

Islam and the West

Hasan Hanafi^(*)

First: the Method

- 1- The topic of Islam and the West is not a new issue that only appeared after the latest events of September 11 in New York and Washington, but is as old as the spread of Islam over fourteen centuries ago around the Mediterranean in the south and the north and then inherited the Roman Empire. When the forces of the European northern shore are strengthened, they invade the African southern shore, and when the forces of the African southern shore are strengthened, they invade the European northern shore, according to the known proverb, "if you do not invade the Romans, they will." During the Crusades, the Western north invaded, from the European shore to the Asian Eastern south of Syria. The south and east, Syria and Egypt, succeeded in curbing the invasion. In the modern age, the West, coming over oceans and seas from Europe, Spain and Portugal, invaded again the south and the east, Africa and Asia, in order to control the old world after it failed in Palestine. Movements of national independence in Africa and Asia liberated themselves from modern Western colonialism, and later Latin America joined in the wars of liberation. Later the Spanish West went through the Atlantic and occupied the Asian East.
- 2- The conflict between the east and west has raged since the conflict between the Persians and the Romans and the victories of Alexander in the

(*) An Egyptian Researcher, Academician, and Intellectual

heart of Asia and the conflict between the north and the south since the conflict between Rome and Catharige (Kortajana) then the conflict over the Mediterranean, both the northern European shore and the African southern shore, though the age of Rome and Greece and the Christian-Muslim Middle Ages, then the modern age. This is an old conflict whose roots are submerged in the cultural subconscious around the Mediterranean. This historical heritage and cultural accumulation made the two shores of the Mediterranean two knights that have fought over history, two strong opponents that could not overcome each other. This is a relationship of love and hatred that has been going on for long, which could be seen in the relations between the north and west, on the one hand, and the south and east on the other. This is what is known as the conflict of "Islam and the West," which coincides with geography and civilization, between two civilizations, Islamic civilization and the Western one, between two geographic areas, the West and East. This is why the dialogue between the north and the south, the Arab European dialogue, and all attempts to set up Mediterranean initiatives stumbled. Such initiatives bring the West to the center of the East and the north to the south. Perhaps the destiny of all the attempts of the African Arab shore and the Asian Turkish shore to join the European Union as well as the Barcelona initiatives will fail if the accumulated historical heritage that resides in the mind and subconscious of peoples of the area, which surfaces from time to time as is case today, is not watered down.

Perhaps the only time when the two sides of the Mediterranean an ideal dialogue among civilizations is the Andalusia period where the Arabs and Berbers, Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived together in Granada, Ash-biliya and Tulaytila and the creation of a human civilization where many cultures melted. In the history of Judaism this period is known as the

golden age. The West witnessed after the withdrawal of Muslims from Andalusia the courts of inquisition against scholars and scientists. The modern Western Renaissance started because of the translations from Arabic into Latin or through Hebrew that were rendered in Tulaytila and Sicily and Byzantine of scientific, philosophic, and urban Arab Muslim heritage. That was the time when Emperor Fredrik the Second spoke Arabic in his court and corresponded with 'Abd al-Haq bin Sab'in.

- 3- The historical heritage of the Arab-Islamic civilization and the Western civilization prevents heavily the development and movement towards a new Andalusian model, that is dialogue among civilizations. This dialogue helps in eliminating the myth of fixed essences of civilizations and national characters of peoples that fight among each other, winning at times and losing at others. It avoids as well in giving absolute judgments that do not take into consideration historical stages and political and social conditions of every civilization. The West is known to give judgment about itself and about the outside world, the non-Western civilization. It analyzes internally the historicism of its civilizations and its process in time and space, while it analyzes other civilization in a non-historical way. Internally, it also avoids value judgments and prefers to be guided by objectivity and neutrality, while it gives value judgments, which show bias and whim. There is a double standard by which the West employs its scientific view of other civilizations and their nature.
- 4- It is unfair to compare between the Western and Islamic civilizations at the same historical moment. For every culture lives its own historical course. The Western culture has passed through three periods: old, middle, and modern. In the old period, Islam did not yet appear or spread. It inherited the old Latin and Greek civilization and the Latin and Greek fathers, translations and commentaries, expositions and briefs, explana-

