

Islam and Pluralism

İslam ve Çoğulculuk

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ABSTRACT This study sets out to analyze the concept of Multiculturalism *Ikhtilaf* in Islam from a philosophical point of view. Generally speaking, this means that people of various cultures can co-exist in harmony in one society through mutual relations of tolerance. The study also aims to determine the reciprocal interaction of benefits and values among societies through human and moral interactive relations. Against this quality of Multiculturalism and cosmic dissimilarity, God reserved for Himself the quality of Oneness and denied it to living creatures and inanimate objects. The reader of the Qur'anic verses realizes clearly that the attempt of some people to impose His Oneness upon the life of others, and to force them to conform and be similar by compelling them to assume the same image is only aggression against the Oneness and unity of God, and clashes with the original spontaneity that characterizes the entity of Man.

Keywords: Islamic philosophy; diversity; pluralism; multiculturalism; values; education and ethics

ÖZ Bu çalışmada, İslam'daki çok kültürlülük kavramı *İhtilaf* filozofik bir açıdan ele alınarak incelenecektir. Bu kavram genel anlamıyla, çeşitli kültürlerle ait insanların, bir toplumda ortak tolerans ilişkileri ile uyum içinde var olabilecekleri anlamına gelmektedir. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda, toplumlardaki etkileşimli insani ve ahlaki ilişkiler sayesinde oluşan karşılıklı fayda ve değer etkileşimlerini de belirlemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu çok kültürlülük niteliğine ve evrensel farklılığa karşın, Tanrı, Teklik niteliğini kendisine saklarken, bunu yaşayan canlılar ile cansız nesnelere bahşetmemiştir. Kuran ayetlerini okuyanlar, bazı insanların Tanrının Tekliğini diğer insanların hayatlarından üstün tutarak onları buna uymaya ve aynı düşünceyi kabul etmelerine zorlama denemelerinin, Tanrının Tekliği ve birliğine karşı bir saldırıdan başka bir şey olmadığını açıkça görerek, İnsan bütünlüğünü niteleyen doğal kendiliğindenlik ile olan açık çelişkiyi fark eder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslami felsefe, çeşitlilik, çoğulluk, çok kültürlülük, değerler, eğitim ve ahlak

This article aims to explain and analyze the concept of cultural *Ikhtilaf* / Multiculturalism in the Qur'an. Islam introduces a model for human communication between cultures at the levels of individuals and groups. This model is based on human values that guarantee the dignity of man and his human rights. The principle of Multiculturalism in Islam means the acceptance of the other different person by establishing relations that are based on acquaintance, dialogue, sharing and

reciprocity. Multiculturalism became an important conceptual tool in the framework of willingness to accept diversity in traditional Muslim societies and has remained an important part of Muslim discourse.¹

The different person is not a mere independent isolated unit living within his own world, and whose main concern is to protect himself and his identity from loss and forgetfulness. He is characterized by his communicative and productive nature and entity, which are delineated by mutual dependence on the other while maintaining independence of the other. The other also has an independent and confident character that qualifies him to establish a communicative and reciprocal relationship that aims to achieve public advantage.

The 'different' people possess evidence to prove their truths, since 'difference' is used in a saying that is based on evidence,² and the established truth that is based on this evidence grants its holder moral and logical confidence, thereby making him more open to the others. In addition, evidence indicates the power of argumentative logic and the high degree of the epistemological level of the ones who differentiate.

Whereas the concept of Multiculturalism is based upon rationality and logic, it also carries a moral dimension as a complementary unity, and thus difference turns out to be a fundamental element in the establishment of a civilized creative society.

MULTICULTURALISM CONCEPT

Multiculturalism is a well-known concept in Muslim literature, which clarifies and determines the way in which one relates to the other, to the individual, the society, the culture and the religion. It is based on values such as recognition, cooperation and acquaintance.

Islam as a religion that refers to diversity as a human phenomenon that ought to be encouraged within Muslim society as well as in other societies. It also recognizes the right of every culture to preserve and promote its cultural specificities and uniqueness. This positive attitude leads to tolerance and mutual respect among people and contributes towards creativity and progress in the lives of human beings.

According to Taha 'Abd al-Rahman, the principle of diversity among people can be divided into two levels: cooperation and acquaintance.³ He makes the connection between society and cooperation and between a people and acquaintance. Society is a group of individuals who cooperate in order to ensure their needs and services. Islam states that cooperation between societies is of the same kind as cooperation between individuals within a single society. While a people are mirrored in the set of values that the society preaches for, and thereupon is qualified to convey to other people aiming at promoting humanity. Islam therefore sees the adoption of these values among different peoples as analogous to the values adopted within the Islamic people.

