

A (short) history of the clash of civilizations

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Abstract *Where does the clash of civilizations thesis and its underlying us-versus-them mentality come from? How has the idea been engineered historically and ideologically in the 'east' and 'west'? What were the functions of Christianity and Islam to these ends? These are some of the questions that will be discussed in this article that engages both the clash of civilizations thesis and the discourse of 'Orientalism' more generally. Dissecting the many manifestations of mutual retributions, the article establishes the nuances of the 'clash' mentality within the constructs we commonly refer to as 'Islam' and the 'west', showing how it is based on a questionable ontology, how it has served particular political interests and how it is not inevitable. What is presented, rather, is a short genealogy of this idea, dispelling some of its underlying myths and inventions along the way.*

Introduction

One must not suppose that grand theories such as the 'clash of civilizations' are a recent invention nor that the epistemology of such can be divorced from its historical context. Ironically, today's proponents of the so-called 'clash' thesis suggest they can escape the fact that their reference to a seemingly coherent past implicates them in the genealogy of the idea. In other words, by attempting to persuade us that the supposed conflict between Islam and the west has always existed, the very agents of the idea orchestrate an historical conspiracy as such. Deliberately placed within it, we are continuously alerted to the undue presence of the other. History is central to this process. If the clash thesis has successfully sustained its ontological presence until the present age, it is because it positions itself within an intellectual tradition rooted in the past. 'Inventing traditions', write Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 'is essentially a process of formalisation and ritualisation, characterised by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition' (1983, 4). Michel Foucault agrees that tradition gives a 'special temporal status to a group of phenomena that are both successive and identical...', enabling us 'to isolate the new against a background of permanence' (1989, 23). These authors alert us to the effects that appeals to the past are designed to have: they are meant to create artificial territories populated with contingent truth conditions that permanently reify the logic of a particular idea. Hence we are told that the clash between Islam and the west has always been there, that it is inevitable, that there is normality to the confrontation, that we are merely born into it and so on. The theory

thus created invents a grammar and syntax that translates the *statement* of a clash of civilization into a coherent and seemingly highly realistic *narrative*.

In this article, I dissect some of the narratives engendering the idea that we are in the middle of some clash of civilizations. To that end, I start by tracing the emergence of the clash idea in the ancient world and its reification throughout the centuries. What I try to establish are the nuances of the clash mentality *within* the constructs we have called 'Islam' and the 'west', not in order to strengthen it, but to show how it is based on a questionable ontology that has served particular political interests—that the clash is not simply inevitable. Understanding where the clash idea comes from is the first step towards deconstructing it down to its tribal epicentre. Once we have reached that point, we are better positioned to comprehend its seismic force and build viable constructs to contain its awesome power.

If we question with Derrida whether 'it is possible to wonder if history itself does not begin with . . . [some] relation to the other' (1967, 139) and with the ancient Persians whether the world is divided between realms of goodness and light (governed by Ahura Mazda) and of darkness and evil (governed by Aharman), then we face a Herculean task in deciphering the genealogy of the Manichean *Weltanschauung* engendering the clash of civilization idea. Is it not true that ambivalence towards the other is inscribed in both 'Oriental' and 'Occidental' minds at least since epic struggles between Greeks and Persians, Romans and Parthians, East Roman and Sassanid empires? It appears that this ambivalence was reified politically, culturally and cognitively during successive periods of imperialistic rivalries extending into the 20th century, namely between various Muslim dynasties (Umayyads 661–750, Abbasids 750–1258, Fatimids in Egypt 1261–1517, Rum Seljuks in Anatolia 1077–1307, Osmanlis 1281–1924) and various European powers (Byzantine and Latin Christian until 1453, Catholic and Protestant between the 16th and 19th centuries, British and French empires in the 19th and mid-20th centuries). Thus, the exclusionary mindset producing the clash of civilisations has an ancient presence: it was there before Adam and Eve, before Babel, before Chinese cosmology established the polarised forces of Yang (positive action) and Yin (negative passivity). It has been with us since the first self-consciously 'social' agent defined another agent as its referential object.