tions, writings, readings and interpretations. In the middle period, the Islamic civilization went through its golden age, the ages of al-Mutanabi, al-Bayruni, al-Tawhidi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn al-Haytham, which is equivalent to European Middle Ages. Then came the ages of commentaries and briefs in the Islamic civilization that committed all of its past inventions into memory. It is its middle ages, the Mamluki, Turkish, and Ottoman age, the second age of inscription, and it is the age that translation from Arabic into Latin of mathematical, natural, philosophical Islamic sciences. This activity was behind the modern European renaissance. The European Middle ages, from the seventh century to the fourteenth century, correspond to the Islamic golden ages, the first seven Islamic centuries, which Ibn Khaldun wrote its history. The modern European ages, from the eighth century to the twenty first century, which equals our middle ages, from the eighth to the fourteenth century in Islam. Every civilization is now living a different historical period that is different from the other because of their diverse historical courses. Now, the West lives its modern Western ages that started with the religious reform in the fifteenth century, the renaissance in the sixteenth century, rationalism in the seventeenth century, enlightenment in the eighteenth century, and science in the nineteenth century. All this ends with the crisis of the twentieth century and post-modernity in the twenty-first century. Our middle ages that started with Ibn Khaldun during the Mamluki, Turkish, and Ottoman age, the ages of commentaries, briefs, and encyclopedias ends with the dawn of modern Arab renaissance and reform movements in the last century.

- 5- In West, the image of Islamic civilization the stereotypical image inherited from the Turkish, Mamluki, and Ottoman ages, the image that Turkey provided during its Asian expansion into Eastern Europe up to the gates of

Vienna. It is the image that traditional orientalism dealt with in the nineteenth century, and it is the stereotypical image of Islamic civilization after it had lost its pluralism in the six century of the hijra. The West took the image of the Islam that believes in miracles but not in laws of nature, in sorcery but not in reason and proof, in the rights of the ruler but not the ruled. The West knew the common traditional Islam. Therefore, the task of contemporary intellectuals and researchers on civilization should focus on uncovering those aspects that have been excluded and marginalized, especially rationalism or the enlightened Islam, as some contemporary thinkers may call it.

- 6- After freeing the perceived image of the Arab Islamic civilization from the West, the West should be liberated from its own self image and destroy the myth of being the world's civilization. Then the West must be shown that its civilization is a historical civilization that emerged in specific time, space, and peoples. It has its roots in the Greco-Roman civilizations and Jewish and Christian cultures, which then interacted with the European environments and their local cultures, popular myths, and paganist religions. The West has been silent on its Eastern roots in order to continue the lie of the "Greek myth" that was inherited by the "European myth", that is the real authentic genius. It is the civilization that all old and medieval civilizations, from China, India, Persia, Iraq and Egypt melted into, and of which the Islamic civilization was one of its components in its modern ages. Science was separated from its history so that it stays as a pure European genius. Supposedly, the West is inspired by reason and rationalism, science and scientism, and man and humanism. The West alone is the force that discovered man and history and accused the other civilizations of being the cultures of the other world and eternity. This is why a deeply rooted racism was born in the depth of Eu-

European consciousness that appeared in racist theories in the nineteenth century and European centrism in the modern ages and since the new geographic discoveries. Europe is the center of the world, others is the object of study, as is obvious from orientalism. This duality is transformed from reality to a system of values, and therefore Europe is always right and others are always wrong, as is the case with the Islamic movements. It honors its principles, but only with its people. Science, reason, man and progress are honored within the borders of Europe, but collapse outside these borders and turn into their opposites, ignorance, myth, violation of human rights, and backwardness. All of these are of the highest order of racism.

- 7- This historic overview of the conflict and dialogue between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean does not preclude the possibility of another dialogue in the near future over dialogue of cultures instead of the clash of civilizations. Europe played the role of the master twice: first, in the Greek age and, second, in the modern age. The Arab Islamic civilization was the pupil in both cases. Aristotle was the first master and Al-Farabi, the second masters. Ptolemy was the first, and Ibn al-Haytham was the second Ptolemy. The modern philosophers of enlightenment, al-Tahtawi and Khayr al-Din al-Tunusi are the new masters, and modern Arab renaissance is their production. The Islamic civilization played the role of the master once, in Spain, when translation from Arabic into Latin took place, and the modern European ages were the pupil.

Second: The topic

After this historic review of method comes discussion over the components of the topic around which the tension between the Islamic civilization in the south and Western civilization in the north arose, and which led to

misunderstanding of north to south. Because Islamic civilization is the core of the culture in the south and the products of social and political conditions, between the essence of religion and what is made by history, the most important components are the following.

