

Abdulrahman ALRASSI

The Embassy of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Romania and Moldova

# INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE – A MUST FOR A SUSTAINABLE HARMONY AMONG RELIGION FOLLOWERS

Theoretical  
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## Abstract

*The impact of the dialogue between cultures can meet national and "internal" dimensions and features or even regional and "external" ones. In order to grasp all the dimensions of this paradigm shift, it is important to try understanding the concepts of and interactions between culture, conflict and dialogue as an array, where conflict has to be always isolated between the other two concepts. The main aim of the paper is to underline the idea that just having a fair dialogue between cultures and religions followers can be established a sustainable harmony among them.*

*Culture is closely connected to a community environment. Indeed, culture is essentially collective and it affects and influences human behavior. Culture helps people to build and preserve their own identity. Identity stems from the consciousness of difference. Sometimes, this identity sharpens after a confrontation. It strengthens the self-esteem of the individual, and it makes it easier for the individual to accept compromises in deals with other parties without being afraid of "losing face" or "losing values" or "misunderstanding values".*

## Introduction

Is very important to establish the difference between the "culture of dialogue" and the "culture of dialogue between cultures".

The **Culture of Dialogue** has as a core goal building collective customs and traditions that would lead to finding a peaceful solution to both the solving and the disagreement matters. Also, the objective becomes inclusive to the community as a whole, without distinguishing between cultures or between cultural specificities which are the embedded components. The culture of dialogue has a public dimension that is specific for a given society, a given family and a given state.

The second concept, the **dialogue between cultures**, has its roots in the general culture of dialogue, but takes into account the cultural factor as the standard on the basis of which the points of difference and conflict are identified. This is why it is stringently to examine the positive and negative effects of this cultural factor in order to recognize the evolution of the disagreement towards an open conflict, seeking to build a common framework that preserves on one hand the cultural specificity of the national components, while on the other hand it is linked to the principle of the common good, which is -in this context- to maintain civil peace as well as social and human interactions.

The impact of the dialogue between cultures can meet national and "internal" dimensions and features or even regional and "external" ones. In order to grasp all the dimensions of this paradigm shift, it is important to try understanding the concepts of and interactions between culture, conflict and dialogue as an array, where conflict has to be always isolated between the other two concepts.

The origin of term culture comes from the Latin term, *colere*. It refers to the placement of symbolic practices, often

called "codes" into a theatrical scene. Those theatrical representations are designed to transmit a sense of belonging. Dialogue is differently organized and includes images or "encodements" (symbols) and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations (traditions), contemporaries, and formed by the individuals themselves (modern). Therefore, culture becomes a set of shared and enduring meanings, values and beliefs that characterize groups and orient their behavior.

**Continuous efforts for maintaining the sustainable harmony among civilizations and religion followers**

**Culture is closely connected to a community environment.** Indeed, culture is essentially collective and it affects and influences human behavior. Generally, culture often influences the criteria for what is good or bad. Values are the components of the culture influence "the selection from available modes, means and ends of action" (Kuckhohn, 1951, p.395).

**Culture helps people to build and preserve their own identity.** Identity stems from the consciousness of difference. Sometimes, this identity sharpens after a confrontation. It strengthens the self-esteem of the individual, and it makes it easier for the individual to accept compromises in deals with other parties without being afraid of "losing face" or "losing values" or "misunderstanding values".

**One dimension of the culture is met as subculture.**

Corporate or professional culture is a subculture that has its own meanings and features, norms and rules of behavior and symbols. A corporate culture also has a transnational dimension which may conflict usually with the local ethnic cultures. This conflict may lead to different rationale and strategies. The family culture, the clan and the tribal culture, are all *infra* national cultures, making it even more difficult to assess the dominant

characteristics of a person's or group's culture.

**Culture has to analyze the past**, to look and see what went wrong. This is a long process of self-reflection which is a form of therapy in itself.

**Culture is a positive organizing force** that lends coherence, meaning and richness to life. It shapes a person's values and identity. Identity stems from differences in Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Class, Religion, Nation, Language, and Geographic Region.

