

IRANIAN DISCOURSE And DIALOGUE

M.Fatih Şeyhanođlu *

A. INTRODUCTION

The ideas, Toynbee continuously insists on in his writing “A study of History”, that the civilizations are being predominated and destroyed and the globe’s becoming uni-cultural began to be mentioned by theorists who are close to USA government during post-cold war era. As known, the other civilizations came to have no right to survive due to the fact that USA retains hegemony all over the world now. Especially along with the globalization movement and depending on the unique dominance of one state, other cultures are gradually being replaced by consumer societies; the trend that the Westerners exactly want. Therefore, under the dominance of one power in the world, the term dialog remains an unpractical utterance that the defeated and/or the powerless uses. There can be no importance of talking either about dialog or confrontation in an environment in which only one power and civilization dominates. As Nietzsche indicates, the reality is something subjective; but who determines the reality is the powerful one. For this, we can only talk about attacks and suppress of a powerful civilization.

In this way, I will try to explain the reasons why Iran cannot be a representative of the Islamic civilization. That the fact that Shia interpretation of Islam is the formal religion and that this sect is not so common in Islamic geography are the main factors why Iran couldn’t have been so influential on other Islamic states. I will also try to explain how influential the Persian culture has been on today’s Islamic culture and how this effect negatively influenced the struggles for dialogue. I will also be so concerned with the following topics; how the Kerbela-oriented thinking led them to make various mistakes, why they are unable to offer an alternative paradigm, why they are trying to be integrated into the international system, how Iran asserts itself with a kind of discourse of inter-civilizational dialogue while adopting a sort of realist-based foreign policy keeping their interests prior, especially Khatemi’s saying that Iran is the mere Islamic state that can undergo dialogue with the West and how consistent the

* Graduate student International Relations Department at Fatih University. fatihseyhanoglu@yahoo.com

Iranian claim of being an intersecting point of the Eastern and Western cultures. Also, I will try to talk about how inconsistent the attribution of inter-civilizational dialogue to the Persian people. It is impossible for the universal values of Islam to reconcile with the ones of today's modern nation-states. What's more, the process of Islam's being protestanized began with the initiation of the religionization of nation-states. In sum, modern nation-state cannot represent the universal values. With the modern states, the understanding of God has been reduced to a kind of simple special matter of nations. So that, with the Iran Islamic Revolution, modernism has been suspended but Iran has succeeded to adapt itself to the modern world in a short time. In foreign policy, he pursued policies with almost no care of Islamic values; he, on the other hand, tried to make the people much more Islamic by very pressure in domestic policies.

B. *WHY IS IRAN SEEN AS AN OBSTACLE TO DIALOGUE? THE EVALUATION OF DIALOG DISCOURSE OF IRAN*

As Ali Şerati, one of the greatest intellectuals of Iran, indicated the Shia means the marriage of Iran to Islam.¹ Şerati described the real Islamic boundary on the basis of Qur'an, Sunna, and reason. He believes that Qur'an is viable and absolutely valid in all times. For this reason, he emphasizes the necessity of adopting it into our lives in line with the requirements of our age and that we must grasp it through our minds. To Şerati, those who approach Qur'an without using his reason can do nothing but to jeopardize Islam. It would be mindless to expect practical things from this kind of people. To be able to best serve to Islam, one must not only be dominant on Islamic knowledge but be so well-comprehensive as to the main beliefs of his age. It is because of the fact that being on the level of producing solutions to the problems of the age automatically necessitates knowing the contemporary thoughts. To Sürüş, Şerati retained both of these characteristics.²

The traditional Shia understanding interpreted the Kербela Event in a way that Hz. Huseyin would display *şefaаt* to the Shia members after himself. To them, the concept of *şefaаt* was based on the traditional stories, which tells about how the one who takes the side of that *şefaаtçi* after committing sins throughout his life deserves to be in paradise. According to

¹ *Ali Şerati, Yalnızlık Sözleri (Okan Sevinç), söylem ,İstanbul, cilt1, 2001 ,s396.(in persian Ali Seriatı, Goftegubayı Tenbayı, Neşr-i Amun, 1983(1362) Iran)*

² Çağlar, M. , Ali Şerati üzerine : Bir Oturum , Bir yayınları, İstanbul, 1984, p53.

