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The Dialogue between Islam and the West: Challenges and Strategies for Coexistence

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Abstract

Coexistence among nations and peoples cannot be achieved in a context of isolation and avoidance of dialogue with others, whether at the individual, group, institutional, or state level. Dialogue helps to bridge perspectives and remove misunderstandings. While some speak of a "clash of civilizations," this notion arises from certain entrenched mindsets. A better approach would be to advocate for a "dialogue of civilizations," especially in a world fraught with violence and the collapse of traditional governance systems. Dialogue is vital, as it is a means of bringing peoples closer together. It is beneficial to understand the West's perspective on the Islamic world, as understanding the other's stance is essential. It is equally important to allow the other to know you, rather than forming prejudiced judgments that can lead to misunderstandings, potentially escalating to violence and war. This war could have been avoided if both parties had listened to each other and engaged in dialogue. This leads us to explore the reasons behind the existing tension and

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suggest practical means and a working strategy to bridge gaps between peoples. This study uses a descriptive and analytical approach to the current situation and history, based on facts and documents. The research findings indicate that the existing differences between the Islamic and Western worlds are due to negative perceptions of each other. Therefore, this study identifies several means to achieve coexistence, such as educational curricula, promoting the values of dialogue and acceptance of the other, avoiding double standards, and working on institutionalized dialogue.

Keywords: Islam; Civilization; Clash of civilization; Acquaintance and coexistence

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 20th century, the world witnessed the First World War, followed by the Second World War. Both wars left catastrophic humanitarian consequences that continue to impact humanity to this day. This was followed by a period of colonization of the Third World under the pretext of protection and progress. However, the reality revealed the colonizers' true intent: exploiting the resources of these nations. Subsequently, the Cold War emerged between the Soviet Union and the United States, dividing the world into two opposing camps—one aligned with the Soviet bloc and the other with the American bloc. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the world transitioned into a unipolar system.

Attention then shifted to a new perceived adversary, as some viewed Islam as the enemy to confront. This led to the spread of Islamophobia, spearheaded by figures such as Bernard Lewis (Lewis, 1990, 2013), who published articles and delivered lectures portraying Muslims as undeserving of democracy and harboring resentment toward the Western world. The stereotypes promoted by Lewis resonated in Western societies due to poor cross-cultural communication.

Mahdi Elmandjra led discussions on the clash of civilizations but approached the subject with the aim of preventing it. He emphasized the importance of establishing values of justice and humanity, avoiding catastrophes that could harm all of humanity, rejecting

hatred and incitement, and building ideal values. In October 1986, during a televised program, Elmandjra asserted that the causes of future conflicts would primarily be cultural. In 1991, following the Gulf War, he stated in an interview with *Der Spiegel* that this war was the "first civilizational war." A few months later, he published a book with the same title, in which chapter 13 was titled "The Civilizational Confrontation" (Elmandjra, 2007: 86).

In contrast, Samuel Huntington (1996: 183 and onwards) asserted the inevitability of a clash of civilizations, particularly in chapter eight of his book. He argued that the post-Cold War conflict would not be military or economic but civilizational, involving the West, Islam, and China. According to Huntington, America seeks to impose its values on the world, while the Third World rejects this imposition. He thus viewed such a conflict as inevitable.

A new phase emerged, characterized by Francis Fukuyama's (1999) discussions on "The End of History." His book, alongside Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, had a profound impact on shaping global policies and exacerbating international conflicts. As a result, discussions shifted from the concept of civilizational clashes to the idea of the end of history. They further evolved into apocalyptic narratives presented by the media, speculating on how the next global war might unfold in the post-Cold War era. This led to a relative erosion of trust among nations, with private interests often taking precedence over collective welfare.

Amid this negative outlook on the world's future, voices advocating for a "Dialogue of Civilizations" instead of clashes began to emerge. Roger Garaudy (1977) was among the most prominent proponents of this idea. In his study, he critically analyzed the historical behavior of the West toward the Third World, highlighting how it relied on military force to exploit other nations for its benefit while maintaining a condescending view of non-Western others.

Simultaneously, some Western scholars produced works that presented a distorted image of Islam. These writings attacked the Quran and the Sunnah, alleging they were fabricated (Goldziher, 1952) and misrepresented the Prophet's image under the guise of freedom of expression. The *Charlie Hebdo* incident demonstrated the Muslim community's reactions to such provocations, which the West did not anticipate. Undoubtedly, every action provokes a reaction.

All the above underscores the vital importance of exploring dialogue as a fundamental mechanism for achieving global coexistence, particularly between Muslims and the West. Highlighting the core principles of Islamic teachings that encourage mutual understanding and assessing their relevance in addressing tensions and misunderstandings between civilizations can play a pivotal role in reducing these conflicts. It can help Muslims understand that the divine purpose of humanity's creation is cooperation, not conflict. Efforts to convey this perspective to non-Muslims could significantly enhance social and political harmony among various groups.

This call for dialogue gains even greater significance in an era where the world has become a global village thanks to diverse means of communication. Effective communication that avoids propagating false narratives holds immense potential for fostering peace.

All these considerations open wide horizons for studying strategies to promote global peace. These strategies focus on strengthening cultural relationships that preserve identities rather than erasing them. At the same time, they aim to promote universal values that affirm human rights without double standards.

Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Explore the Islamic perspective on dialogue and its emphasis on peaceful coexistence, supported by Quranic verses and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.
2. Assess the role of Islamic and international initiatives in promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue, with a focus on both historical and contemporary efforts.
3. Analyze the root causes of strained perceptions between the Islamic world and the West, particularly in relation to media bias, misinformation, and cultural misunderstandings.
4. Identify and examine the challenges facing positive communication between civilizations and the Islamic and Western worlds, analyzing the underlying reasons behind the strained relationships.

Propose practical strategies to enhance communication, foster mutual understanding, and build sustainable relationships between Eastern and Western worlds with the aim of advancing civilizational progress.