In addition to dynamism that makes it open to the different interactions with its environment, culture is characterized by heterogeneity, social complexity and individual construct.

Though it gives coherence to organized individuals, the nature of culture itself is rarely homogenous. Culture is rarely monolithic. It has a heterogeneous nature and is embodied by a number of internal paradoxes and contradictions so that decoding the behaviors of individuals requires a fine understanding of its complexity. It is composed of a major, a minor and sometimes of different minors.

Globalizing behaviors, jumping to shortcuts or oversimplification of the heterogeneous and pluralistic nature of Culture leads to false and sometimes dangerous stereotyping. However, this heterogeneous characteristic is not an impediment to resolving conflict. True cultural management by the choice of values, their development, and their reinforcement as a result of the learning process of the dialogue itself could lead to satisfactory ending of the dispute such as the Rhinewater dispute (Faure & Rubin, p.216)

### **Social complexity**

The heterogeneous nature of society implies that individuals belonging to a group with a dominant culture might not be sharing exactly the same cultural content.

The most important features of cultural interactions with conflicts in the Arab world can be regrouped in four groups: the identity-based divide, the religious question, the North/South divide, and the problems of governance.

During intense and prolonged conflict, identity conflicts take the form of a struggle for survival. Affirming one's existence in the climate of hatred becomes synonymous with the annihilation or reduction of the other. Maximizing one's share is essentially a fight for the right to live with dignity. The Palestinian Question is a good illustration of the centrality of such an identity-based divide. Other examples can be taken from the minority question in the Middle East, and it may concern ethnic groups (the Kurds or the Armenians) or religious ones (the Shi'a or the Christians). This issue complicates the traditional intra-state paradigm. It adds the dimension of non-state actors and forces the adoption of additional levels of analysis, focused on conflict genesis and transformation through intercultural dialogue.

#### *The connection between religion and intercultural dialogue*

Religion plays a core role in the evolution of a conflict because it influences the issues, parties, strategies, outcomes, and interveners. Religion helps to construct both the individual's and the group's value system and world-view. If an individual or a group has internalized a set of religious values, these beliefs can motivate and be the reasons for changes in attitude and action.

#### *The complex nature of religion*

The differentiation lines are not defined between religions, but even within the same religion as well. Instead of becoming a source of inspiration to build the common good for all humanity, religion thus used by politics becomes a source of differentiation to assert one's claims and demands in the name of the private good of the community. These new demarcation lines of politics

embedded with religious alibi put more pressure on the inter-religious dialogue. The separation of religion from politics could have been one venue to uproot the causes of such a divide. This approach remains just at the level of theory and impractical. Theoretically, Islam is a way of life that encompasses all aspects of life, including politics. And practically, the religious awareness and the emergence of political parties claiming the implementation of Sharia as the major source of law make very difficult to operate such separation between religion and politics.

There is however some genuine effort made to differentiate in Islam between the higher religious principles or Ibadat, and the other religious principles relate or Adat. The first set is the core body of law that creates imperative norms that suffer no exception and should be of universal application. Whereas the second set is open to interpretation and adaptation to the prevailing situation. The first one creates the obligation for the believer vis-à-vis his creator, whereas the second one creates the code of conduct or the social contract that binds the believer to the other citizens. That internal vertical separation within the hierarchy of norms of Islam replaces the difficult horizontal separation between religion and politics and by so doing, paves the way for a more civic approach to constitutions, laws and policies.

Also, over the last few decades there have been many meetings on this subject the paper intends to discuss. What is intercultural dialogue? Well, I think it is not just a question of having intellectuals sit around various tables on this planet to discuss things. There may be good books and articles on the subject and so on but it really has to become human. The East-West divide is something that should be confronted, and that confrontation should take place within individuals and not on the battlefield. It is then that people will be able to develop a sort of global

consciousness or identity. When we talk about cultural dialogue, the Alliance of Civilizations is the kind of thing that I think of, and if we promote that kind of intercultural dialogue so that it really seeps into the souls of human beings, only then will we achieve our objectives.

