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CIVILISATION ISSUES

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Summary: One of the French nation's challenges is to produce a model of society that's based on justice, respect for difference, and integration for the diverse ethnic, cultural, spiritual, and social hearths of its population. The evolution of France's spiritual and socio-demographic components, of its cultural and historical elements, put it at the heart of consolidating a united, inclusive, and riche diversity. The issue of men's rights allow us to explore a possible dialogue between Islam and the West. It will help us define the main goals of civilisation conditioning the construction of a nation and a durable collective identity.

Key words: civilisation, nation, spiritual and socio-demographic background, cultural and historical factors, modernity, diversity, civilizational dialogue, men's rights, heterogeneity of Islam's components and practices.

A New Spiritual and Socio-Demographic Landscape

The Muslim presence in the West has deeply changed the social, cultural, and religious background historically based on a Roman-Greek and Judeo-Christian foundation. This reality has stayed the same for a long time and was perceived as unchangeable. Even though old Europe offers "a contrasted painting of societies far from mixing, the political organisations it gives itself, the religion or traditions it practises, or even the language it speaks with the lands occupied by its population" (Cuisenier 1993, p. 78). Samuel Huntington and other scholars defend the "clash of civilisations" theory. For Jean-Pierre Warnier (2004), the "war of civilisations" is not an identity war (Islam against Christianity). We wouldn't presume to detail the history of Muslim implantation in the West, but we would like to think on what this presence could bring to Western society. For Maurice Lengellé-Tardy (1999): "One of the great missions of international organisations could be to get rid of global economy models that aren't adapted to third world countries. To elaborate a plan so that in the future, progress – to this day genocide – truly liberates men from need – in short, to give back morals to humanity – and forced labour. Instead of provoking, as is the case now, the spread of slave candidates and exorcise hunger's ghost too: the great fear of the 21st Century". For Southern countries, rebalancing the North-South relationships is the main perspective for a dialogue including under-developed countries, third world, poverty, dependence, delay, and chaos. Speaking of a responsible presence in Islam is to think on the individual and collective sense of belonging and duty. This also implies addressing a dual challenge of identity. Muslims would have to first define themselves through their present and future contexts, looking critically at a

fragile cohesion. Then defining the mid and long term finalities, goals, and perspectives of their presence. Western Muslims think it's their duty to absorb their historic heritage, and learn from it to free themselves from the fixed approach of those sources and texts. An immobility and image constantly associated with their current identity, their perception and that of Islam to a whole of retrograded traditions, community decline, and refusal of modernism. Muslims' presence in the West is a fact from a socio-demographic point of view. However, available studies and statistics are only the tip of the iceberg. If this Muslim presence is manifested by social, economic, and political participation, it isn't safe from communitarian temptations. We notice an ethnicity of space, particularly in a commercial area. A deep social and spatial segregation taking a specific space in city suburbs in countries like France. Let's point out that this presence varies considerably from country to country in terms of demography and socio-economic situation. It's inherent to the history of immigration, to the nature of the relationships that colonising powers have maintained with their colonies, with the weight of postcolonial heritage in people's minds. It isn't easy to reflect on the diversity of situations and heterogeneity that describe Muslims' presence in the West (amount of practising the faith, weight of cultures, of traditions). To speak about participation, and thought-out and assumed presence, makes us take on the issue of Muslims' rights in the West. They would be made to claim them legitimately. Muslims' recognition as European or American citizens, of their cult, of their right to state their convictions, to freely practice their faith in proper spaces, carves itself into democracy's secular openings and pacific claims. From one country to the next, the differences stand out: political and civic implication, height of public financing, representative structures. Muslim citizens living in the West consider there is a gap between the low recognition of their rights and the weight they represent in a civil society. The equation is composed of confessional, ethnic, and cultural conditions on one hand, and identity, social, economic, and political claims on the other. All this in terms of recognition and statement of their citizenship, plain and simple. The spirit of secular democracies installs "living together" as a norm for society, parring against communitarian temptations and marginalising phenomena. It therefore invites a free and open expression of each person's convictions and aspirations, individually and in the many layers of public life, with respect and acceptance of others. In Western Europe, France is the historic and ideological bastion of secularity. Its second most present religion is Islam, and its where there is the highest concentration of Muslims.¹ The Wall Street journal has suggested a total of 8% of the French population.