Problem

This study addresses a pressing reality in the contemporary world: the misunderstanding between the Islamic world and the West. This raises several questions: What are the root causes behind this issue? What challenges does the world face in achieving global stability and peace? How can the idea of cooperation be strengthened to replace conflict? What role does the media play in either fueling discord or mitigating it? What efforts are currently underway to overcome fabricated problems that lack a solid foundation? Moreover, how can these efforts be activated through specific and effective proposals to have a positive impact on the international community?"

Importance

The importance of this study lies in its attempt to explore the underlying causes of contemporary international conflicts, analyze this reality, and provide practical recommendations to enhance understanding and cooperation among nations. It emphasizes the shared origin of all humanity, underscoring that there are no inherent differences between people—a positive point that should be highlighted to bring individuals, communities, and nations closer together. Additionally, it affirms that preserving the life of others is inherently tied to preserving one's own life. Spreading love and peace fosters an atmosphere of reassurance, a sense of tranquility that encourages the world to focus on constructive civilizational progress rather than the destructive tendencies that currently prevail. Such efforts could have long-term impacts on improving human behavior and steering it toward a better future.

Situation

In the current era, characterized by rapid globalization and instant communication, the world has become akin to a small village. Societies are more interconnected than ever before, yet religious, cultural, and political divisions remain stark. Western perceptions of Islam have largely been shaped by media narratives that often depict Muslims negatively, exacerbating stereotypes and fostering hostility.

Despite these challenges, significant efforts have been made to promote dialogue, such as:

- The United Nations General Assembly's declaration of 2001 as the "Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations," an initiative proposed by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami.
- Islamic summits and conferences emphasizing the role of culture, education, and international relations in bridging civilizational gaps.
- Events like the ISESCO seminar in Damascus (2002) and the University of Sharjah conference (2007), which focused on dialogue as a tool for coexistence.

However, these efforts face considerable obstacles, including entrenched biases, a lack of follow-through, and the persistent influence of divisive rhetoric.

Hypothesis

This study hypothesizes that constructive dialogue based on Islamic principles and supported by international cooperation can significantly reduce tensions between the Islamic world and the West. It posits that misunderstandings, often fueled by biased media, are the primary cause of these tensions. Enhancing mutual understanding through educational programs, purposeful media, and positive communication can play a crucial role in fostering peaceful coexistence.

Justification

The need to study this topic of dialogue has become imperative due to the ongoing conflicts between nations and communities. The issue has been further exacerbated as these conflicts have taken on a global dimension, with intellectual discourse revolving around the idea of a "clash of civilizations," fueled by targeted media narratives that stoke the flames of division. Life in this world is finite, limited to a set span of time during which humanity can choose to live in either suffering or harmony. It is incumbent upon all of us to strive for a life marked by security, stability, and peace, where relationships among nations are founded on goodwill, compassion, and cooperation, forming the basis for civilizational progress and fostering coexistence and positive communication.

This study aims to analyze the underlying causes of the differences between the Islamic world and the West, examine the challenges faced by nations, and propose practical strategies to achieve the stated objectives. These include reforming educational programs,

fostering positive communication through awareness campaigns, and supporting dialogue initiatives to build a foundation for mutual understanding and cooperation.

METHODS

This research relies on a critical analytical approach to study the nature of the relationships between the West and the Islamic world. These relationships have been characterized by tension between the two sides for a variety of reasons, making it important to monitor all of this and conduct a critical study of the stereotypes that have been promoted. The research also aims to address the challenges facing positive dialogue for civilizational building.

Research plan

The research plan is structured into an introduction, three main issues, and a conclusion.

These issues are as follows:

a. Monitoring the Western perspective on Islam and Muslims.

b. Reasons for the tension between the East and the West.

c. Strategies for enhancing dialogue.

DISCUSSION

1. Monitoring the Western Perspective on Islam and Muslims

Throughout history, scholars have noticed the West's hostile view towards Islam and Muslims, expressed through various auditory and visual means, as well as through military campaigns and their behavior towards civilians, including killing innocents, the elderly, women, and children, burning trees, and demolishing houses. Below are some examples that provide a clear picture of this situation:

a. Attacks on Prohet Mohammad (PBUH) Character

The character of Prophet Mohammad has been attacked from various angles, including claims on websites like "jewishencyclopedia.com" that his teachings were derived from Jewish and Christian sources in the article "Mohammad". Western newspapers have dared to publish caricatures of the Prophet in a distorted manner over various periods,

representing a media campaign to defame Islam and Muslims. This Western stance provoked a reaction from Islamic populations who condemned this behavior. Such disrespectful actions hinder the development of trust, peaceful coexistence, and dialogue (The Telegraph, 04 May 2015, 10:11am).

Voltaire also dedicated an entire book to attacking the Prophet (peace be upon him) based solely on unfounded impressions (Voltaire, 2015), and such claims do not require a response from us. On the other hand, there are those who speak about the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) with a sense of fairness. Karen Armstrong wrote about her reasons for writing a biography of the Prophet Muhammad, stating that her motivation stemmed from the distorted image presented by the West. She aimed to provide a fair portrayal, saying:

> *"We have a long history of Islamophobia in Western culture that dates back to the time of the Crusades. In the twelfth century, Christian monks in Europe insisted that Islam was a violent religion of the sword, and that Muhammad was a charlatan who imposed his religion on a reluctant world by force of arms; they called him a lecher and a sexual pervert. This distorted version of the Prophet's life became one of the received ideas of the West, and Western people have always found it difficult to see Muhammad in a more objective light. Since the destruction of the World Trade Center on September n, 2001, members of the Christian Right in the United States and some sectors of the Western media have continued this tradition of hostility, claiming that Muhammad was irredeemably addicted to war… Muhammad was not a man of violence. We must approach his life in a balanced way, in order to appreciate his considerable achievements. To cultivate an inaccurate prejudice damages the tolerance, liberality, and compassion that are supposed to characterize Western culture. I became convinced of this fifteen years ago, after the fatwah of Ayatollah Khomeini had sentenced Salman Rushdie and his publishers to death because of what was perceived to be a blasphemous portrait of Muhammad in The Satanic Verses. I abhorred the fatwah and believed that Rushdie had a right to publish whatever he chose, but I was disturbed by the way some of Rushdie's liberal supporters segued from a denunciation of the fatwah to an out-and-out condemnation of Islam itself that bore no relation to the facts. It seemed wrong to defend a liberal principle by reviving a medieval prejudice… Muhammad was not a man of violence. We must approach his life in a balanced way, in order to appreciate his considerable achievements. To cultivate an inaccurate prejudice damages the tolerance, liberality, and compassion that are supposed to characterize Western culture. I became*