International cultural relations in the present time more than ever necessitate co-operation between organisations that represent regions, areas of common culture or groups of countries, in addition to existing bilateral co-operation between countries and their institutions.

The government's partnership with international organisations in cultural projects not only offers the possibility of reaching a wider audience in their member countries, but it also makes it possible to deal with subjects of general or global concern.

in modern times, the most important contributions to the study of the culture brought Ethnology (or/and ethnography), cultural anthropology, sociology of culture and history. Here is what is their point of view on culture.

Sociology of culture, as a branch of sociology, analyzes the relations between the company (in terms of Sociology-global social system) and culture as its subsystem, from the perspective of social conditioning of culture and social function of culture. Sociology approaches culture as a whole of the material and spiritual values, institutions, habits, norms, traditions as an expression of the way of living and quality of life.

Sociology analyzes: the relationship between culture and civilization, especially from the perspective of the mutual conditioning of the system of national culture, folk culture, high culture, mass culture, the internal structure of the culture. All these aspects are somewhat self explanatory-trending looks, timeless, aspatial, causal-functional.

The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization

(UNESCO), in cooperation with the Arab League, the PLO and the Palestinian Authority, have decided to recognize and celebrate Jerusalem as "the capital of Arab culture" for 2009.

Contrary to a common assumption that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its administrative arm, the Palestinian Authority (PA), demand "East Jerusalem" as a future capital for a nation-state of Palestine, their actual demand is for all of Jerusalem. The consistent term used today in the Arabic language for the Jerusalem aspirations of the Palestinians is *al-Quds al-Sharif* - holy Jerusalem, all of Jerusalem - not "East Jerusalem".

In that context, UNESCO is working with Palestinian Authority officials and key Arab figures in Israel to organize celebrations that they will turn into a huge event protesting against what they describe as "the Israeli occupation of Holy Jerusalem." The Palestinians' plan stems from the fact that 16 neighborhoods in West Jerusalem are constructed in place of pre-1948 Arab neighborhoods from which the Arabs fled during the 1948 war. Since 1996, the title "capital of Arab culture" has been accorded by the Arab bloc in UNESCO to one of the capitals in the Arab world. This year, for example, Damascus, capital of Syria, was given the coveted title, and last year Algiers, capital of Algeria, received it. Other cities that have received the title over the years were Cairo, Tunis, Amman, Beirut and Khartoum. Jerusalem is the latest chosen to bear the prestigious title and now the Arab leadership is preparing to turn the title into a symbol of the battle against Israeli control of Jerusalem.

The basis for cooperation between the PA and members of the Arab population in Israel was laid recently in the Israeli Arab city of Shfaram, where a meeting took place between PA representatives and representatives of Israel's Arab population. They met to discuss preparations for the events

associated with the title to be granted to Jerusalem.

One of the participants at the meeting with the PA representatives was Amir Mahoul, the chairman of Ittijah - the Union of Arab Community-Based Associations - the umbrella organization of the Arab NGOs in Israel and the chairman of a "committee for the defense of freedoms." Mr. Mahoul said that he believed Israel would try to create difficulties for the events that will take place in the framework of the declaration that "the capital of Arab culture" is Jerusalem.

"We expect Israel will make things difficult for us and this is a fact that we will take into account, and over which we will battle the Israeli occupation authorities," said Mr. Mahoul.

Mr. Mahoul stressed that he and the PA plan to turn the events associated with the title into a campaign against the occupation of Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem. "This will be an event symbolizing the battle against the occupation, beyond the historical and cultural value of Jerusalem," he explained. "We will stress that Jerusalem is the capital of Palestinian-Arab culture, which is under occupation, and Israel should realize that every time there is a battle over Jerusalem, it loses."

In contrast to Mr. Mahoul, the Secretary General of Mada, the Arab Democratic Party, Mahmoud Mawasi, said that the purpose of the events was to raise awareness of the Arabic and Islamic past of Jerusalem, and not necessarily to create friction with the Israeli establishment. "We don't want to clash with the establishment," he said, "rather our intention is to celebrate the fact that Jerusalem was for many years the center of Arab and Islamic culture."

