p. 242.

- Restore historical truth, in terms of scientific legacy and cultural heritage, and prevent totalitarian annexations³⁹
- Ensure that scientific and cultural legacy belongs to all humanity - all civilizations have contributed -, that all contributions are framed in their historical context and recognized as multicultural artefacts produced by actors of either civilization.
- Disentangle the distorting, essentialistic and negative vision of a civilization vis-à-vis *the Other*
- Refocus the politicians and media discourse on a better knowledge of *the Other* rather than an ideological weapon of war
- Mobilize cultures as vehicles for understanding, tolerance and openness of *the Self* to *the Other*
- Promote critical thinking and plurality of viewpoints as resulting in fairer assessment of things and events
- Combat all forms of stigma, racism and xenophobia within any given culture
- Deconstruct the weight of old prejudice, fantasies and stereotypes that animate the circles of politics, diplomacy, the media, arts and letters

It remains unclear, in particular, how can be developed a Universal History capable of improving the opinion climate and helping different societies to live together. The challenge may be qualified as enormous. However, it is not unrealistic in the long run because the process of developing Universal History has already been started, however timidly :

1. Globalization increasingly promotes cultural encounters of peoples.
2. The fascination with "the past" is palpable since the end of the Cold War. This fascination encourage "memorial" rites that could help not only to recognize Western and Islamic peoples' shared experiences, such as those illustrated by the three historical chapters "historic" of our book⁴⁰, but also to rehabilitate their respective histories by incorporating them into a universal corpus, rooted in the shared heritage of all mankind.
3. The building of Universal History is already underway in the form of a "diplomacy of memoir" in which several countries participate. In this respect, the Franco-German contribution to a European reconstruction of a common heritage is very edifying. In less than two decades, France and Germany, who share experiences of dramatic conflict, are able to undertake joint initiatives, particularly with regard to the reform of school history books.

The same goes for the reconciliation process initiated between Germany and Poland which, driven by a desire to cooperate in an objective and non-partisan review of the past, have holded regular seminars on lived experiences of the Nazi Era and organized other activities to make these experiences part of a binational dialogue. The case of Switzerland, who decided to officially commemorate the memoir of the Holocaust and the prevention of crimes against humanity also deserves to be mentioned.

³⁹ The expression was coined by Sen (2000), Nobel Prize of Economics in 1998.

⁴⁰ Chapters IV, V and VII.

Similar initiatives for a "dialogue of memories" added colonialism and neocolonialism since the late 1990s, have been undertaken by France and Algeria. If both countries have not been able to reconcile their respective memoirs, they have nevertheless made progress toward dialogue by initiating public discussion of taboo issues such as the massacre of May 8th 1945 in Algeria and torture during the Algerian war Liberation.

Should new institutions be created to remove the obstacles to dialogue of civilizations? The problem is that they already exist: the UNESCO, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the General Secretariat of the United Nations, to name just these three, established as vanguards of intercivilizational dialogue. After several decades of operation, these UN's bodies should be sufficiently trained with the art of strategic planning and sufficiently well informed to minimally circumvent the obstacles to dialogue. They should be in a better position to mobilize member States - these lukewarm actors of dialogue - and facilitate contacts between the voices, even marginal, than can join their forces to promote dialogue of civilizations.

However, in doing so, the UN bodies need the leverage of international public opinion. Indeed, members States providing financial and political resources of the institutions mentioned above are not very motivated to support them in this mission of civil dialogue across borders. They rather focus on Law and Order and the imperatives of *realpolitik*. A culture of dialogue is not their priority.

The general climate being unfavorable to dialogue, it is only at the periphery of the international public arena that marginal voices⁴¹, both Muslim and Western, that can gradually organize solidarity networks in order to re-balance a unjust world order⁴². Indeed, let us not forget that the strategies of actors can be dialogical even in the worst circumstances (one of those voices was that of marginal Raymond Lulle ...) To establish contacts or strengthen their actions, the marginal voice can also mobilize the social movements through which they are already promoting common frameworks concerning the issues on the agenda: the status of women, globalization, fair trade, human rights, minorities, environment ...

ANNEX 1. THE ROLE OF UNESCO

By Azzedine G. Mansour⁴³

(under linguistic review – 1 page yet to come)

ANNEX 2. THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

By Azzedine G. Mansour

(under linguistic review – 3 pages yet to come)

⁴¹ Life across the Globe now implies daily contacts among millions of more or less marginal actors : NGOs, tourists, religious elite, international diplomacy...

⁴² Such networks have long passed the test of time and still exist. Such is the movement for fair trade initiated by the Canadian NGO Plan Nagua. Such are the international Human Rights movement, Reporters without Borders, Doctors without Borders, and most NGOs of cooperation with the Third World.

⁴³ Azzedine G. Mansour is an architect known for his collaboration with scientific dictionaries. He co-edited *L'Islam et l'Occident* with me and El-Mostafa Chadli.

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