> *convinced of this fifteen years ago, after the fatwah of Ayatollah Khomeini had sentenced Salman Rushdie and his publishers to death because of what was perceived to be a blasphemous portrait of Muhammad in The Satanic Verses. I abhorred the fatwah and believed that Rushdie had a right to publish whatever he chose, but I was disturbed by the way, some of Rushdie's liberal supporters segued from a denunciation of the fatwah to an out-and-out condemnation of Islam itself that bore no relation to the facts. It seemed wrong to defend a liberal principle by reviving a medieval prejudice"* (Karen, 2007: 5-6).

This distorted image, which the West has entrenched in the mentality of the other by generalizing judgment on individual behaviour and making it a public matter, has led to the judgment of Islam and Muslims across all eras and times. This situation creates a mutual distrust between different parties, hindering the progress of dialogue for coexistence. Additionally, Islamic peoples have faced genocides that the world has witnessed. The Islamic world has also been fully exploited. Strife has been created through the fabrication of extremist groups. These actions further tarnish the image of Muslims. It becomes clear that dialogue requires a correction of intentions. It also demands avoiding unjust harm to others. This approach should not be based on the perspective of the strong towards the weak, which leads to a condescending attitude and the imposition of force to accept what cannot be accepted, whether for religious, social, cultural, economic, or political reasons.

b. Some forms of criticism directed at the Quran and Sunnah

1) Some forms of criticism directed at the Quran

The Holy Quran has been subject to criticism regarding its readings by orientalists, led by Goldziher, who have claimed distortions and grammatical errors stemming from ignorance of the Arabic language, and have twisted texts to support their claims (Goldziher, 1955: 6-8).

This criticism focusing on the Quranic readings has nothing to do with any actual errors in reading the Quran itself. In fact, the Quran has been transmitted to us through these readings via *Tawatur* (consensus by multiple narrators), a method of transmission that cannot be challenged. Those who do not master the Arabic language have made the allegations of grammatical errors in the Quran. Furthermore, the Arabs at the time of the Quran's revelation to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) were the ones qualified to make such critiques, especially since Allah challenged them in the Quran to produce even the shortest surah like it, yet they were unable to do so.

'Utba ibn al-Walid went to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) hoping to reach an agreement with him to stop calling people to Allah. The Prophet (peace be upon him) recited some verses from the beginning of *Surah Fussilat* until he reached the prostration verse. When Utba returned to his people, he told them: "I have heard words, by Allah, like which I have never heard before! By Allah, it is neither poetry, nor magic, nor soothsaying, O people of *Quraysh*." (Ibn Hisham, 1411 H, 2: 131-132). However, the people were not interested in hearing this; what mattered to them was finding someone who could discredit the Quran, yet they found no one capable of doing so. It is surprising that someone who does not master Arabic would claim the existence of grammatical errors when those who are proficient have failed to demonstrate this.

Goldziher attributed the differences in Quranic readings to the peculiarities of Arabic script and the placement of dots on letters, which led to variations in the Quranic texts, in his opinion. He overlooks in his claim that the primary method of transmitting the Quran has been through oral recitation in a communal setting, alongside its writing. There is no contradiction in having these Quranic readings, as the hadith states that Allah revealed the Quran in seven *Ahruf* (modes of recitation):

> Narrated 'Umar bin Al-Khattab: I heard Hisham bin Hakim bin Hizam reciting Surat *Al-Furqan* in a way different to that of mine. Allah's Messenger had taught it to me (in a different way). So, I was about to quarrel with him [during the Salat (prayer)] but I waited till he finished, then I tied his garment round his neck and seized him by it and brought him to Allah's Messenger (PUBH) and said, "I have heard him reciting Surat Al-Furqan in a way different to the way you taught it to me The Prophet; ordered me to release him and asked Hisham to recite it. When he recited it, Allah's Messenger; said, "It was revealed in this way". He then asked me to recite it. When I recited it, he said, "It was revealed in this way. The Qur'an has been revealed in seven different ways, so recite it in the way that is easier for you" (Bukhari, Book 44, Chapter 4, 3:345-346, No. 2419).

This does not indicate any inconsistency as Ignaz Goldziher claimed.

2) Some forms of criticism at the Sunnah

The Sunnah has also been doubted without a sound methodology, overturning standards. For example, Goldziher considered what hadith scholars deemed false as

authentic, and vice versa, claiming that the hadiths were fabricated in the first three centuries to serve political and religious purposes. They also attempted to discredit the methodologies of hadith scholars that preserve the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammad by distorting facts, with significant figures in Islamic history being unjustly criticized to cast doubt on the transmission of religious texts (GOLDZIHER, 1952: 180-186). Also, he considered the methodology of Hadith scholars to be formalistic in their handling of seemingly contradictory Hadiths by prioritizing the chain of narration of one Hadith, weakening others, and accused them of manipulation by resorting to interpretation, which is often weak (Goldziher, 2: 85-86). By this, he claims that they limited their critique to the chain of narration, whereas in fact, they relied on both the chain of narration and the content in analyzing the Hadith.

Margoliouth's argument focused on the claim that the Hadith relies on the memory of narrators, which he considered weak. He argued that human memory, everywhere, is unreliable, and no narrator has a memory better than others (Margoliouth, 1914: 90).