1 In the absence of official and reliable figures, diverging estimations have been suggested.

This figure includes 70% of citizens originating from old North African colonies.² The concentration of Muslims in underprivileged suburbs is seen as a spatial, social, and economic exclusion by Muslims. The specific magnitude of the issue of Islam and secularity in France is seen as the symptoms of a malaise, of a socio-cultural and religious evolution at the heart of the city. This was particularly noticeable during the “headscarf case” in schools and public areas. The recurring conflagrations of “sensitive” suburbs were seen as a cry from disinherited youths. Four million Muslim citizens live in Germany, particularly of Turk origin. These citizens hold their mother country dear to their hearts. For a long time, they have been considered simply as foreign workers. Still today, these Muslims are subject to chronic xenophobic behaviours. The authorities are starting to act and are only just realising the seriousness of this problem. The relationship between the United Kingdom and Muslims goes right back to the Middle Ages. We’d like to point out that as of September 11th, the way Muslims are seen has brutally evolved and the behaviour towards them has changed dramatically. A massive influx of people went to the United Kingdom in the 1960’s to work there. They are, for the most part, from Asia and East Africa, from old British colonies. Today, half of Muslim immigrants living in the United Kingdom are born there. Statistics also put forward a high portion of unemployed, under-qualified people, usually renting property within this population. However, the authorities had the wisdom to establish a principle of recognition, and freedom of expression of all cultures within society. In this way, the government openly preaches a multi-cultural policy. In the United States, from a statistic point of view, it is hard to ascertain precisely how much of the population is Muslim. Again, the immigration flow explains its presence with large numbers of converted, approximately a fifth of Muslims. Egon Mayer and Tom Smith estimate near two million Muslims. However, this low hypothesis is confronted with figures estimated by critical scientists and Muslim organisations. The American Muslim Council goes anything from five to eight million Muslims. The reliability of these statistics is subject to problematics defining the criteria deciding who is truly Muslim and who is not, as Daniel Pipes from the New York Post points out. In any case, whether it’s in Europe or in America, things aren’t only statistics, and transformations are ongoing. The growing weight of Muslims in the world’s population is witness to this. These statements raise debates and questions on the presence of a growing Islam, which disturbs a certain conception of secularity.

² Source: Insee, 2004.

Islam-West: Clash of Civilisations?

In Alain Touraine's analysis of the relationship between Islam and the West, he underlines the absorption of Islam by Westerners as contrasting with the constant massive Muslim presence, particularly in European societies. This manifests through a growing frequency of practicing rites. Along with other contemporary scholars, he claims that European Islam can play "a dynamic and modern part inside the whole of the Islamic world". At the same time, he also thinks that this presence "makes religious foundations reappear in European societies where faith, as an institutional practise, is quickly regressing. Where Catholics in particular don't follow the church's positions, for example concerning abortion, artificial insemination, research on stem cells or euthanasia". He continues: "Against the dangerous and erroneous image that identifies religions with decline and modernism, we see increasing demands for spirituality and reflexion on the meaning of life, as well as communities of believers; while religious institutions are regressing almost everywhere". For this social scientist, it's urgent to recognise the Muslim population's alterity. Not in a sense of confrontation, but in an approach to come closer. A kind of schok-proof parring with the growing hostility between communities and belongings (Touraine 2007, pp.243-244). Through his writings, Amin Maalouf tries to show that it's possible to overcome the strong divisions through a human dimension transcending religious, political, and cultural hostilities. Hélé Béji reminds us that "to be human doesn't only mean belonging to the human race. It's also the ability to be sensitive to humanity, and to be capable of humanity. Which is to say to be good, sensitive, and charitable" (Béji 1999, p.167). According to him, this disposition must be cultivated particularly through effort and conscience. To the mediated question: "is Islam soluble with the Republic?", he answers: "at the time, it was a case of civilising one who we couldn't even consider, by his race, as being an equal. Today's problem is unchanged. We have simply changed the word 'race' to 'culture'" (Béji 1999, p.170). The author qualifies a globalisation "plunging us into general indifference", and would resemble a "cultural quest of dominance and supremacy. The general submission to a determinism looking like a general domestication, a modern version of fatality, necessity, and therefore a loss of humanity, civility, or even civilisation in the universal sense, not the worldwide sense" (Béji 1999, p.176). He asks an underlining question: "Are the foundations of recognition between humans a cultural prerogative? Don't they undermine the meaning of being human to reduce Man to his culture? Is my neighbour human solely because he has a culture, or is he human by 'nature'? As claims Rousseau, this capacity Man has of looking to himself, of withdrawal, to find his virtues of humanity: his famous conscience, that divine instinct" (Béji 1999, p.174).