Therefore, one can call the good moral relations between different persons and between different peoples as the act of acquaintance, since the essence of acquaintance is cooperation in good actions and

¹ John O. Voll, *Cultural Diversity and Islam*. Edited by Abdul Aziz Said, Meena Shrif-Funk, University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland, 2003, p. 125.

² AL Tahanawi. *Kashshaf Istilahat al Funun*. Dar al- Alim al- Ailmia. Baurut. 1998. p. 57.

³ Abd al-Rahman Taha, *al Haq al Aslami fi al Aktif al Falsafi*, (The Islamic Right in the Philosophical Difference), Adar Albayda', Al Markz ALthaqafi, 2005, p.22.

non-cooperation in bad ones. If a person's behavior towards the members of his own people usually requires certain moral principles, his behavior towards other people demands an even higher standard of morality, and the greater the diversity the more the need for a higher level of acquaintance. The multiplicity of peoples means increasing diversity and the greater the diversity the more one needs to increase the moral act of acquaintance. A Muslim is a person who frequently makes acquaintances since this increase his Moral degree through which he can maintain relations with various peoples. This means that all the societies in the world are considered by him as different peoples and the diversity among these peoples forces him to improve his "moral". The act of acquaintance is maintaining relations with different people and different peoples according to standards of virtue.⁴

Tariq Ramadan emphasizes the importance of the idea of acquaintance based on universal Islamic principles, and he calls upon the Muslims living in the West to become acquainted with the culture of Western society in order to become integrated within it and to act as equal citizens.

To regain confidence in oneself, one's values, one's role also means, in practice, reclaiming one's rights and respect. Through involvement in education reform, social and political participation, economic resistance, inter-religious dialogue, and contributions to culture, people will be much more successful than if they persist in solitary confrontation and continual complaint.⁵

MULTICULTURALISM IN THE QURAN

The concept of Multiculturalism in the Qur'an carries diverse indications. This term occurs in several aspects that deal with the idea of difference among living creatures and inanimate objects, as well as among human beings according to their religion, their affiliation to a certain community or people and their attitude, language and color.

The Qur'an carries a comprehensive meaning of the principle of difference that applies to all creatures. The principle is one but its applications take several forms. God says:

ART THOU NOT aware that God sends down water from the skies whereby We bring forth fruits of many hues – just as in the mountains there are streaks of white and red of various shades, as well as [others] raven-black, and [as] there are in men, and in crawling beasts, and in cattle, too, many hues? Of all His servants, only such as are endowed with [innate] knowledge stand [truly] in awe of God: [for they alone comprehend that,] verily, God is almighty, much-forgiving. (35: 27, 28)

The noticeable thing in this Qur'anic verse is the pointing out and repetition of the idea of difference in colors, and color is a casual rather than an essential attribute of something. The absence of the attribute of essence means the absence of the object, whereas the absence of the casual attribute and its change do not affect the existence of the object.

Multiculturalism in essential qualities between objects means that there is full contradiction between them, but the difference between casual qualities attests to external difference rather than to internal essential difference. It means that there is a similarity and a common ground between them. This indicates that there is commonality in difference. Thus, its subject is not disparity or dissimilarity.⁶

⁴ Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 225.

⁵ Yossi Yonah, *What is Multiculturalism? The Poverty of Discourse*, Tel Aviv, Babble Publications, 2005, p. 83.

⁶ Abu al-Ma'ali al-Juwayni. *al-Irshad*. (ed), Muhammad Yusuf Musa, Ali Abed al-Hakem. Maktabat al- Khangi. Egypt. 1950. p. 39.

Consequently, difference in people's color should not distract our mind from the common human attributes that unite humankind. Probably, the connection between the difference in the color of things and the scholars' worry and care is a warning and a reminder to them that the difference does not signify negative contrast that negates or nullifies the other.

In addition to the difference in colors, there is the difference in tongues, or languages. God says: And among his wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colours: for in this, behold, there are messages indeed for all who are possessed of [innate] knowledge! **(23: 30)**

Here, God raises the status of differences in languages and colors to that of a prodigy or miraculous sign that is connected to a similar one - 'the creation of the heavens and the earth,' - thereby considering creation and difference as apparent and visible miraculous prodigies of God. Also, they are amazing things to people who are knowledgeable. We do not plead for a prodigy in a materialistic or merely absolute mentality; we need means or ways that are suitable to attain it. In fact, there are no more suitable ways than intellectual contemplation and meditation that lead to gaining instruction and wisdom that go beyond the relation between the phenomenon and the law.