This claim falls into the category of preconceived judgments that are not based on scientific evidence or observed reality. Scientific reality does not deny the existence of variations in information retention among people, nor does it deny individual differences in capabilities. Historical accounts have shown us that Arabs were known for their strong memories during the pre-Islamic period, memorizing lengthy poems; some could memorize a poem after hearing it only once, while others could do so after hearing it a second time. Additionally, the criticism of Hadiths is based on two aspects: the chain of transmission (Isnad) and the content (*Matn*). The methodology of Hadith scholars in assessing the authenticity of a Hadith involves studying five factors:

a) The integrity of the narrators.

b) The accuracy of the narrators.

c) The continuity of the chain of transmission.

d) The freedom of the Hadith from irregularities.

e) The freedom of the Hadith from defects.

Thus, it becomes clear that criticism among Hadith scholars does not focus solely on the memory of the narrators but encompasses all five aforementioned aspects. Hadith scholars have authored books tracking the conditions of narrators and testing them to

determine their integrity, avoiding lies, and immorality. In general, anything that affects the narrators' integrity is scrutinized without bias. Then comes the role of memory, where scholars follow up on the narrations of a narrator and compare them with those of others to assess the accuracy of the narration. If a narrator made a mistake in even one word, it would be pointed out. This method is known among Hadith scholars as comparison between narrations.

A narrator might be accurate in their transmission, but Hadith scholars would still examine their condition to see if they maintained their accuracy or if their memory weakened for any reason. Regarding the continuity of the chain, a break in the chain affects the authenticity of the Hadith. It is not enough for there to be a connection between the narrator and the one from whom he narrates; there must be a confirmed direct transmission of the Hadith. Furthermore, the narrator of the Hadith must not contradict someone more reliable or a group of reliable narrators; as such, a contradiction affects the authenticity of his narration. Similarly, the Hadith must be free from hidden defects that could affect its authenticity, which requires meticulous scrutiny, a task undertaken by Hadith scholars who have written multiple books on this topic.

In conclusion, Hadith scholars were the first to discuss these matters. Those who criticized the Sunnah relied only on judgment based on conjecture. Their criticism lacked certainty. Yachaoui Hanan conducted outstanding research in which she demonstrated the weaknesses of the doubts raised by critics of the Prophetic Sunnah through what they claimed to be a Contemporary Reading of the Prophetic Sunnah. She showed that their arguments are not based on scientific principles, but rather on preconceived judgments and ulterior motives (Yachaoui, 2024).

3) Reliance and inaccurate sources

The depiction of Islam and Muslims often relies on inaccurate sources. One example is the book Al-Aghani by Abu al-Faraj al-Isbahani. Some sources mix authentic and other content. This is the case with The History of Nations and Kings by al-Tabari. Al-Tabari reported news with chains of transmission (*Isnad*). He left the task of verification to the researcher. This follows the hadith scholars' principle: "He who provides you with a chain of transmission relieves you of the burden." He did this to record everything said on the topic, so anyone who finds something can check its chain and research its authenticity. In addition, regarding that, al-Tabari said (Al-Tabari, n.d., 1:13):

> *"Let the reader of this book know that my reliance... is solely on the news that I have mentioned herein, and the traces that I have attributed to their narrators within it... For knowledge of the events of the past and what happens from current news does not reach those who have not witnessed them and did not live in their time, except through the reports of reporters and the transmission of conveyors, not through extraction by intellect or inference by the thought of the soul. If there is any news in this book that seems strange to the reader, it was not authored by us. If the listener finds it objectionable or questions its truth, it did not originate from us. This news came to us through its conveyors. We have only reported it exactly as it was delivered to us."*

However, the selective method of only reporting negative news regardless of its accuracy is followed by those seeking ways to criticize Islam and Muslims, resulting in the absence of truth in their writings except for those who were fair to Islam, some of whom converted.

Relying on poor translations of Arabic texts leads to the distorted transmission of ideas, and consequently, building on them to draw specific conclusions is incorrect behavior because the results will be erroneous. Here are some examples where translations by Orientalists might have led to skewed perceptions of Islamic doctrines and history:

a) George Sale's Quran Translation (1734); This translation is not free from fallacies and interpretations that attempt to trace the Holy Quran back to Jewish and Christian sources (Atik & Lakhvi, 2023). The translator added comments to the verses to explain their intended meanings, thereby distorting them. He also altered the order of the verses and chapters. Such behavior in translation and interpretation does not aid in promoting good communication and coexistence; rather, it leads to misunderstanding and hatred.

b) Richard Bell's translation of the Quran (1939); Richard Bell was not faithful in his translation of the meanings of the Holy Quran, as he rearranged the verses chronologically according to his understanding, based on the assumption that the Quran is a human work. He infused his translation with interpretations based on Orientalist ideology, which sought to distort the Quran and claim that its content was influenced by Jewish and Christian sources. This alone suffices to prove the lack of objectivity in his work (Elnemr, 2020).

c. Claim that Islamic legislation is derived from Roman law and other religions

They distorted the image of Islamic legislation in the Holy Quran and the pure Sunnah, claiming it was influenced by Greek, Roman law, and the Jewish religion, and described the penal laws as inhumane (Kofman and Goldziher, JewishEncyclopedia, Islam). Some have claimed that the Quran is derived from the Bible and that the Prophet's (peace be upon him) relationship with some Christians was behind this, denying it to be a revelation from Allah (Lamartine, 2005, 1:80). They argue that what appeared to him in terms of "visions" was nothing more than satanic possession, epilepsy, and the like (Lamartine, 2005, 1:119). Some of them considered Muhammad (peace be upon him) to be merely a deceiver (Rodinson, 2001: 102). In doing so, they refuse to acknowledge the Prophet's (peace be upon him) message based on their whims rather than evidence! It is worth noting that the Gospel of Barnabas contains what confirms his message, but their fanaticism blinded them to deny the credibility of this Gospel. Scientific study does not rely on preconceived notions or whims but on evidence, which is absent in the biased writings they have published. Even those who showed some fairness among them were not spared from this bias.

The similarities among the holy books are because they all originate from the same source, which is Allah Almighty. However, some matters were presented correctly in the Quran, differing from those in the books that were altered. Additionally, the Quran includes unique matters not found in the Bible. For example, the speech of Jesus (peace be upon him) in the cradle is mentioned in the Quran, where Allah says:

> *"He ['Isa (Jesus)] said: Verily, I am a slave of Allah, He has given me the Scripture and made me a Prophet"* (*Surah Maryam*, verse: 30).