Questioning Nation

The saving and future of their nation are the main goals of modern democracies. The presence of Islam in the West is as much a problem as Muslims falling prey to a fundamentalism rejecting the principles of a dominating secularity. According to Yves Lacoste (1997), Muslims should be “considered as a minority because of their language, but especially because of Islam”. This perception can tend to exacerbate tensions and psychoses, just as much as the actions of the far right it questions. Some have proclaimed the end of the nation, like Jean-Marie Guéhenno in his book *La fin de la démocratie* (i.e. *The end of democracy*). The nation states root themselves in the collective conscience and recognition of a historic, cultural, linguistic, and territorial identity. The idea of a nation is violently confronted with regional, community, or xenophobic demands and temptations manifested with more or less intensity throughout the country. In his book *Vive la nation* (i.e. *Long live the nation*), Yves Lacoste (1997) defends the integrity of the nation. A concept that must, according to him, be simplified and widened. Contrary to this, our research shows that it’s important to put an ideal of timeless fraternity, and human relations expressed from one to the other, above all else. We must understand where our neighbour comes from and what he aspires to, so we can build against egocentricity and individualism, which erode our societies from the inside. For Anne-Marie Thiesse (2008, p.15), the national principle has deeply marked current European societies, for better and for worse: “It has allowed growth for democracy, individual rights, and trans-social solidarity. But it has also allowed growth for excluding practises, of ‘ethnic cleaning’, and has raised two world wars. Its current revival is definitely linked to the de-legitimation of the opposing principle: Marxist internationalism. However, the return of the nation, as a community ideal, takes place in a time where changes in production, exchange, financial capitalism, and balance of power are seriously questioning the nation state’s part in the development of economic and social principles”. A number of specialists (anthropologists, historians, social scientists, philosophers) condemn today, as they have in the past, the debate on national identity. France’s authorities try to instigate this debate solely for their own political purposes. The issue of national identity and the future of the nation often resurface. Let’s remind ourselves that the nationalists’ exacerbations were the cause of regional and worldwide conflicts. The economist Michel Herland (2009) reminds us that national identity is constituted of the nation states, that, according to him, are defined less by their positive values, than by their hereditary enemy, or the conquest of new territories. For him, the time for national identity is past, after the decolonisation, the creation of the European Union, and globalisation. However, he thinks that in France, within the current debate, it appears the “conservative” party (including certain left-wing representatives) is looking to revive this conception of national identity when it highlights the national anthem and the tricolored flag. The integration to the European Union, the economic globalisation usually accompanied by thought globalisation, characterised by an acceleration of new information and communication techniques are as many factors explaining the ambition for a strong French identity, as was the case during the Third Republic, is purely utopic. He thinks the “progressive” party is more in touch with our times than