Şeriati, Huseyin intentionally became martyr so as to save his followers from atrocity and maltreatment and also for the establishment of freedom and justice. Moreover, the traditional religion, which describes the concept of *velayet* as loving Ali and his family, described him as an Iranian Rüstem or a tyranny by isolating him from his real situation. It fitted him with miracles and made him somewhat beyond-human. However, to Şeriati, the sign of Ali's being made as having beyond-human characters has no practicality for today's Muslims. The mere miraculous thing is the holy book and its miracle is its being eternal.³

Islam has entered Iran after such big wars. The Persian culture began to penetrate into Islam with the expansion of Islam on Iranian soil. Ali Şeriati who says that "previously, Iranians had adored to the Shah, but now to Ali anymore"⁴ is no liked amongst the *Mollas* in Iran. Because, he always tries to criticize and undergoes a kind of getting even with the Shia sect. So, in this respect, I personally will try to explain the Iran's being an obstacle before the dialogue movements and for that, it cannot represent the Islamic civilization.

Now, I will tell about the effects of the old Persian culture on Iran and the negative sides that these effects generate. I will also mention how the Persian culture evolved to Islam, I mean how it has Islamized.

1. *EXPECTATION OF "MEHDI"*

The Persian Empire's being too much powerful and Iran's desire to retain this power forever; the preparation of a huge army for Mehdi. It is because of this similar belief of expected prophet that Jews are also continuously militarizing. Once Mehdi lands on the earth, he will obtain the domination over the world and accordingly, the atrocity will disappear. It is also for this reason that the attendees to the Iraqi war are called the Army of Mehdi(Besici).

2. *VICTIMIZATION COMPLEX*

³ Ali Serati, Muhammedi Tanıyalım (trans Ali seyidoğlu), Fecr yayınevi, Ankara 1988,p68.

⁴ Ali Şeriati, *Yalnızlık Sözleri (Okan Sevinç), söylem ,İstanbul, cilt1, 2001 ,s396.*

The complex of being sacrificed has gain strength in the wake of experiencing that Kerbela syndrome and of the war against Iraq after the Revolution. This feeling is also so strong amongst Jews. These kind of psychological deficiencies/unhealthiness paved the way for a change in the essence of their religious understanding. These psychological problems, in a way similar to the changes made in Tevrat in Judaism, played a crucial role in the formation of Shia. It is a clear affirmation of my claim of the similarities of these two states that while Iran has a missile of 2500km-range, Israel, too, has a missile of 1600km-range. So, for the syndrome they live is almost the same, their reaction is also the same. Therefore, I say that, Iran and Israel are the biggest barriers before the dialogue movement. We can clearly feel the influence of this understanding in their foreign policies.

3. THE PICTURE OF Hz. ALI

The drawing of the Ali's pictures in which Ali has hair, though he has not, made in Iran is an indication that they evaluate Islam as they want to.

4. MOCKINGBIRD

It is so common in Iran that almost everybody feeds mockingbirds in their homes. It is believed that the mockingbird conveys the past events to the present. Also, Mülküm Han, is seen in an old photograph in his traditional dressing handing a baton on which there is a mockingbird.

5. THE STONE OF PROSTRATION

This stone is made of Kerbela soil. This way, they continuously remember the Kerbela Event and fell it in their hearths. It displays how important the Kerbela Event is for them. This stone is functioning in a way that it builds association and causes this syndrome to be experienced every time. This also results in an excessive sentimentality. The Iranian are conspirative and, for this reason, they are always in pursuit of building regional alliances.

6. *THE FAL BOOK OF HAFIZ*

The poetry book of Hafiz is being used as fal book and this shows that Iran has lost nothing of his traditional Persian perspective. It is clear that Persian culture has a strong place with continuity in Iranian state.

C. IRANIAN INTERNAL POLICY

There is an isolating policy pursued towards foreigners in Iran. Especially there is much pressure on Sunni Muslims there. When applying to a job, for example, you are questioned about your sect and if your not shia, you most probably lose the priority. While in Iran, Turkish and Kurdish music are welcomed, the schools of Sunni Kurds are not granted a formal statute. We can build a connection between these regulations and the those of Fascism. In those times, whoever could speak Italian were being regarded as Italian. In Iran, too, there is a dominant upper-culture, which is Shia and Persian-centered. Though the ethnic minorities seem to enjoy a respective freedom, a cultural assimilation and psychological pressure predominates all over the society. This shows Iran is afraid of undergoing a dialogue with the minorities within itself. So, a state that is totally unready to pluralism inside its territory must firstly secure the integrity within itself before asserting its utterance of dialogue.

D. THE FOREIGN POLICY OF IRAN

Islam never gives tolerance to any kind of atrocity. In Teoman Durali's words, "If I'm asked to summarize the Islam, I would summarize it as 'justice'. Justice shortly means for something to find its outcome it deserves." Especially as You know Allah⁵ emphasized Justice, Ethics in Qur'an. It is a contradiction with its utterance of dialog that Iran pursues realist policy in its foreign affairs, especially its support for Armenia during the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, its effort for keeping its interests at top and trying to get the piece of cake as other big powers. Therefore, Iran is not able to assert an alternative paradigm. To Fuat

⁵ Allah refers to God. But Muhammed represented the Allah. He is not like Jesus.