Persia versus Greece: ancient antecedents to the clash thesis

It is Edward Said, of course, who points to the fact that contemporary adherents to the clash mentality have recourse to an ideologically diverse and historically deep epistemology of difference, which explains why they could resist the universalizing promise engendered by the Abrahamic revelations, communism or even western modernity (Said 2000). Their project is to continuously reinvigorate the early antecedents of the clash idea, to persistently organize an archive in which what matters is primarily identities, tribes and permanent cultures, with all their claims to causality and positivistic validity. From their perspective, at least since the Persian-Greek wars at Marathon, Salamis and above all Thermopylae, history is the field of identity production and myth making. Consider Herodotus' assertion that at Thermopylae, a tiny Greek holding force fought a 'heroic' battle against three million Persians, which was picked up by

Lord Byron in a poem written in protest of Turkish occupation of Greece in the 19th century:

Earth! Render back from out thy breast
A remnant of our Spartan dead!
Of the three hundred grant but three, to make a new Thermopylae.
(Coleridge 2006, 170)

That the myth-making apparatus engendered in antiquity continues to make inroads into contemporary consciousness through Hollywood blockbusters like *300* is yet another indication of the salience of such epistemology of difference.¹ The competition between Persia and the Greek city-states, perhaps once and for all, gave impetus to the exclusionary mindset that continues to this day. It was this period, in other words, that created the historical archives for the clash thesis, its conceptual framework around notions of us-versus-them, its metaphysical emphasis on difference, its imagination of fixed identities, its myth making ideology and cultural coherence. The reason why it was possible for Huntington (1996) and others to replant this idea in the 20th century and for their argument to gain prominence is because it was nurtured within a cultural genealogy that can be traced back to those early encounters, real or imagined, between east and west. This genealogy—abstract, facile and thus easily digestible—has accustomed us to accept demarcations between us and them as a way of introducing order during periods of chaos. Like guild historians and polemicists, contemporary proponents of the clash thesis avoid drawing things together by circumventing possibilities of kinship, attraction, affinity. Their argument is rather dependent on discrimination, that is, on an epistemology that accentuates difference. By necessity of its exclusionary demeanour, this type of discourse sets boundaries, contracts the various forms of the other, erects total systems instead of hybrid structures, and produces and determines false monoliths: ‘the Orient’, ‘the east’, Islam on one side, and Christianity, the Occident, ‘the west’ on the other. This type of discourse is reactionary, not only because of its ideological content; it is in fact and quite directly reactionary.

Western formations

How was the epistemology of difference ‘re-enacted’ in subsequent centuries, especially during the emergence of Islam in the 7th century? In *Islam and the west: the making of an image*, Norman Daniel aptly demonstrates how the emergence of Islam was greeted with both ignorance and fear by Latin Christians. In subsequent centuries Muhammad was seen as the ‘great blasphemer’ and the ‘Qur’an became the object of their ridicule because it was unfamiliar’ (Daniel 1960, 107, 77). As a consequence, ‘Islam took its place rather dramatically, but inevitably, in the historical sequence as a prefiguration of Antichrist, for as long as political, economic and military requirements dominated European thought upon the subject’ (193). It became an image against which Europe organized itself in terms

¹ The movie *300* (2006) produced by Zack Snyder and based on the graphic novel by Frank Miller caused a storm of protest in Iran, where it was banned. With the help of digital imaging it depicts the ‘barbarous’ Persians as sub-human, animal-like creatures.

of military development, cultural preferences and ideational constitution. Ultimately, this was the political rationale of such normatively and emotionally charged notions like 'veneration', 'chivalry', 'piety' and 'duty of the west' in the discourse of the Crusades, the uniting force of which motivated Shakespeare in the beginning of *Henry IV, Part I*, as a symbol of the holy resolution of English civil strife:

Therefore friends
 As far as to the sepulchre of Christ,-
 Whose soldier now, under whose blessed cross
 We are impressed and engaged to fight,-
 Forthwith a power of English shall we levy,
 Whose arms were moulded in their mother's womb
 To chase these pagans in those holy fields
 Over whose acres walk'd those blessed feet
 Which fourteen hundred years ago were nailed
 For our advantage on the bitter cross.
 (Shakespeare 1862, 510)

Daniel draws particular attention to the western approach to Islam over the field of morality, especially as to the 'theoretical, and almost legalistic, character that it assumes' (Daniel 1960, 160). As a result of the emergence of Islam, the whole moral episteme of the Christian culture found its fundamental place in history modified. In particular the epistemology of Christ as the ultimate sign of God, which early Christians saw as absolute and eternal, this whole idea of infinitude of the biblical revelations was to dramatically take on a new configuration. The religiously legitimated antecedent to the clash of civilizations idea, in short, can be interpreted as a competition over history and temporal sequences of humanity. It is our time that Islam and Christianity have competed for, both in the present and in the hereafter.