Although it is widely assumed that the Western nations recognize Israel's sovereignty in Jerusalem, that assumption is not correct. No member state of the United Nations maintains an embassy in any part of Jerusalem. Every nation in the

world, except for Israel, lists those of their nationals who were born in Jerusalem as having been born in Jerusalem, with no listing of the country of birth.

The capital of Bahrain, Manama, was officially declared the capital of Arab culture for the year 2012. This honorary title is awarded to the initiative of the League of Arab States and international Organization UNESCO in 1996. The official ceremony, which took place in early February, was opened by King Bahreinului, Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa, in the presence of onora ilor in different States of the Arab Peninsula and the Ministers of culture of the Arab countries. At the same time, the ceremony was a major artistic plant-"The Pearl". During the inauguration, on the background of traditional Arab Music Orchestra, were presented to the history of Bahrain, its traditions and customs, as well as existing at the time the current prospects for the country's youth.

As European countries and their Union would not be cosemnatare international documents referring to human rights. Binnaz Toprak's opinion, social democratic lawmaker in the legislature from Ankara, Turkey demonstrates rather where can slide rule of law if the Islamist parties come to power through democratic elections.

As was said recently in Berlin, Soli Yeliz, "the Middle East is not somewhere out there; He is here. " Middle East and Muslim Mediterranean riviera are proxima of Europe, which, of course, the European Union should wish to see a stable and secure, and if you don't somehow and some prosperity. Only the interest of the European Union stumbles in the interests of the Member States-that not infrequently, is heading that-ncotro. While the EU has, in addition, and financial limits. Sure, there might be room for a Marshall plan with European methodology and money from rich Arab monarchies. But such an idea is hit by political barriers. And it is a problem faced by the European Union, one of

credibility: for years has had to cooperate with the dictators turn recently in North Africa. Yeliz compares this moment with the collapse of an Empire ("it's never pleasant to assist to something"), coalesced around the Arab domination-pool. However, the first Gulf war and Kurdish zone as a buffer in northern Iraq, they kinda changed this state of affairs.

Syria is perhaps the most telling illustration of trends in the Arab world today, after the expansion of Kurdish nationalism and the rise of Shia Islam; In addition, the dissensions between the ethnic groups and religious groups are becoming more blunt. And all Syria demonstrates how flammable are tensions, since peaceful protests could degenerate into antigovernment a multi-ethnic civil war and confessional.

Not to forget, from this desolate landscape, that the only four countries in the region that can count on ethnic and religious homogeneity are Turkey, Iran, Israel, and Egypt. But these States are not exempt from the pressures-internal or external.

Iran was, in fact, three decades, only one model for the Muslim world. On September 4 the european optimism for peace process does not seem to have too much ground. And yet, believes the german diplomat Andreas Reinicke, who represented Saudi Arabia and Syria in Berlin before the EU mandate, "the Arab world is moving towards more openness and freedom" either and in jumps and not overnight: "I think you have to think in terms of decades, not years." Europeans should be patient.

But the euphoria of the fall of dictators, Egypt Tunisia and Libya has kinda faded. At this time, the civil war in Syria, orpileaz public opinion, which demonstrates the lack of political solutions to the world. Meanwhile, the opposition in Bahrain, îngenunchiat of power, retaliation is no longer heard on media channels too widely.

Economist and Turkish Envoy Yeliz political researcher believes that the developments surrounding the Mediterranean Sea marks the end of a systemic order post-Ottoman created by United Kingdom and France. As such, neither has ever put the problem in these 30 years, a change of political system. In the meantime, however, the secular Turkish State with the ruling islamist party begins to draw the Arab world. Radwan Masmoudi, the Tunisian Center for the study of Islam and Democracy, supported by Washington, suggests that, while not necessarily perfect, example of Turkey opens the way of co-existence between islam and democracy, islam and secularism even. That things aren't really pink a pinpoints and opposition from Ankara, warning that Turkish democracy is not a liberal Western Rite, nay, on the contrary: under the Government of Prime Minister Erdogan, the country was transformed slowly into a party-State, with a forced

power press to choose the path of discretion and with fundamental rights.

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