The Qur'an shows the moral and value dimension that results from the difference between humans:

O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware. **(49: 13)**

This direct address that encompasses all human beings serves to remind them of that which unites them, which is a fact of human existence, and then reminds them of their different origins as males and females, as if He were saying that this difference is a necessary condition for the proliferation and continuation of life. The reader senses the parallel between the wedding and coupling of male and female, which guarantees the perpetuity of the human race, and the mutual acquaintance of peoples on this earth. Just as the condition of fruitful marriage that is characterized by peace and tranquility is the contact based on love and mercy between the male and the female, so is the civilized human acquaintance conditioned by contact that is based on high human values that make that contact creative, useful, and motivating for the continuity and development of human life.

If creativity and birth are characterized by creation and newness, there must be a mutual relationship between two different ends where creativity requires difference. It is true to say that there is no creativity without difference and there is no creativity with similarity or contrast, even if the conditions of contact are secured, because birth or creation requires commonality in some attributes, but it is not complete commonality that reaches the degree of identification. In addition, no fruitful or useful creation can be produced from contrast because commonality is absent.

This difference between peoples aims to achieve a human value, namely acquaintance that represents a supreme model for human cultural contact and that is based on frank acknowledgement of other cultures and the right of other people to develop and nurture their own culture. This acknowledgement represents the first step towards other elevated degrees in human contact. This divine discourse has come to legitimize the difference that exists among human beings who, supported by God and a natural law that man cannot change or oppose or object to, turn it around in order to derive benefit from it.

Seeing difference as a natural fact of life that governs humanity and defines the choices of realistic human beings is inevitable, and man should accept the difference and exploit it according to the logic of determinism. Man can accept this difference and make use of the diversity, but he could also choose the alternative of a clash that seeks the abolition of all colors. Such a choice would surely lead to destruction without negating the colors.

Thus, we have to realize the existence of difference just as in all cosmic differences, and to understand the network of relationships connecting them and study it as a human phenomenon in order to make mutual use of it by relying on the principles of acquaintance and cooperation.

If mutual beneficial cooperation is a value that we wish to pursue, we must create the suitable means to achieve this ideal value. The first step towards this pursuit entails recognition of the different 'other' and recourse to treatment with mutual respect. Acquaintance between people contributes to the ideals of cooperation and peace and decreases hatred, injustice, violence, murder and wars.

The above verse prescribes that the height of the cultural status of a certain people is measured by the degree of its possession of virtue. Morals also constitute the criterion that defines the preference and excellence of peoples. The address ends with a definition of the standard of preference based on piety that entails abstaining from vices, and is characterized by the virtues of good deeds and good behavior. This means that the best person is the one who has the best manners and best virtues.

The fact that nations and people differ in their colors, races, traditions, laws and realities makes the principle of acquaintance necessary and very important in people's lives. The idea of acquaintance and knowing one another is based on the principle of identification between 'we' and 'they'. This is a process that takes place between different cultures, and contributes to the development and flourishing of human societies through the movement of reciprocal material and spiritual values.

Acquaintance and knowing one another produces acknowledgement and recognition of the existence of the needs, feelings, and richness of those other groups that have not been previously recognized. Acquaintance is actually the human and cultural experience that guarantees recognition of the existence of the 'other' and of his importance as a cultural generator and partner. It is not recognition that is based on coercion, and it results from personal meetings between human beings of different cultures. Such recognition requires an abundance of cultural knowledge as a factor in relations between cultures.

Cultural abundance comprises the concept of justice between people by establishing centers of recognition and learning of different types of lifestyles. Abundance of cultural knowledge can guarantee the creation of not only a constructive dialogue between nations that is based on mutual respect, but also of a contact between cultures that contributes to social change. Mutual acquaintance and knowledge between different cultural groups can constitute a basis for a change in relations between societies through developing contact between cultures as a constant activity at various levels.

However, the principle of recognition *per se*, which the liberal pluralism calls for, does not achieve the values that result from acquaintance such as sharing, equality and reciprocity. This is because the principle of recognition is established on the basis of separation between 'we' and 'they', which is a process that can lead to the division of society into disconnected units and can undermine the idea of reciprocity among individuals and groups. The motion takes place from the knowing self to the recognized self. Here, recognition becomes a possession of the knowing self, which means that the powerful ruling

culture is the one that gives up its possession according to the element of value and experience in reality. In this case, full identification between the two sides cannot take place.

The problem with the discourse of liberal pluralism is that it introduces the policy and morals of borders and separation, but does not approach reality from the point of view of sharing and partnership between groups; to the contrary, it strengthens differences between them.