the conservative party. France only needs to effectively guarantee republican values, particularly in equality, to finally close the debate on identity: “All French, whatever their origins, their social status, their religion, etc. will be proud of belonging to a country that recognises their rights judged as fundamental. Therefore, it’s vain for him to try to define what could be a ‘common identity to all French’” (Herland 2009). He considers that the nation no longer exists. It remains a state trying as much as possible to bring together groups with contradictory interests and aspirations. It’s certainly not, according to him, a simple debate on national identity that could resolve all these contradictions magically. It’s interesting to place the debate on the future of the nation at the heart of the capital aim for the consideration of alterity as a whole of the ensemble. To place it as a contribution and a spiritual and civilizational enrichment transcending borders; at a time when integrity of national spaces must face virulent particularities, the hold of economic globalisation, the strategies of governments, and the globalisation of behaviours and means of communication.

It would be pertinent to ask ourselves not on the “how” of integrating the fringe of the marginalised population with an identity mold, a rather vague concept as Yves Lacoste (1997) points out, but more on the “why” of republican ideals failure. One of these goals consists of converging efforts towards the discovery of what could bring together the perceptions and convictions of two worlds. For Armand Touati, who underlines the complexity of a nation/identity relationship, it’s necessary to explain the meaning of “democratic system”, as well as the place the latter gives to different identities: “The conception of working to bring together cultures, and interculturalism, allows building common spaces for influence, and intermingling respecting specific identities expressing sharing, generational experiences, lifestyles, and representations of the world” (Touati 1999, p.157). The dialogue appears as a reply to ambient antagonisms and apocalyptic speeches prophesising an inevitable and imminent civilizational confrontation. “What is there in rejecting another? There is the will to avert a foreigner. But in truth, a foreigner is not as foreign or strange as that. In truth, the foreigner is that dark part in each of us. It’s the negation of another’s identity. A negation born from a hierarchy and whose consequence is inevitable: an inferiority complex. [...] The far-off colonisation – we can ask ourselves – would it have known the duration, the magnitude that we know, without this inferior data of disregard that actually comes from the existence of different indigenous populations?” (Halimi 1999, p.34). The propensity to collectively discover a common identity heritage, a hearth which sources in and recognises each people, each culture, consists of one of the pillars of a nation turned towards the future.

The September 11th Effect

The 21st Century was marked by the 2001 attack on the United States. A number of analysts say this attack legitimised a war in the names of freedom, sovereignty, and worldwide justice: “When faced with the relative failure of development and third-world politics applied to less advanced countries, Western countries try to impose ‘better governing’ democratically through weapons, like the United States and their allies have tried to do in Iraq” (Warnier 2004, p. 109). According to the ethnologist, these enterprises, especially when lead unilaterally “remind us of unfortunate memories of the ‘civilisation missions’ that inspired many colonial enterprises” (Warnier 2004). He wonders if Western activism, preaching people’s rights everywhere, is perceived as interfering negatively by those interested. The indirect link of terrorism, hate, and violence with Islam has contributed to cultivating a subconscious apprehension and reject of Muslims worldwide. Kayhan Delibas (2009, p.89) explains that since September 11th, 2001, “international terrorism” is associated with “Islam”. This perception could raise the existence of a “typical profile” of integrists which would correspond to all Muslims. Kayhan Delibas (2009) reminds us that September 11th produced prolific literature on Islamic fundamentalism. These writings underline the renewed hate of the Muslim world toward Western civilisation. September 11th was interpreted as an Islamic *jihad* determined to destroy this civilisation, their values of freedom and democracy. The rhetoric is simple: “them” and “us”. The researcher shows the limits of this approach against one of the main problems of the 21st Century which is singularly complex. He associates this simplistic vision, to say the least, with a prophecy feeding radicalism and extremism of certain groups, and reinforcing the world’s dread of Muslims in the West (Delibas 2009, p.95).