This event is not mentioned in the Bible, nor do Christians speak of it, despite it being a miracle of Jesus (peace be upon him). The reason for this omission might be that if they preserved the text where he speaks, the question would arise: what did he say? It would then become clear that he is not Allah, as he declared himself to be a servant of Allah, not a divinity.

d. Defamation of the image of muslim women

Muslim women are often depicted in their hijabs as symbols of backwardness, ignorance, and a suppression of freedoms. This depiction contrasts with the image of

Western women in conventional attire, which reveals body contours, suggesting that this is a more appealing representation of what women should be like today, a standard of individual freedom in society. In France, a country known for its liberties, there has been significant controversy over the hijab since 1990. This led to the enactment of laws banning the hijab and all religious symbols in public institutions. In December 2003, Jacques Chirac decided to pass a law prohibiting all species religious slogans, in the name of secularism. The French Parliament voted on the law of secularism, named sometimes the law of secularism: Islamic veil, regulating, in application of the principle of secularism, the wearing of signs or outfits showing religious affiliation in public schools, colleges and high schools (1) (March 2004, Low no. 2004-228).

Referring back to the mentioned article, it states:

> "Art. L. 141-5-1. - In public schools, middle schools, and high schools, the wearing of signs or clothing by which students openly manifest a religious affiliation is prohibited. The internal regulations state that the initiation of a disciplinary procedure is preceded by a dialogue with the student".

Thus, it becomes clear that it does not regulate the use of the hijab in educational institutions as the title suggests, but rather prohibits it outright. This contradicts the principle on which France is founded: "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity". This article discriminates between students, which goes against equality, and it restricts freedom, including the freedom to choose one's attire and the freedom of belief. It also contradicts the principle of fraternity, as a brother does not treat his brother based on exclusion from the system and depriving him of education if he chooses a certain type of clothing. This is primarily due to the country's stance on Islam, rooted in Islamophobia.

The laws in France and Belgium prohibiting the hijab demonstrate how political leaders see established communities and cultures as uniform entities, rather than recognizing them as diverse, evolving, and changing structures (Scott, 2007). According to a research, Muslim women who wear the headscarf often have unfavorable encounters at work because of how Muslims are portrayed in US media in relation to the fight against terrorism, which causes dread in the hearts of non-Muslims (Reeves, McKinney & Azam, 2012).

On the other hand, we find that Western women do not benefit from the actual rights they need. Instead, they are often viewed primarily as objects of sexual desire, valued

as long as they are young, beautiful, and attractive, while they are not desired when they do not meet these descriptions. Even in Canada, a country known for its rights, women suffer from numerous crimes committed against them, as evidenced by the high rate of rape (Klaina, 2024).

e. Impact of colonial selections

They have distorted the image of Islam based on the behavior of a group of Muslims living in the West, who were selected during the colonial period and lacked education, with the intention of exploiting them in undesirable jobs. Such individuals should not be relied upon as a primary source of information about Islam. In addition, misattributing negative behaviors in the Western world to Muslims frequently leads to the unfair linking of Islam with terrorism (Klaina, 2023). This prejudiced portrayal obstructs the potential for mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence between Western and Islamic societies.

This way of thinking, which relies on information from unreliable and unqualified sources to speak about the principles of Islam, as well as on preconceived notions to judge others, is a deliberate approach in the West's treatment of Muslims, considering them uncivilized. It is well known that a rational person cannot accept such logic, as a sound mind does not accept such judgments from unreliable sources and selective information that highlights individual or abnormal behaviors and generalizes them like Lewis Bernard (Lewis, 1999, and 2013: 141). Judgments not based on accurate information are founded on falsehoods and myths, and selecting abnormal behaviors leads to the injustice of entire peoples, which is broader than individuals are. The behavior of a community cannot be invalidated by the behavior of individuals!

2. Reasons for the Tension between the East and West

A prudent observer of the reasons leading to the distortion of Muslims' image in the West can trace it back to the following:

a. Western and misconceptions

The West views Islam as an enemy because it includes criticisms related to their creed, recalls Islamic conquests, and due to the spread of Islam. The British Broadcasting Corporation noted over a year ago the phenomenon of people in Britain converting to

Islam, with more than ten thousand people entering Islam annually. Moreover, the Muslim population in France ranks second after Christianity, significantly influencing both domestic and foreign French policies (Jawdat & ‘Alouani, 1996: 219 The West views Islam as an enemy because it includes criticisms related to their creed, recalls Islamic conquests, and due to the spread of Islam. The British Broadcasting Corporation noted over a year ago the phenomenon of people in Britain converting to Islam, with more than ten thousand people entering Islam annually. Moreover, the Muslim population in France ranks second after Christianity, significantly influencing both domestic and foreign French policies (Jawdat and ‘Alouani, 1996: 219). In the United States has witnessed a noticeable increase in the number of Muslims, accompanied by a growth in their power, influence, and media capabilities. This demographic and socio-political shift contributes to the context in which leading figures like Huntington have articulated theories of global conflict. In this context, Huntington stated that in the evolving global landscape, interactions between these civilizations are often strained and marked by conflict. At the micro level, the most severe tensions occur between Islamic societies and their Orthodox, Hindu, African, and Western Christian neighbors. Expanding this view to a broader scale, Huntington identifies the primary conflict as existing between the West and all other civilizations, particularly between Muslim and Asian societies against Western nations. These conflicts are driven by a combination of Western arrogance, Islamic intolerance, and the assertiveness of Sinic cultures. As the influence of Western culture diminishes and non-Western societies grow more confident in their own cultural identities, the central challenge becomes the West's decreasing ability to promote a universal Western culture amidst the rising power of other civilizations (Huntington, 1996: 187). On the other hand, the German orientalist Stefan Wild offers a strong critique. He chaired the Institute for Arab Studies at the University of Bonn. Wild condemns a group of orientalists for misusing their knowledge. They allowed it to be used to belittle Muslims and support colonialism. He stated, "It is uglier that a group calling themselves orientalists used their knowledge of Islam and its history to combat Islam and Muslims." This painful reality must be honestly acknowledged by orientalists true to their mission (Zaqzuq, 1994: 61).