The concept of difference carries a more comprehensive meaning and deeper indication than mere diversity and pluralism. Difference is a qualitative description and quality is a communicative issue, but pluralism is a quantitative description and quantity is a separatist issue.⁷

Acquaintance and knowledge of one another guarantees variety and abundance that seek to achieve human values through cooperation between groups and peoples. This cooperation is based on direct communication and removal of separating borders between different societies. Moreover, acquaintance guarantees that cooperation should be useful to people because cooperation does not always aim to achieve good and deny evil. It can be cooperation to achieve good or evil. God says:

And never let your hatred of people who would bar you from the Inviolable House of Worship lead you into the sin of aggression: but rather help one another in furthering virtue and God-consciousness, and do not help one another in furthering evil and enmity; and remain conscious of God: for, behold, God is severe in retribution! **(5: 2)**

This is the reason why the Qur'an emphasizes cooperation that guarantees good to all the cooperating sides. This cooperation possesses the ability to create human values that deal with existing things, and rises to what it aspires to be. In other words, acquaintance is open to an infinitely wide world, and it is not limited to the limited real world. It seeks to change it constantly into a better world.

MULTICULTURALISM OF METHODS AND LAWS

Islam acknowledges the differences in peoples' methods and laws, as God says:

Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ. **(5: 48)**

Religious pluralism is considered a decision of God's will, which is fulfilled and embodied in the real life of human societies as a human phenomenon. This implies that diversity and pluralism of methods and laws is a fact that Islam acknowledges and respects. It indicates that the religious truth is diverse though its source is one. These facts are true for a specific time and place but not in an absolute way.

Islam acknowledges the diversity of truths, despite its belief in the existence of a certain truth, which is Islam itself, but this truth does not nullify the truth of the other. It respects the other person's right to believe in his own truth, and does not coerce others to accept Islam's truth. Islamic Law also allows non-Muslims freedom of worship and belief, independent religious and educational institutions,

⁷ Taha Abed al- Rahman. al- Haq al- Islami fi al Ikhtilaf al- Fikri. al- Markis al- Thaqaifi al- Arabi. Al-Magrib. 2005, p.52.

and also autonomy in matters of family law, personal law, marriage and divorce. Freedom in financial, transactional, civil and social matters is also allowed.⁸

Since pluralism and diversity of laws is a Godly judgment, it is unreasonable to argue that such pluralism is made in vain. Therefore, as a human society we have to look for the advantages of pluralism that benefits humanity, and we should have precognition regarding our judgment and reading of the prodigies and signs that are related to this phenomenon. One can deduce various prodigies for this phenomenon by exerting some effort in thought and contemplation.

God's will has judged the existence of diversity and difference between peoples rather than uniformity and unity as one people. The Qur'anic verse shows that difference is a trial and tribulation for nations. One can imagine the difficult psychological and mental state of the person who undergoes such an ordeal and the ambience that permeates the space of the trial experience. It is full of tension, motivation, and a great deal of effort to achieve success. Most people remain under constant pressure striving for success and living continuously in a state of competition in the race to achieve lofty and virtuous values.

The Qur'an points out that one of the aspects of the wisdom of difference is the anticipation of good things and the race to attain them. This feeling motivates competition among human beings – whether as individuals, groups, or nations – to make quality products that benefit mankind, stave off harm, and create strong motivation for productivity and creativity.

This approach refutes fanaticism for one's own race, kind or ethnicity, and the adoption of antagonistic attitude towards other races. It also refutes the claims of monopoly on virtues by one nation and denial of the same virtues to other nations.⁹

God also decides that this actual difference will remain continuously and people will differ constantly. Each will stick to a certain truth thinking that it is the only truth, but discrimination between truths is impossible in our world and will be possible only in the eternal return and resurrection. In other words, the absolute truth is known only to God, and what humans know are limited truths. Despite the limitations of human truth, many people have believed in the unity and oneness of truth rather than in its diversity and pluralism. The prevailing belief has been that the truth is unique and can be reached only through certain methods of search.

The Qur'an points out that difference is a clear expression of a divine will in His words:

And had thy Sustainer so willed, He could surely have made all mankind one single community: but [He willed it otherwise, and so] they continue to hold divergent views. **(11: 118)**

The wisdom of creation has judged that people should be different, and if difference is a fulfillment of God's will and a determined order over which humans have no power, then erasure or cancellation of difference and unification of humans turns out to be an attempt to replace the divine will that has decided this difference. This attempt can lead to oppression of human beings and expropriation of their liberties, which they were born to fulfill. Indeed, it constitutes robbery of a gift that God granted them.