The Christian sense of time and history is perhaps encapsulated in Genesis 9:1, where God tells Noah and his sons to start the collective, 'to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth'—to form the in-group. It is surely central to the following chapters 'where the job of populating is done, and the peoples, lineages, and cities of the world are created, already too ambitious, and consequently scattered by God into a great linguistic diversity, the nations' (Shaw 2006, 1). This early emphasis on a distinctive community is emphasized in the parables of Jesus, which, according to the evangelist Mark, were told with an understanding that they may not be understood by those outside the trusted circle. The followers of Jesus must have been convinced that with them a particular sequence of human existence, and perhaps human history, was coming to an end, and that from the depths of the transcendental revelation of Christ another epoch was approaching. This new era was considered to be absolute, that is in terms of both its transcendental *and* historical claim. It did not allow for a new temporality like Islam's. It allowed only one Logos who 'passes out of eternity into time for no other purpose than to assist the beings, whose bodily form he takes, to pass out of time into eternity' (Huxley 1950, 62). In this specific sense Christianity was exclusive and absolute, both in terms of its belief in the one, eternally valid revelation and its emphasis on an exclusive temporality:

If the Avatar's appearance upon the stage of history is enormously important, this is due to the fact that by his teaching he points out, and by his being a channel of grace and divine power he actually is, the means by which human beings may transcend the limitations of history. (Huxley 1950, 62)

The Christian revelation thus introduced what Ricoeur (1984, 86) calls 'the upper limit to the process of the hierarchisation of temporality'. 'For Augustine and the whole Christian tradition', he explains, 'the internalising of the purely extensive relations of time refers to an eternity where everything is present at the same time' (86). In order to decrease the distance between the individual and that divine eternity, the good Christian was obliged to hold firm, to 'smooth out', the vicissitudes of history: 'Then I shall be cast and set firm in the mould of your truth' said Augustine (1961, 30:40). Indeed, if we follow the main themes of Augustine's *Confessions*, we find that the temporal sequence of the world was central to the self-understanding of early and medieval Christianity. It constituted Christians as subjects of history by placing them onto a temporal sequence, starting with the birth of Jesus and ending on Judgment Day. 'The Christian apprehends the world as one term of a Metaphor', elaborates Hayden White, 'the other and dominant term of which, that by which the world is given its meaning and identity, is conceived to exist in another world . . . ' (1973, 125). Within this temporal sequence there was no place for competing faiths that made it impossible for early Christian thinkers to regard Muhammad as an authentic prophet. For them, an authentic universal prophet 'had his place in the evangelical preparation for the coming of Christ. . . . But Muhammad came after the event to which the line of universal prophets pointed, and he foretold no events in the future' (Hourani 1980, 8). If many Christian writers were hostile to the emergence of Islam, it was not because they were hostile to Islam and Muhammad *per se*, but because Islam dispersed the units and time sequences claimed by Christianity. If Muhammad could not be positioned within the Christian universe and its sense of history and time, then he could only be considered the anti-Christ who heralds the end of the world. Thus, Muhammad's claim that Islam introduced the last stage of the human experience of God threatened the very *raison d'être* of Christianity because it engendered a new temporal sequence in God's revelation to humankind. Islam threatened to make it apparent that the dialectic between man and God had more than one or two rounds, much in the same way that Christianity confronted Judaism with a new transcendental sequence in human history (see also Schwab 1950; Goldhammer 1962).

It has been argued that Muslims emerged as the 'other' *par excellence* because Islam injected a new sense of time into the cosmology of mankind. For mainstream Christianity and Judaism, the new revelation shattered the articulated unity of the three ecstasies of time proposed by Ricoeur (1984)—the having-been, the making-present and the coming towards. Because this antagonistic relationship was played out in a temporal sequence where Muhammad came after Abraham, Moses and Jesus, Christianity and Judaism were never really able to retrieve Islam, to catch up with it theologically or coincide with it ontologically.

To add a second dynamic: what became known as the 'west' in latter centuries was also 'disadvantaged' historically, because civilization as such was thought to have been established in the 'east', a starting point that was central to the methodology of Hegel, Ranke, Marx, Weber and others. The 'west', in other words,