Ajami, the Iranian support for Armenia during the war against Azerbaijan has dissolved the Huntington's thesis of clash of civilizations. As it seen, Iran, although being an Islamic state, backed Armenia who has a different religion and culture. Once taking a look at the policies that Iran has recently adopted, these contemplations can be reached; while Russia is fighting against Muslims in Caucasians, Iran is in pursuit of improving its relations with Russia; in spite of the fact that India and Pakistan have a tension over Kashmir issue, Iran seeks to enhance its relations with India. So, in this respect, it will not be something astonishing, if we see a resurgence/revival in Iranian-USA relations in near future!

E. EVALUATION OF INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The dissolution of Soviet Russia was evaluated as the victory of capitalist world. Fukuyama had written the first version of his well-known thesis in an optimistic and romantic environment brought mainly by the Romanian revolution and the falling down of the Berlin Wall. What's more, he declared that this was an absolute victory of Western liberal democracy, which is based on free market mechanism. To him, after this time, all other potentially alternative value systems and civilization structures had to respect and obey the superiority of Western civilization in this period of history.⁶

According to Huntington, the world politics has been evolving into a new phase in which traditional ideological and economic conflicts are being replaced by mainly cultural-based clash of civilization. For him, the potential political conflict areas in the future will take place in regions where there are civilizational cracks. In contrast, Huntington has made no mention of systems of value and an international order that indicate the end of history.⁷ In reality, any new civilization aiming at establishing dominance, if it has sense of reason, must claim that the previous things/values were of less value/practicality than the current ones. Therefore, all these things done are, in essence, the psychological and structural needs of Western civilization. Any judgment brought by a civilization about itself carries no objectivity let alone its judgment against its counter-parts.

⁶ Francis Fukuyama, "The end of the History", *The National Interest* 16, 1989, p3-18.

⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, "The clash of Civilizations ?", *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, vol.72 Issue 3, p3.

The enthusiasm created by the falling of the Berlin Wall left its place to a pessimistic atmosphere later on. The war on Balkans was a reflection of this turning. Serbians, in an environment that international society opted to remain silent, gnaw the Bosnian lands. Besides, in Rwanda, the United Nations soldiers were just watching the massacres carried out before retreating. The resolution taken by the UN was in that direction. However, the organization was the general hope for the world. Unfortunately it couldn't though.⁸

Especially after September 11, in the West, an auto-criticism began to be undertaken more seriously. But, this self-criticism left its place to a global-level operation in a very short time. After September 11, all troublesome states undertook a kind of cleansing within themselves pleading the attacks performed towards USA. There became an increase in the already-felt pressure of the states, respectively, of China over East Turkistan, Russia over Chechnya, India over Kashmir, and Israel over Palestinian. Human rights violations began to be seen as something natural/normal and committed in the name of struggle against terrorism. Because, the attack to the USA created a big opportunity for every state to terminate its enemy. Very good conditions appeared for states to tackle with their problems. So, the world passed to a new era of domination/tyranny.

F. CONCLUSION

It is indispensable, rather than the religionization of nation-states, to put forward an alternative political theory by returning to the main sources of Islam.⁹ Post-Westphalia process caused the Ottoman Empire to collapse and new nation-states to appear in the center of Islamic civilization. So, it is obvious that then-established nation-states on this civilization don't represent the Islamic civilization. The intention of nation-states to build up history on the basis of themselves spoils the integrity of Islamic Civilization. Especially The Khatemi's saying that the only place that dialogue can be offered and his reduction of dialog to a one race¹⁰ displays that his discourse is more likely pertains to a modernist discourse of a nation-state rather than an intercivilizational discourse.

⁸ Marisol Touraine, "Altüst Olan Dünya : 21. Yüzyılın Jeopolitiği (trans. Turhan Ilgaz)", Ümit yayıncılık, Ankara 1997, p13.

⁹ Ahmed Davutoglu, "Alternative paradigms: The Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory", Universty of America, Maryland; 1994, p202.

¹⁰ Mohammed Khatemi, " The Soul's East, Reason's West", NPQ, Spring 1999, p3.

To Jean François Mayer, “We, as human beings, know that the struggle of powers, strategies etc. are not making us more religious and are not the elements that can lead us to the binding to religion. Religion means to experience God personally.”¹¹

To Teoman Durali, “In theory, Islam is the concrete reflection of divine will. On the other hand, ideology, is the product of philosophy-science that is the work of human reason. These two are actually opposite. Trying to reduce the one to the other means something silly in respect to philosophy-science; and refusal of God in respect to the religion. You are neither able to ideologize the Islam, nor Islamize the ideology.”¹² Therefore, he claims that Muslims must refuse most severely the people who are trying to exploit religion for their political interests. Especially after the Iranian Revolution, a nation-state was made religionized. He believes that many people’s being killed and the appearance of a clergy class who has an immunity are jeopardizing Islam. Should this situation goes on like this, he claims, Islam may be attached to globalized unreligious British-Jewish civilization and it is claimed that there are efforts in this respect.