Against this difference and cosmic diversity and pluralism, God has kept the attribute of Oneness for Himself and denied it to others. The reader of the texts of the Qur'anic verses realizes clearly that the

⁸ Saiyad Fareed Ahmad, "How can we understand Religious Diversity?" *Islamic Culture*, No. 4, October 2004, p.19.

⁹ Muhammad Imarah. *al-Islam wa al Taadodia*. Cairo. Dar al-Rashad. 1997.p.119.

attempt by certain circles to practice 'oneness' and 'uniformity' in people's lives by forcing them to be identical or similar and have the same color is nothing but intrusion into God's Oneness and a clash with original spontaneity that characterizes the entity of Man and his existence.

Reading through the history of mankind, we notice that there have been repeated attempts to impose oneness and uniformity upon human beings, but all these attempts have been doomed to failure because of their clash with the nature of the universe and human beings. In fact, this oppressive and suppressive approach to quash the attribute of human difference is a result of one's instincts of arrogance, deification and lust for absolute power and authority.

THE VALUES OF MULTICULTURALISM

The achievement of human values that represent the essence of Islam and its goal in real life is connected by necessity to the application of the principles of difference such as 'acquaintance', 'cooperation,' 'dialogue,' and other productive values. Freedom represents the necessary condition for the achievement of these values. It was explicit in the Qur'anic approach to the relationship with other religious groups. It is a significant departure from the liberal position, which equates coexistence and freedom with absolute equality for all.¹⁰

The Qur'anic interest in guaranteeing people's freedom is clear and frank as can be seen from its emphasis on the principle of thought and religion, as we read in His words:

THERE SHALL BE no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from [the way of] error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil and believes in God has indeed taken hold of a support most unfailing, which shall never give way: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing. **(2: 256)**

This verse is considered a general principle in Islam, giving human beings the option to choose their religious faith according to their free will. There is no coercion to conform to a specific belief. If non-Muslims or skeptical Muslims do not accept our reasoning we are not obligated to impose our version of truth on them, using force and terror in the name of religion itself. When a person sees a benefit in a religion, such as well-being and spiritual peace, he or she will not let go of it. Change comes when people are convinced, not when they are forced.¹¹

The principle of no-coercion in religion is a fundamental that is important to all other types of freedom. There is no meaning to other types of freedom if this type of religious freedom is absent. Besides, Islam connects free choice with responsibility, which means that each person is responsible for his choice. In the beginning, one's innocence is absolute: an indwelling from life's first breath inevitably moves one to begin searching. Becoming aware of this state immediately makes one a responsible and in fact a free being.¹²

The importance of difference in the Islamic concept is that it is a divine will that one has to accept without argument. Therefore, it is impossible to coerce people to believe in one religion, as coercion contradicts their different natures with which, by the high will of God, they were born. Even if a group of people accepts a certain religion, the difference in their understanding and interpretation of that religion remains standing.

¹⁰ Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: Liberation and Pluralism*. One World (Oxford), 1997, p.174.

¹¹ Mohsen Kadivar, "Voices Within Islam." *Current History*, Vol. 104, No. 678, May 2005, p. 44.

¹² Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*. Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 18.

Islam as a religion made human values an original principle that precedes law and religious rules. There is no meaning in the application of the law (Sharia) in the absence of a dignified and free man who chooses according to his own free will.

These values are totalities and meanings that are distinctively embodied within man, but they are not absolute like numbers, for instance, because every man feels these meanings without the need for mental absoluteness. They are lamps that light the road of human behavior. The sensing and recognition of these meanings, which a person deals with daily in connection with the law of the time and the place, represent their actual and concrete existence.

In dealing with these meanings from the point of view of their necessity rather than their existence, one can argue that it is impossible to deduce their necessity from their existence. In fact, they cannot be reached because the 'value' is what must exist while 'reality' is what has happened, and it is impossible to deduce what must exist from what exists in reality. This means that it is impossible to conclude what should exist, which includes several future totalities, from a specific single event or from several limited events. Logically, the movement from one event to a value is an impossible thing. Therefore, the human being is in a constant state of aspiring to attain these values, but without being able to reach them in an absolute way, and can only advance towards the absolute, which means that these high ideals and values remain hovering before his eyes without his ever being able to grasp them entirely.

The role of Islamic education here is to develop the original values that are personified and distinct within every human being so that they will be actually practiced in daily life. It also attempts to keep these supreme meanings as man's future goal, which he does his best to achieve.