b. Describing Muslims viewed as backwards

Muslims are often portrayed as a nation of ignorance and backwardness. They are also accused of rejecting Western values such as freedom, equality, and democracy. This perception led 60 American intellectuals to issue a cultural statement directed at the Muslim

world. The statement granted the governing authority the right to wage a long-term holy war against Muslims. It concluded by calling for a forceful change in political conditions within the Muslim world. Additionally, it associated Islam with backwardness and violence (Ghassan, 2004: 196-197). We should not be surprised when we find Pope Benedict XVI, in his speech on September 12, 2012, portraying the Islamic religion in a demeaning manner, which triggered numerous objections in the Muslim world.

c. Challenges and biases in western-Islamic dialogue

Major obstacles persist in the modern discourse between Islam and the West, heavily influenced by past views and biases from the West. The difficulties stem from how Western scholars and the public have traditionally depicted Islam, often based on outdated or inaccurate perspectives. The main topics and current hurdles are emphasized in the discussion:

1) A persistent orientalists biasis

The portrayal of Islam through an orientalist lens has historically contributed to a widespread aversion to Muslims. Scholars like Montgomery Watt have highlighted efforts dating back to the 12th century aimed at correcting misrepresentations of Islam that emerged in Europe. Despite these efforts, the residue of these early misconceptions continues to influence Western perceptions of Islam and its followers. This enduring bias suggests that there is a deep-seated challenge in overcoming historical prejudices, which are often reinforced by selective interpretations and the lack of comprehensive understanding in Western narratives (Zaqzuq, 1997: 76).

2) Challenges in scholarly approaches

Rudy Barth highlights that medieval scholars and theologians had access to primary Islamic sources, yet their assessments were influenced by bias. This bias stemmed from a preconceived notion of Islam's incompatibility or hostility towards Christianity. This historical perspective has led to a selective acceptance of information that aligns with negative stereotypes about Islam, thereby perpetuating a cycle of misunderstanding and prejudice (Barth, 1967: 9-10). This indicates a need for a more balanced and objective approach in scholarly work, where Islamic teachings and history are evaluated without the influence of entrenched hostile biases.

3) The impact of historical conflicts

Murad Hoffman comments on the long-term impact of the Crusades on Western attitudes towards Islam, suggesting that the adversarial mentality fostered during these conflicts still affects contemporary intercultural and interreligious relations. The historical conflicts have left a legacy of mistrust and antagonism that complicates efforts towards understanding and dialogue (Hoffman, 2000: 70).

d. Contemporary challenges

The relationship dynamics between individuals, as Samuel Huntington suggested, are often framed through lenses of enmity necessary for defining identities. This theory posits that humans inherently require adversaries, fostering an environment where threats are anticipated from those who are different, fundamentally due to mistrust. This perspective serves to underline the complexities of intercultural relations, emphasizing the deep-seated challenges in fostering peaceful coexistence (Huntington. 1996: 185).

In the name of freedom of speech, people often justify hate speech directed at Muslims. This rhetoric is part of a broader context where the promotion of such speech against Islam and Muslims targets various demographic groups, catalyzing the spread of a negative image that is further reinforced by biased media portrayals (Fuentes-Lara C., Arcila-Calderón, 2023, Wiktor et al., 2020). Modern representations frequently focus disproportionately on negative events, suggesting that religiosity equates to backwardness or is merely a matter of personal freedom. These portrayals also push misleading narratives about consensual relationships, aimed at influencing Muslim youth. Collectively, these depictions significantly perpetuate fear and misunderstanding, affecting both the internal dynamics within Islamic communities and their global perceptions.

Furthermore, institutions within the Islamic world face infiltration by proponents of Western ideologies determined to sever any ties of Muslim countries with Islam. This includes the presence of modernists, secularists, and individuals who have adopted Shia Islam in predominantly Sunni countries—whether openly or secretly through *Taqiyyah*. They have begun to challenge the Prophetic Sunnah, disparage Islamic scholars, and question the authenticity of Islamic jurisprudence, claiming it is unfit for the present times (Klaina, 2023). These individuals have managed to assume significant positions within unions and academic departments with the aim of spreading their beliefs, thereby fostering confusion and decline instead of promoting research and academic integrity. This is often executed under the guise of promoting freedom of expression and belief, with the ultimate

goal of transitioning Islamic populations towards secularism or outright irreligion. This internal discord significantly impedes the progress of constructive dialogue within and outside Islamic communities.

The influence of Western nations has led to the Islamic world becoming increasingly subordinate, adhering to international policies and losing the strong scientific, economic, and political influence that once defined its power on the global stage. This subservience has significantly shaped Western perceptions of the Islamic world as inferior, exacerbated by the lack of unity among Islamic nations and ongoing regional power conflicts, which further affect the populace. It underscores the urgent need for the Islamic world to reassess its interests based on the unique characteristics that unite its diverse peoples, moving away from the restrictive frameworks imposed by historical colonialism intended to fragment and weaken them.

In conclusion, addressing these historical biases and contemporary challenges demands concerted efforts across educational, media, and political realms. By recognizing and confronting these foundational misconceptions, progress can be made towards a more informed and respectful dialogue between Islam and the West, aiming to bridge cultural divides and foster mutual understanding.

e. Cultural challenges and identity dynamics in the Muslim diaspora in western Europe

The perception of Islam in Western Europe is profoundly influenced by the complex interactions between cultural assimilation, identity dynamics, and prevailing biases. Within Islamic communities, certain individuals who fail to present an admirable image of the faith have significantly affected the perception of Islam. These individuals often embrace Western culture to an extent that they amplify Orientalist views, depicting Islamic practices as outdated and advocating for a lifestyle prioritizing personal freedom. This perspective posits religious belief as merely a private affair, pushing for a secularized interpretation of Islamic values.