To Sürüş, Islamic teaching is made up of Islamic world-view and Islamic ideology. When we say that the existence of God, the other world, revelation, and angles are the truth itself, we at the same time explain some tenets of Islamic world-view. However, all the proposals related to our duties put forward in “fikh” and ethics like “Praying must be performed” are the products of Islamic ideology.¹³ Teoman Durali says that Sürüş is making a mistake and emphasizes on that every mind tends to be conducive of different inferences. He insists that a religion and ideology are two separate languages.

The traditional idea of state in Islam is different in essence from contemporary nation-state understanding. These two have nothing in common. While Islam asserts state as a tool of realizing divine will, the nation-state, in opposite, gives national interests determined by human being priority leaving God alone. All nation-states are the products of the Western civilization and its period of imperialism/colonialism. Nation-states are anti-Islamic.

¹¹ Jean François Mayer, “ II Vatikan Konsilin’den sonra Hristiyan dünyasındaki yeni temayüller ve gelişmeler”, *Divan İlmi araştırmalar*, s. 9, 2000/2, p.112.

¹² Teoman Duralı, “ Çağdaş Küresel Medeniyet : Çağdaş Küreselleştirilen İngiliz ve Yahudi Medeniyeti”, *Dergâh yayınları*, Kasım 2000 İstanbul, p186.

¹³ Abdülkerim Sürüş, *Kim savaşım verebilir ?*, (trans. Sabah Kara), Seçkin yayıncılık, İstanbul,p.70

Nationalism is the real antithesis of Islam. Therefore, we must admit the reality that Islam has no a kind of political-based design.

This period of history in which Muslim societies are transforming into nation-states may be said to be an extension of European colonialism, actually. Almost all Muslim states have capitalist economic system and are now somewhat integrated into international capitalist economy. The universalization of nation-state and capitalist culture is the thing that A.J.P. Taylor wants to tell about in his saying “the total victory of the Western civilization managed to come with the 20th century.”¹⁴ Now we are the free prisoners of Western civilization. Islamic dominance can only mean the dominance of a collective “takva” of all Muslims organized in Islamic state. It is a pre-condition for surrender to God. It is impossible to surrender to God while obeying the understanding of denial of God’s existence. This shows clearly why Islamic authority cannot be an alliance towards the East and the West. No regime that is oppressive in internal politics and a kind of servant in its foreign affairs can claim to Islamize itself or its society, except for deceptive reasons. The Muslims of the world have to accept that nationalism is a denial of God, and a modern nation-state is a product of the historical period in which Muslims were defeated by deniers of God and lived under dominance of them.¹⁵ We can draw a conclusion from here that we may cause to the elimination of the universal message of Islam in our environment through making mistakes as a result of thinking in Western concepts. For Kalim Siddiqi, They are trying to mold Islam within the framework of western political science.¹⁶ Therefore, it is so important/necessary for Muslims to turn back to the main sources of Islam and constituting a new political theory. However, to him, there is no need to have a Muslim political scientist who is to develop theories in the name of receiving acceptance and deepening in the subject. In Islam, there is a structure that provides necessary conditions for science and knowledge, so religious sciences are more useful on the way to reach the objective. The conversion of Islam to nation-state structure will probably bring about deviation from its original sources, and will be conducive to what Dostoyevski says the creation of every state’s own God with their own style. The Gods of nations cannot be the same, if could, then nations must disappear.¹⁷ What’s more the nation-states are the safeguards of capitalist systems. So, even though the utterances that nation-states have come to disappear with globalization, it is not coincidence that every day

¹⁴ Kalim Siddiqi, “Conflict, Crisis and War in Pakistan”, MacMillan and New York Preager, London 1972, p.56.

¹⁵ Kalim Siddiqi, “ Evrensel İslam Çağrısı : Alternative bir Yaklaşım”, Birleşim, Ankara Kasım 1986, p101.

¹⁶ a.g.e. p 58.

new states are emerging. To Wallerstein, the reason for the appearance of ethnic rebellions is that capitalist states are exploiting these movements. Ethnic rebellions have brought about the necessary conditions for exploitation. In short, we are not the persons who will make a romantic irony here. We are actually the defenseless victims of this kind of ironies. When a child draws something on a paper, he never asks what his drawing means. So, Muslims are obligated to produce/create solutions by thinking with their own concepts.

¹⁷ Dostoyevski, Cinler (trans. Ergin Altay), İletişim, İstanbul 2000, p.253.