Men’s Rights as an Interface to Civilisations

There are few voices preaching a reconciliation of the conception of Men’s rights, and accepting a large area of significations beyond cardinal values that everyone willingly recognises. Islam places at the very heart of society’s project humanity’s dignity and sanctity. To a Muslim, living for God means always defending justice and respecting the ideals to which everyone has a right to. Inspired by the word of God, the Muslim interiorises this duty. The definition of Men’s rights in Islam takes on an entirely spiritual dimension. The duties falling to each citizen don’t make any sense unless the spirit of the law recognises each individual with as many prerogatives as obligations. This “social contract” implicitly linking all residents of a city guarantees order within its walls. For Jules Ferry, the duty of the “superior races” consists in civilising the “inferior races”. This “white man” ethnocentricity encompasses civilisation as an act of submission: “The Declaration of Man and Citizen and its dramatic statement, its petition for a utopic principle, almost against nature I would say, ‘all men are born and remain free and equal in rights’. This principle represents a humanist leap without precedent. But should we neglect the omissions, the unforgivable cracks of this philosophical system?” (Halimi 1999, p.38). Gisèle Halimi (1999) reminds us justly that the Declaration in 1789 doesn’t see, the internal contradiction proclaiming all

men as equal while maintaining slavery. Furthermore, she underlines a “universality” excluding half the population. Indeed, minors, the demented, and women never reach citizenship! According to her, more often than not, the rejection is not real but is fantasized: “It’s the rejection of something we have made as much to scare as to reinforce racism” She considers that multiple cultures help recognise in each man and woman “the parameter of human dignity” (Halimi 1999, p.42). Philippe Raynaud states that the defamation of the role of Western rationalism started in the 1960’s and constitutes one of the main motives of the broadcast or dissemination of ethnological critics of Western “ethnocentricity”. This Western rationalism was particularly defamatory in the idea of historic progress in forming colonial or imperialist ideologies. According to him, the former critics know a renewal thanks to an explicit questioning of the Republic’s past by “natives” condemning the so-called republican universality and its project to “civilise” (Raynaud 2007, p.77). Historically, the fight for justice, peace, and worldwide order has turned into a real war against values animating these ideals, while affecting its democracy, its moral identity, and its image. The French Declaration is directly inspired by Enlightenment. On several occasions, there are references to the “supreme Being”. Indeed, it’s under his auspices that the assembly introduces the Declaration. In a context of absolute rejection of anything remotely religiously conservative, God is not openly spoken of. The authors of the Declaration tried to create a new religion that some have compared to a “philosophical catechism”. From now on, we adore a more “natural” God, faithful to a philosophical conception of enlightenment. This God is now part of the background and has no place in politics, the main social modifier, which originated in the Ancient Regime’s fall. Serge Bernstein recalls how the republican culture leans on a normative reading of history: “An instrumented history made of an ensemble of models and lessons implying that humanity’s evolution generates the intentions of indefinite progress; such as encyclopaedists and then positivists thought. This reading of history reveals a major unbending. The one operated by the French revolution is considered a great turning in human history” (Bernstein 2007, p.10). According to him, Republicans consider France as the “great nation”, the “mother of new ideas”, “a beacon of freedom and progress enlightening the world”. These claims legitimise colonial conquests and conform to the “civilizational” mission. 18th Century philosophers “saw the reason behind a universal enlightenment and the disappearance of particularities” (Warnier 2004, p.30). Crossing the immaterial, civilizational, and psychic borders hinders meeting others, the common search for a wide acceptance of Men’s rights in societies evermore open to the world and diversity. This common search is the first step on the path to a healing human understanding.