Moreover, the substantial presence of more than 11 million Muslims in the major Western European countries makes Muslims the most significant religious minority in the region, which creates many sensitivities at various levels and a desire by others not to feel the presence of strangers in their country. The only solution for the other party is for Muslims to integrate into Western society and live according to its style, and to convey this image to other Muslim countries. We should not be surprised when we hear of Islam in a

European (Cesari, 2002) or American style... all in an effort to contain the religion and dominate it based on their fear of Muslims regaining control of the West again (AIR ISLAM, Janvier 9, 2002, Konan & Makarian, 26/01/2006).

Additionally, Western racism is based on viewing other groups as inferior and less intelligent. This idea is supported by the testimony of Roger Garaudy, a French thinker. He stated, "The colonial West, for five centuries – and the show continues – provided the most lethal example of extremism. It claimed to possess the only true culture, the only global religion, and the only development model, while denying or destroying other cultures, religions, and development models." (Garaudy, 1999: 22). The complex of superiority is clearly expressed by Francis Fukuyama, who asserts in the summer of 1989 in his article "The End of History" that European civilization, with its ideas and institutions, represents the end of the world. He believes that this civilization surpasses all other civilizations and that Muslims are enemies of progress and are conducting a campaign against European civilization (Fukuyama, 1999: 12).

This narrative underscores the intricate dynamics and ongoing challenges faced by Muslims in Western Europe as they strive to balance their religious heritage with the pressures of assimilation in societies that frequently view them with suspicion or perceive them as inferior. These struggles for identity and acceptance reflect the broader dialogue between the West and the Islamic world, highlighting the critical need for mutual understanding and respect. The multifaceted nature of these challenges calls for a comprehensive approach to fostering intercultural interactions that are rooted in empathy and equity, aiming to bridge gaps and build lasting connections across diverse communities.

3. Strategies for Enhancing Dialogue and Coexistence

The current universal recognition of the need to initiate dialogue with the West for mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence is profound. Therefore, we are compelled to identify effective means to facilitate this dialogue despite the obstacles that foster misunderstandings. It is like clinging to a light that illuminates our path; without it, our progress is hindered.

To be pragmatic, I suggest the following methods to activate dialogue and achieve coexistence and understanding:

a. Resolving key conflicts and establishing dialogue initiatives

Promoting global dialogue and understanding requires addressing key conflicts such as the Palestine issue. Ensuring a comprehensive and fair resolution based on goodwill significantly increases the chances for successful dialogue. Additionally, establishing dialogue initiatives across various institutions can enhance mutual understanding and correct misconceptions at both national and international levels. By creating dialogue cells in diverse settings and documenting the resolution of arising issues, these efforts not only foster harmony among different groups but also cultivate a culture of dialogue that can adapt to and respect a wide array of religious and cultural perspectives. Also, is very important avoiding double standards, where criticism is directed against one side without action when it concerns another, and this happens in criticism of Judaism, for example, individuals who criticize certain groups are frequently labeled as anti-Semitic and are likely to face legal consequences. Meanwhile, Islamic sanctities are openly violated and justified under the pretext of 'freedom of expression'.

Rosemary Hollis proposes three different levels of conversation to address the Palestinian problem, each differing in size and strategy: 1) Formal conversation at an authorized level. 2) Non-governmental efforts to facilitate conflict resolution between countries. 3) Interpersonal Communication. Rosemary commented on all this, stating that the success of this dialogue depends on carefully selecting the participants, location, and dynamics. Ensuring a diverse group of participants and fostering a balanced, confidential, and welcoming environment are critical to achieving success in the dialogue (Hollis, 2015: 8-10).

It is observed that Hollis is not seeking serious dialogue, but rather directed dialogue. Therefore, we find her talking about carefully selected participants in the field of dialogue, maintaining confidentiality of the location, providing exquisite food, and fostering an atmosphere of humor among the parties across all three levels. The questions arise: Who determines the criteria for selecting participants? Why is the location confidential? Why the special food and humor? This reminds us of choosing the winning horse, not successful dialogue, as the interlocutors are chosen from a specific group that maintains the interests of the controlling party, which does not accept dialogue except as a formality. The secrecy of the location is due to fear of protests against unacceptable decisions that might be reached. The luxurious and exquisite food is as if these people were starving, hence they are appeased with food like cattle. The atmosphere of jokes could lead to filming disrespectful videos of each individual to use them as a means to pressure them to impose

their will on the carefully selected group. This method has been used with influential figures who found themselves victims of it, and its notoriety obviates the need to name the individuals involved, because our aim is not to defame individuals, but to clarify the methods used by these people. Therefore, the criteria Hollis spoke about are not innocent.

b. Building international dialogue platforms

Establishing international institutions focused on dialogue is essential. These institutions should coordinate efforts to bridge viewpoints and correct misconceptions through objective studies. It is also important to build communication bridges between universities and study centers in the Islamic world. Additionally, connecting with Muslim communities living in other countries can be highly beneficial. These centers can draw from the experiences of Muslim minorities who had better understand others. Such minorities often know the appropriate methods of discourse for conducting dialogue without extremism.

c. Comprehensive educational and medias reforms

The West should avoid campaigns based on promoting lies and distorting the image of others, which only leads to further division. Notably, some entities, unrelated to science, actively disseminate offensive information about religions and prophets to the broader public, aiming to foster hatred—as evidenced by derogatory depictions of the Prophet Muhammad in cartoons and films. Additionally, it is crucial to embed the subject of dialogue and its etiquettes into educational curricula worldwide. By doing so, we can cultivate a generation that is not only well informed about the methods of understanding but also committed to spreading a culture of peace rather than perpetuating a culture of hatred.

d. Continous and honest dialogue

Dialogue and advocacy should not be used merely to placate others. They should not serve as a tool to reduce pressure on a party due to its unacceptable actions. Using dialogue to absorb others' anger and then ignore their concerns shows bad faith. Such behavior undermines the credibility of those who promote it. Instead, dialogue must be sincere. It should remain continuous and not cease under any circumstances.