Among the characteristics of the Houses of Learning and the Houses of Wisdom is their absorption of all the social and religious classes. They were characterized by multiculturalism that joined the different ones in one place to study, research and debate. This indicates that they provided freedom of thought and belief, which is fundamental for every scientific flourish and prosperity. Among the samples of this multiculturalism is what we read in the following quotation: "Khalaf al-Muthanna said: We witnessed ten people in Basra gather in a council (majlis), who were incomparable in their knowledge and intelligence, who are: al-Khalil bin Ahmad the grammarian, who was a Sunni, and al-Himyari the poet, who was a Shiite, and Salih bin Abd al-Quddous, who was an atheist who believed in dualism, and Sufian bin Mujashi', who was a Safawi Khariji, and Bashar bin Burd, who was a dissolute, wanton Sho'ubi; Hammad 'Ajrad, who was an atheistic Sho'ubi, and Ibn Ras al-Jalout the poet, who was a Jewish, and Ibn Nazeer the Polemist (mutakallim), who was a Christian, and Omar bin al-Mu'ayyad, who was a Magi, and Ibn Sinan al-Harrani the poet, who was a Sabi',... all these were gathering to recite poetry, exchange news, converse in a friendly atmosphere; you cannot know from them that they have so much difference in their religions and denominations."¹³

Islam warns the human being and reminds him to listen to, and hear, the call that comes from within because every human, whether primitive or civilized, possesses intrinsic high human values. It is a reminder of what he has within himself and a warning to shake off his inadvertency.

¹³ Al-Siba'i, Mustafa, *Min Rawa'I Hadharatina*. Damascus: Dar al-Warraq li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'. al-Maktab al-Islami, 1999.

THE MOSLEMS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE OTHER

Islamic society has known diversity since the beginning of the Islamic Da'wa, which included individuals from various races and colors such as: Bilal al-Habashi, Suleiman al-Farisi, Suhaib al-Rumi, besides Arab Moslems. This diversity also appeared in later periods through multiplicity of jurisprudence doctrines within Islam itself. Jurists considered differences at this level as different opinions on jurisprudential issues that can change from time to time, and from one society to the other. In this way, it was acknowledged that jurisprudence is an applied science on which plurality of visions and opinions applies, and is connected to the general circumstances and different contexts, and to one's will, and to interest¹⁴.

In addition, several religions and faiths worked freely and independently, as the Islamic Law allowed non-Moslems to practice their worship, belief, religious independence, and establishment of educational institutes besides independence in issues of family rules, personal status, marriage and divorce. Islamic society also allowed that people practice their freedom in their money, trade, and civil and social affairs¹⁵. The relationship of Islam with non-Moslems who live in Moslem lands was a cultural civilized relationship. Moslems accepted the other, his heritage and history, which he also took part in its making, and nothing of these things would have been achieved without the contributions of the people of Islamic countries, Moslems or non-Moslems to making it together, and they were equal partners with us in making the Islamic civilization and culture¹⁶.

The fact that non-Moslems in the Islamic society are equal partners in the cultural action and achievements indicates the degree of acceptance of this society to the Other, and its carefulness to benefit from the creativities of the others with no exception and its ability to invest the difference for the public benefit. However, the circles of difference were numerous and intertwined but were joined by one society. This multicultural society was not closed on itself or disconnected from other human societies; it was interactive with the neighboring societies at different levels:

THE POLITICAL LEVEL

The Islamic relations with the non-Moslems began at the beginning of the Islamic Da'wa. For example, the Moslems made a treaty with the people of al-Madina al-Munawara called the Alwathiqah (al-Sahifa), which organized the relations within the new Moslem society, which included the Moslems, the Jewish tribes and others. Another treaty was made with Najran Christians in Yemen, Hira, Iraq and in Jerusalem in Palestine¹⁷. In the treaty which was held in 628 AD. between Khaliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab and *Archbishop Safronius*, there was a commitment to protect the people of Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem) and not to persecute or harass them¹⁸. Despite the conflict with the Byzantines, the relations between the Moslems and Christians were characterized by compromise and tolerance on the practical level, and the policy of religious tolerance that the Arabs showed to local people had a great effect on conversion of many of them to Islam¹⁹.

¹⁴Ahmad S. Moussalli. *The Islamic Quest for Democracy, Pluralism, and Human Rights*. University Press of Florida, 2001, p.87.

¹⁵Saiyad Fareed Ahmad. "How can we understand Religious Diversity?". *Islamic Culture*. No.4. October 2004. p.19.

¹⁶ al-Awwa, Mohammad Salim. *Al-Islam wa al-Demoqratiya*. Amman. Mu'sasasat Abd al-Rahman Shuman, 1988, p. 22.