- 1-Linking Islam to terrorism and to not recognizing the other. In fact, this image is deformed. Islam is the religion of liberation from oppression and aggression because of martyrdom and declaring that there are no gods but God, that is the principle of unity that stratifies people against arrogance and tyranny and the false power of the ages, wealth, status, fame, sex, exorbitance, and nihilism.
- 2-Linking Islam to roughness in dealing with the body and the other in general, the roughness of Islamic law in deterrents: killing, crucifixion, stoning and amputation, and exclusion and the deterrents of apostasy, punishment, theft, adultery, and wine drinking. In fact, the media image is purely made to deform Islam as a religion and a culture. Islamic law is a complete whole that cannot be separated, and deterrents cannot be separated from duties and punishments. Deterrents come at the end and not at the beginning, and rights come before duties. It the right of Muslims to meet the basic necessities of life: food, drink, residence, education, health treatment, work, and early marriage.
- 3-Sectarianism and radicalism and rejecting dialogue and hardening of opinion are angry positions that resulted from psychological, social and political circumstances of Islamic Arab societies that do not tolerate opposition and the other's opinion. So it is exclusion against exclusion and rejection against rejection. While difference is a legal right, and subject to the rules of differences, its solution is based on proof and preference. There no divine book that dialogued with the unbelievers as the Qur'an did, which dialogued with the Satan, the unbelievers, the polytheists, the hypocrites, the

magis, and the paganists. The Qur'an used the argument against the argument, the opinion against the opinion, and the proof against the proof. Difference is a norm of nature and life so that people can find unity behind that. For unity is found in diversity, and diversity in unity.

4-The West has superimposed fundamentalism on all of the Islamic culture.

What is meant by this is that culture rejects the new and hold to the old and puts down modernity. It also sticks to forms and manners and the practice of violence internally and externally and the excommunication of society. The West quotes Ibn Khaldun to the effect that the Arabs, meaning the Bedouins, will destroy any state that they control. Bedouinism is against civilization, and the Bedouins are happier in a tent than a state. In fact, fundamentalism is a trend that exists in every civilization that is to his its advantages and disadvantages. For it alerts to the problem of alienation and the loss of identity and infatuation with modernity and the loss of fundamentals and roots. Fundamentalism is not alone but is dialoguing and arguing with modernism, and both complement each other and correct each other. In the West, fundamentalism rejects modernity and the values of consumers' society, and calls for the return to the primitive life as was conceived by Rousseau and a return to nature and early innocence.

5-Islam is accused of irrationalism and too much belief that leads to dependence and predestination, negativism, surrender, inaction towards livelihood and work in this life, and inability to fight the manifestations of corruption. Renan and others accused all of the Semitic civilizations of contradiction because they bring together contraries and lack coordination and deduction and the coherence of forwards with the conclusions. This accusation is untrue, but could only be directed to a few Islamic movements. For belief is a rational demonstration and an emotional endorsement. There is nothing in it that transcends reason, as is the case with

Christian beliefs such as trinity, who is more secretive, or Judaism, as the belief in being a chosen people with a divine contract for a promised land and God's love of His people without earning it. When al-Bayruni studies the civilization of India in his famous book, *Inquiry of India's Sayings that are Acceptable to or Rejected by Reason*, he measures it according to reason. For reason is the start of religious commitment, and speculation is the first of Muslims' duties, and analogical deduction is one of the sources of legislation, and the belief of the imitator is not acceptable, and imitation is not a source for knowledge. The West even attempted to eliminate its rationalism and accused it of formalism and emptiness.

6-It is said that Islam is a religious civilization that belongs to the Middle Ages of Judaism and Christianity, while the West alone is the maker of scientific civilization. Religion and ethics, Sufism and mysticism are the trade of the East. Science and civilization, politics and urbanization is the trade of the West. The East is the cradle of sorcery, mythology, allegory, horoscope, and all sorts fortunate telling. The West alone transformed knowledge from imagination to nature. Islam is that of one thousand and one nights, Aladdin, and other fairy tales, as opposed to the rational West. This is a wrong generalization. Science has its roots in old civilizations of the East, India, politics in Persia, astronomy in Iraq. Mathematical sciences, astronomy, algebra, engineering, music as well as natural sciences, medicine, pharmacy, chemistry, plant, animal and mineral sciences flourished in the Islamic civilization. These sciences in their Latin translations were behind the rise of the Western modern science. For revelation, reason, and nature are one thing in the Islamic civilizational model, as fortune telling and divination were general characteristics of all civilizations, of old Egypt and India as well as the Roman and the Greek, though they took different shapes and forms.