e. Avoid prejudice and unscientific judgments

Avoid relying on prejudices that unnecessarily provoke disputes, especially when seeking coexistence. In the West, the image of Islam and Muslims has often been shaped

by fallacies. Orientalists and their predecessors have constructed this image inaccurately (Lewis, 1990). Judging an entire group based on the actions of a few individuals is unscientific. This is particularly true when those individuals represent only themselves. Additionally, relying on statements and judgments from unqualified individuals lacks validity. This reminds me of a meeting organized at Abdelmalek Essaadi University in Tetouan, where I hosted a delegation from the ABC Dutch educational support foundation on the topic: "Education in Islam." They raised an issue where a student in one of the Dutch institutions insulted his teacher, and when his guardian was summoned, he claimed that Islam encourages them to behave this way towards women, which is incorrect. On the other hand, they accepted judgments from non-specialists and the broader public. This occurred despite knowing that, during the colonial era, the West deliberately employed illiterate individuals. This strategy made it easier to control them and denied them education that could connect their children to their religion. This facilitated their smooth integration into Western society. Ironically, they now complain about this issue while being part of the problem. They do not allow parents to raise their children in an Islamic way. As a result, the second generation and beyond adopt and echo Western thought.

f. Addressing misuse of freedom of expression

Not encouraging deviant voices that resort to the West in the name of freedom of expression when it concerns Islamic countries, while they are not allowed to do so when it relates to the host country. A prime example of this is Salman Rushdie, author of "The Satanic Verses," and others who follow his path. It is known that this aligns with the inclinations of the host party and indirectly reflects its stance towards Islam and Muslims. There is positive freedom of expression based on constructive criticism aimed at correcting ways of thinking. However, there is also negative criticism intended to belittle others. This type of criticism is not aimed at correcting thought but rather at undermining their status, even if they are correct. This involves defamation without evidence, relying on lies and distortion of facts. Such criticism does not lead to the success of dialogue but hinders it. For this reason, I call for the criminalization of offenses against religious sanctities, especially since people have started relying on individuals living in Islamic societies using financial incentives to echo in the ears of the public what they failed to spread in the name of freedom of expression.

g. Countering material and political exploitation

Not exploiting the material and political aspect to pressure countries and groups to promote views contrary to Islamic principles. We are aware of what missionaries do in exploiting the poverty of African peoples to spread Christianity not on the basis of conviction but so that they can be materially assisted. At the same time, we notice the imposition of educational policies that serve the West and harm the Islamic world, with the reduction of hours for certain Arabic subjects and Islamic education at the top of the list, or the cancellation of institutions wholesale for their association with Sharia. The interpretation of this remains with the responsible parties, and we do not want to put ourselves in their positions.

h. Promiting Islamic academic excellence

Encouraging Islamic studies and opening new specializations in this field, such as Islamic economics, Islamic sociology, Islamic psychology, and generally Islamizing the sciences, as there is no enmity between them and the Islamic religion. They thrived under it due to the encouragement of scientific research and the call to contemplation by the Islamic religion. We should not forget the significant services that Muslims have provided to the entire world through the dissemination of sciences, whether through translation or innovation in various specialties, such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, medicine, engineering, and others. This German orientalist, Sigrid Hunke, highlights the Muslims' contribution to the West in her book "The Sun of the Arabs Shines on the West," and many others. My viewpoint is that the deviant and harmful behavior of some individuals stems from ignorance of the basic principles of religion. Therefore, promoting Islamic studies and expanding the field to include various specializations and graduate studies benefits everyone.

i. Etiquettes of disagreement and coexistence

Promoting the etiquettes of disagreement fosters understanding and coexistence among individuals and groups. Disagreement does not spoil a friendship. In this regard, we recall the words of Allah Almighty:

> *"Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is guided."* (*Surah An-Nahl*, Verse: 125).

We also recall His words:

"Repel evil with that which is better; We are most knowing of what they describe." (*Surah Al-Mu'minun*, Verse: 96).

Additionally, His words state:

"And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend." (Surah Fussilat, Verse: 34).

It is attributed to Imam Al-Shafi'i that he said: "My opinion is correct with the possibility of being incorrect, and my opponent's opinion is incorrect with the possibility of being correct."

He also stated: "Difference of opinion does not spoil a friendship." Scholars emphasize the importance of these etiquettes in dialogue and disagreement. They believe that awareness of these principles helps to spread a culture of peace among nations.

CONCLUSION

The need for meaningful dialogue between civilizations, particularly between the Islamic world and the West, has never been more critical. This research highlights the challenges and misconceptions that have historically strained these relationships. The path forward, however, lies not in perpetuating misunderstandings or imposing one culture's values on another, but in fostering mutual respect, recognizing diversity, and embracing shared humanity.

For dialogue to succeed, it must be based on sincerity, equality, and the recognition of each civilization's unique contributions. The principles of peaceful coexistence, deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, offer valuable guidance for addressing global tensions. As the Quran reminds us, 'Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is guided' (*Surah An-Nahl*, 16:125). This approach, grounded in wisdom and understanding, emphasizes the importance of respectful communication in resolving conflicts.

Moving forward, it is essential to develop educational and media initiatives that promote an accurate understanding of diverse cultures and beliefs. International platforms for dialogue must prioritize inclusivity and fairness, ensuring that no party feels

marginalized or misrepresented. By embedding the values of respect, equity, and honesty into these platforms, we can nurture a culture of collaboration and trust.

This conclusion calls for rejecting double standards and avoiding prejudices that fuel divisions. Instead, nations and communities should focus on strengthening cultural and intellectual ties that preserve identities while promoting universal values. Cooperation, not conflict, is the cornerstone of civilizational progress, as it allows humanity to address shared challenges and build a future founded on peace and understanding.

The road ahead is not without challenges, but with collective effort and adherence to ethical principles, humanity can overcome barriers and realize the vision of a world where diversity is celebrated, not feared, and where dialogue serves as a bridge to mutual enrichment, not division.

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