¹⁷ Haroun, Abd al-Salam. *Tahzib Sirat Ibn Hisham*. Pp. 359-386.

¹⁸ Hassan, Hassan Ibrahim. *Tarikh al-Islam*. Vol. 1. Maktabatal-Nashdha al-Misriya, 1964, p. 231.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 530.

This kind of treatment with the different other falls within the realm of obedience to the Prophet's orders that ask the Moslems to be just and fair with the partners of the treaty, as reported in a Hadith by Abu Daoud and al-Bayhaqi: "Beware, if anyone wrongs a contracting man, or diminishes him anything without his consent, I shall plead for him on the Day of Judgment".

Besides, according to al-Bukhari, the Prophet warned those who harm them with God's punishment on the Judgment Day

THE RELIGIOUS LEVEL

Interaction between *Ilm al-Kalām*, the Islamic scholastic theology, and Christian theology represents the other living side in the Arab thought. Damascus, the capital of the Umayyads, was a meeting place between the Christian and Moslem scholars from the beginning of the Umayyad era. One of the most reliable documents says that Mansour bin Sarjoun, grandfather of Saint John Damascene, who was the Minister of Finance during the Byzantine era, was the man who opened the Eastern Gate for the Arab armies that were led by Khaled Ibn al-Walid. Classical sources preserved a significant dialogue that is attributed to Saint John to an audience of Christian and Moslem theologians. The dialogue was about the question of Qadar and Qadariya. According to Majid Fakhri, the importance of this document is that it witnesses that the theological dialogue between Moslems and Christians was known, if not popular. Thus, this dialogue prepared for the appearance of the Kalam trends in Islam, which were not exclusive to dealing with the issue of 'qudra' (power), but exceeded it to the question of the existence of God, His attributes and, especially 'speech' and 'free will', which were issues that Saint John dealt with in his book *The Orthodox Faith*²⁰

Non-Moslems during the Ottoman Empire were independent in developing their religious, cultural and educational institutes, collecting taxes, and judging events which were not related to public security and crimes. Besides, they were also independent in the Family Law. In addition to all that, Christians and Jews were resorting to their private courts, and were resorting to Moslem courts for other issues such as: divorce, inheritance, and other internal social issues.²¹

THE CULTURAL LEVEL

It is clear today that the philosophical movement that started in the era of al-Mamoun Chaliph reflects the truth of the cultural and intellectual interaction with classical civilizations, especially the Greek one, when the Moslems started translating the outstanding scientific and philosophical books into Arabic: "Translations into Arabic included Aristotle's works, interpreters of the Alexandrine School, the majority of Galinos's books, and some of Plato's dialogues. These translations were not limited to Greek books, but exceeded to other streams of knowledge at that time²². For three centuries, the Moslems kept on translating the scientific, philosophical, literary and religious works that were created by classical cultures and benefited from a huge human heritage that they received from six known languages at that time: Hebrew, Syriac, Persian, Indian and Latin, and especially Greek²³.

²⁰ Fakhri, Majed. "al-Taqrub byna al-Islam wa al-Gharb", a report by: Salah Shu'aib, *Markaz al-Hewar al-Arabi in Washington*. Georgetown University. On: 25/12/2006.

²¹ DÜZENLİ, Pehlul. "al-Ulaqat al-Ijtima'ya bayn al-Muslimin wa Gharihimi Istanbul fi al-'Ahd al-Uthmani fi Dou' Fatawa al-Mashyakh al-Uthmani". *Şarkiyat* 10.1: 424-440, p. 426.

²² al-Fakhouri, Hanna & al-Jur, Khalil. *Tarikh al-Falsafa al-Arabiya*, part 2, Dar al-Jil, Beirut, 1993, p. 20.

²³ Madkur, Ibrahim: *L'Organon d'Aristote dans le monde arabe: ses traductions, son etude et ses applications* / [par] Ibrahim Madkur; pref. de Simon van den Bergh. Paris: J. Vrin, 1969, pp.26-27.

Interaction between Islam and the West is represented in the impact of Ibn Rushd /Averroes, *Qordova's* philosopher, who opened an intellectual hatch on Western Europe, which, at that time, had no idea about philosophy. The result was that Averroes's eleven volumes of Averroes's philosophical and medical works were translated into Latin at the beginning of the thirteenth century by a number of famous translators such as Mikal Scotch and Hermanus Alimanus, and others. These translations led to an intellectual renaissance that preceded the well-known Italian Renaissance in the fifteenth century, which was accompanied by an intellectual and theological conflict in Paris and Padua between the supporters of Averroes such as Siger of Brabant, John of Jandun and their opponents such as Thomas Aquinas²⁴. In Padua, a number of teachers of medicine applied the logic of medicine which previous philosophers, such as Ibn Sina/ Avicenna and Ibn Rushd/Averroes called for.