An Islamic Concept of Human Rights

Through media, Islam is often associated with slavery and servitude of the human race. Etymologically, it's associated with the idea of peace and voluntary submission to God. Neither the Quran, nor the Islamic Prophet brutally repeals that which is deeply rooted in ancient social and commercial morals. Mohammed Draz (1951) recalls that tradition not only restrains the foundation of slavery by limiting the fighter's rights in war to defence only, but it substantially reduces the distance this old institution has created between society's classes. During the Islamic Prophet's lifetime, the masters had the duty to insure their slaves had the same clothes, the same food as their own, and to not give them work which they couldn't accomplish. It's true that before Islam, slavery was very common amongst Arabs. However, the social and moral evolutions that Islam triggers is progressively succeeding in coming to terms with austere and immoral practices and customs. This is how Calif Omar ibn el-Khattab, in the 7th Century, officially abolished slavery. He rose up against reducing men and women born free into servitude. Through the modernisation of economies, and the globalisation of exchanges and cultures, relationships of dominance take on new forms. The invitation in the Quran to liberate the captive considers a multitude of meanings. Modern slavery takes many different forms: servitude through work, child labour and exploitation, beating women, etc. "Among the hundreds of millions of our contemporary slaves, many are struggling indirectly for the tens, maybe hundreds, of millions of people living in developed Western countries" (Lengellé-Tardy 1999, p.118). Maurice Lengellé-Tardy (1999, p.118) estimates that the worst resides in the fact that "half of modern slaves are children, and half of the residents of richer countries haven't reached yet, or are over, working age". Aristotle considered that the slave status was the result of a loss of freedom to choose one's own activities. He lends himself to a perpetual genocide as soon as other Men have kept or acquired this free will (Lengellé-Tardy 1999, p.119). The economist René Passet (2000, p.29) notices that if Man is the finality, he is at the same the instrument, "the calculation object of economy". John Maynard Keynes thought that an economy built on the sole logic of capital, to the detriment of Man, would be a "stubbed science" (Keynes 1972). For René Passet, only that which transcends may give meaning. He refers to the values "suggesting a global vision of the world, of life, and of Man's place in the evolution of the Universe" (Passet 2000, p.185). "Entrusting social arbitrages to whatever economic, merchant, or non-merchant rationality would be substituting the order of a party to that of the whole. Making the economic instrument the finality, and the human finality the instrument; science itself, knowledge enterprise of the world served by technique, then becomes the tool of a mercantile ordered system; it becomes techno-science, dominated by the search for concrete results immediately fruitful" (Passet 2000, p.189). Scientific and technological revolutions serving Man have allowed liberating materially rudimentary societies. However, they have at the same time strengthened ideas that religion, in margin with movement, couldn't and wouldn't integrate its immutable dogmas with modernism. In Islam, Men's rights are among the main finalities of law that eminent ulemas tried early on to decipher and codify. The generalisation of material comfort, the development of scientific

knowledge, and social equity and peace integrate a dynamic conception of spirituality and justice including “God’s borders” not as shackles, but as a primordial institution of duty of preservation and respect of life. The ideas of justice and spirituality have trouble finding their way as much in the West as in the Muslim world. They are both concentrated on the stigmata of the past and the theological and ideological positions preaching in the best case a timid or one way dialogue: “While Western historians are focused on the European side of contacting other cultures, we are under-informed on how Africans, Native Americans, and Asians have perceived and lived this experience, and with what effects that weren’t destructive. [...] In the name of so-called ‘civilised’ nation, the colonised must be transformed, to reach their subjectivity so to rip them from their supposed savageness. In the name of industrial progress, the indigenous must be put to work, against his will, and be pushed to a merchant economy linked with the metropole” (Warnier 2004, p.28 and 74). Alain Touraine describes a dichotomous Western civilisation in every respect: “Who are we, Western civilisation? We are a very particular civilisation that not only believed in rationality and rationalisation, but reinforced this belief by asserting the necessity of bipolarising society: rational/un-rational. We built our society on coupling oppositions. All the great social scientists have suggested coupling oppositions. The most well-known, the most important, is rational man/un-rational woman. But we also have rational entrepreneur/un-rational labourer, and of course rational coloniser/un-rational colonised” (Touraine 1999, p.163). According to him, the goal and main characteristic of Western societies is to not only consider that equality and difference aren’t paradoxical, but that they are destined to go together.

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