7-It is said that the Islamic civilization did not develop a declaration of human rights, which was announced by the West twice, after the French Revolution and after the Second World War. This is a false accusation. Every civilization has its own humanist tendency as opposed to the natural and divine tendencies. This is represented in Confucius in China, Buddha in India, Socrates in Greece, and Christianity as a new reading of Judaism, and Islam as a new vision of the complete man and his vicegerency on earth and the common characteristics between God and man such as knowledge, ability, life, hearing, vision, speech, and will, which all absolute and metaphorical in God's case and relative and concrete in man's case. The Sufis have recognized unity in all its manifestations and Islamic law has recognized human rights in terms of objectives, as was expressed by al-Shatibi in his five necessities: life, reason, religion, family, and money. In the Qur'an, saving one life is equivalent to saving mankind, and killing one life is equivalent to killing all of mankind. The Qur'an mentions man's grandeur and limits, realities and ideals. He is the man of values and not of relativity, the man that transcends the limits of peoples, nations, races, and sexes. But he is still God's creation on earth and not only the person that exists within the geographical limits of the West and whoever exists outside of it becomes no more than tribes and primitive people who are worth of museums or cultural anthropological sciences. If the Islamic and Arab culture recognized the duties but not the right, the Western culture has been based on rights without duties. The Arab and Muslim have duties and no right, and the Europeans have right without duties.

8-It is said that women's status in Islam is not harmonious with the rights of women in the modern age. She is the female that is opposed by the male; the obedient wife that bears children or the daughter that needs someone

in charge, in charge of offering her for marriage; and her inheritance and testimony equal half of the male's. She should not be a judge or president of a country and should stay at home and put the veil. Many women are married to one man, and men are dominant over women. Men's right to divorce makes women hostages to the male. However, such an image is theatrical folklore that overlooks women's status in Islamic law and reality. The Islamic law was developed in an environment that did not even give women the right to live. They would be buried alive. Islam gave her the right to live. Women then did not inherit or give testimony, and Islam made her a whole person that can keep her name after marriage and gave her the right to financial transactions, the right to get education and work and participate in all domain of social life. She have the right to choose her mate and even the right to ask for divorce if she did not get her rights , as is the case with the law of special divorce where the women can get divorced by a judge. She enjoys other rights that have been tied to Islamic civilization alone such as the right of life to all humans and natural sex and the sanctity of the body.

9-It is also said that Islam does recognize the doctrine of citizenship and equality in rights and duties among citizens and that the Islamic identity is not a national identity and that the Islamic system is a system of confessional peoples that was accepted by the Ottoman Empire the people of the Book where poll taxes were imposed on Christians and Jews for their protection and where they were exempted from military service. In fact, this image also does not capture the pluralism of the Muslim society, for people are equal in terms of rights and duties regardless of their confession, as was state in the "Covenant of the Median," and the Muslim society is by its nature a pluralistic society that is governed by a just law. There are issues such as the poll tax that have been terminated and the people of the

book have become equal to the rest of the citizens. A lot of terms that were coined by older jurists such as *jizya* are not used anymore. For loyalty is now for the homeland, and citizens have rights and duties. The jurisprudence of minorities has had many contemporary advances at the theoretical level to a point where it recognized citizenship and equality of rights and duties.

- 10-What is said about confessions is said about peoples, nations, and tribes, which the West has described in terms of color, the white, on the one hand, against the black, the red, and the yellow, on the other hand. The West seems to have imposed its concepts on other civilizations. However, Islam considered racism to be an element of paganism, Arabism is not based on race but on language, and an Arab is not better than a non-Arab. Preference is given to piety. The person who called for prayer during the Prophet's was a black Ethiopian, Bilal, and al-Najashi, the Christian king of Ethiopia, supported the Muslims and Islam. When the Prophet died, Islam has gone a long way in abolishing slavery, for Islam made freeing slave as a punishment for certain crime and prohibited enslaving those individual who read and write. This meant that slavery was one of the grave sins that should be abolished. However, now while enslaving individuals had been terminated, people are now instead enslaved.
- 11-The Arab character is described in anthropology and literature with lying, hypocrisy, conspiracy, sleaziness, dishonesty, laziness, subordination, no sense of time, sluggishness, tolerance of oppression and poverty, submission, and surrender. It accepts very little and is satisfied by good words; it is primitive in its conception of this and the other life, materialist in dealing with the other and perception of heaven and hell and matters related to the other life. The Arab is known to be exorbitant and miser at the same time. He lives in the past and repeats it and takes from the others.

They are folklore images to make fun of the others that the West attaches to other peoples in order to subordinate them. However, in the Arabic literature and poetry the Arab is described as adventurous, preferring the after life, and death to a humiliating life. He is generous with the generous, honors his promises. These are characteristics of older peoples of the world.