This logic, in turn, led to the development of the method that is called the method of 'Analysis and Synthesis'. In my view, it was a necessary method to develop modern science because it focused on the significance of 'experiment', which is a more complicated concept than the concept of 'observation' that Aristotle and first Scholastics²⁵ were satisfied with.

Evidence to that is what Étienne Henri Gilson (1884-1978), who is a French philosopher and historian of philosophy, and considered to be the dean historian of philosophy in the Middle Ages, wrote about Averroes's role in igniting this intellectual renaissance, saying: "The intellectual theory was created in Spain (Andalusia) by the Arab philosopher who left for those who came later a model for the intellectual philosophy that affected the development of the Christian philosophy itself²⁶ and he had a major effect on the development of Scholasticism and on pushing the 'mind' to the official forefront in Christianity, which was one of the major contributions of Averroes to the West".

Thus, we find that interaction between different views through religious and cultural dialogue within the Islamic society contributed to the prosperity of Islamic civilization which was not a product of a specific color or religion or race or nationality, because actually, different nations took part in the formulation of this culture including: Persians, Indians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Berber, and Andalusians²⁷. Besides, interaction between different cultures and epistemological exchange among peoples, contributed to the development of the human knowledge and sciences in general.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, we can conclude that the principle of Multiculturalism is an original one in Islam and it certainly contributes to the reconstructing of human society on accepted and existing human values among all people, irrespective of their belongings and differences. Besides, difference constitutes a critical instrument that refutes reality as it is and works constantly to change it in order to abolish oppression, injustice, and exploitation while establishing justice for and emancipation of humanity and granting freedom to all human beings. Thus, 'difference' turns out to be a project of human liberation from fanaticism, domination and war. It is a call for openness and peace.

²⁴ Fakhri, Majed, "al-Taqarub byna al-Islam wa al-Gharb", 2006.

²⁵ Polo, Gern, "al-Falafa al-Madrasiya wa al-Rashidiya fi al-Asr al-Wasit: Ta'thirat Ibn Rushd fi al-'Ilm al-Gharbi", Ibn Rushd wa al-Tanwir. Ed. By Murad Wehbi and Mona Abu Sinni. Dar al-Thaqafa al-Jadida. Cairo, 1997, p. 47.

²⁶ Madkur, Ibrahim. *Fi al-Falsafa al-Islamiya*. Cairo: Dar Ihya' a al-Kutub al-Arabiya, 1947, p. 12.

²⁷ Gern, Polo, 1997, p. 45.

Islam looks at 'difference' as a natural human phenomenon that enriches the human life and constitutes a catalyst for development and creativity, and the Islamic society has been characterized by various forms of diversity and pluralism on the basis of color, race, people, religion, doctrine and culture, and this difference had an important role in enriching the Islamic culture and its diversity. Besides, interaction between the Islamic culture and the other human cultures had a clear role in the development of sciences and the progress of man .

'Difference' in Islam is considered one of the fixed universal facts that distinguishes all creatures and inventories, and it is a fixed origin in the reality of human beings, and an essential attribute that has accompanied the human being since his existence. People are different in their methods and beliefs, let alone their colors and races. The Moslem's awareness of this fact had a great importance in their acceptance of 'difference' and in investing it as a necessary condition for enrichment of man and achievement of his Scholastic role that is entrusted to him .

'Difference' is against 'monism' or "oneness", and it refers to 'abundance', 'diversity', and 'instability', and these attributes are conditions for constant diligence and human development. Thus, 'difference' in this meaning is a divine wisdom that aims to achieve man's happiness and his promotion. It is also a high value that requires that we seek its achievement. 'Difference' can be achieved only by communication with the others. The 'different' person is characterized by his nature and his communicative entity that necessarily produces a relationship that is characterized by exchange of dependence with the others, in addition to his independence from them. He has an independent and confident personality that entitles him to establish a communicative and reciprocal relationship that aims to achieve the public good .

Acquaintance with the other represents a high ideal in the system of 'values of difference', and it aims to achieve communication between different peoples on the basis of acknowledgement, mutual respect, and cooperation that focuses on the progress of humanity. This relationship, which is established on dialogue, is not satisfied with bringing benefits and financial interests only, but it also seeks to achieve exchange of moral and ethical values among peoples.