was perceived to be at the receiving end of history, its historical consciousness was inherited from the 'east'. This means that in terms of revelation *and* history, the latter was forever beyond the former, that Occidentals and Orientals were irreducible to the synchrony of 'temporal sameness'. 'Time is not the accomplishment of an isolated and lone subject', writes Lévinas, 'but it is the subject's very relation with the Other . . . ' (1987, 17). This relational function of time has ostracized the Orient in general and Muslims in particular from western cosmology. Perhaps this constellation can explain why anti-Islamic polemics (and at later stages, Orientalist writings) from the early days emphasized the backwardness of the Muslim Orient, its retroactive superstitions, archaic cultures and outdated fundamentalisms. Can we interpret this dynamic as efforts to reverse the temporal sequence of the Abrahamic revelation (Judaism → Christianity → Islam) on the one side and temporal sequence of civilization's development on the other? Is the 'temporal superiority' of the east the reason why Orientalists proclaim with pride that their discipline attempts to project 'itself outside of itself, toward something other than itself, and by this very act establishing its own view of civilization and history, politics and religion, society and poetry' (Gabrieli 1965, 128)? Or does this methodology push the 'other' back in time, as critical anthropologists argue, rewinding the clock of history in favour of the west (see Fabian 1983)?

It appears that many narrators of Christianity understood well, that the supersessionist claim of Islam was threatening the foundational identity of their religion (and indeed their own supersessionist mandate over Judaism). Moreover, Islam co-opted geographically, the very habitat and birthplace of Christian culture—it shook the orientation of the Christian civilization to its spatial core. Indeed, from the period of the 2nd century, it was customary both in the eastern and western church to pray facing towards the east. Augustine traced this practice, which appeared early in the Christian church, to the custom observed by the heathens. The altars of the Christian churches were situated in the same manner, and the dead were buried so that the eyes might be turned in the same direction. In the baptismal ceremony it was customary to turn first towards the west as the region of darkness, where the prince of darkness was supposed to dwell, to renounce with solemnity the devil, and then to turn east and to covenant with Christ.

But with the emergence of Muhammad, the 'east' was not exclusive to Jesus anymore. What occurred in the 7th century was the dismantling of the great unity of Christianity, the deconstruction of a religious community institutionalized since Roman Emperor Constantine, who was baptized on his deathbed and who issued the Edict of Milan (in 313) proclaiming religious toleration in the Empire. What was thus needed was 're-territorialization' of Christianity away from the east, which after Muhammad and the Islamic conquests, fell from grace. From the Christian perspective, the Muslims were accused of turning the Orient from light to darkness, from good to evil, from civilization to barbarity. This view is encapsulated in the songs and poems compiled in the French epic, the *Song of Roland*, from the period of the first crusades in the 12th century:

the ruler of that land
men call the Hills of Darkness . . .
In that land, they say,

the sun shines not, nor rain nor gentle dew
fall from the heavens, and not a grain of corn
may ripen. No rock is there that isn't solid black;
some say it is the devil's habitation. (Laiou 2006, 36–37)

Thus, the changing meaning of the 'east' was met by the demonization of Islam, which had 'usurped' the birthplace of Jesus and required re-territorialization of Christianity from its Oriental habitat.

The above examples show how early the efforts to change the temporal sequence of human history in favour of the west had begun. How focused later canonical writers were on this effort can be illustrated by turning to Hegel, Marx and Weber. In *The phenomenology of spirit* (1977), Hegel put forward a concept of historical development that was particularly dependent on temporal sequences. He differentiated between four phases in the birth and demise of civilizations: the period of birth and original growth, that of maturity, that of 'old age', and that of dissolution and death. Similarly, he argued that ancient Oriental history can be differentiated according to four 'sub-phases', manifesting themselves in four political orders: the 'theocratic-despotism' of China, the 'theocratic-aristocracy' of India, the 'theocratic-monarchic' culture of Persia and finally the dichotomization of spirit and matter attributed to the civilization of ancient Egypt.

Yet, Hegel concludes, Egyptian culture and by implication the Orient failed in its mission to solve the 'riddle of man' for humankind. The solution to it, and to history as a whole, is found in the west. That is why according to the Oedipus myth, the Sphinx travelled to Greece and why the Owl of Minerva spread its wings in the Orient, only to settle finally in the Occident. According to these metaphors and Hegel's methodology:

History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of history, Asia the beginning. . . . The East knew and to the present day knows only that One is free; the Greek and Roman world, that some are free; the German World knows that All are free. (Hegel 1902, 164)

To Hegel, the east is in a state of 'unreflected consciousness—substantial, objective, spiritual existence . . . to which the subject will sustain a relation in the form of faith, confidence, obedience' (Hegel 1902, 105). Thus when Hegel (1985, 243) likens the Orient in general to a childhood in history, when he argues that the 'religion of Islam . . . hates and proscribes everything concrete' and that 'its God is the absolute One, in relation to whom human beings retain for themselves no purpose, no private domain, nothing peculiar to themselves', the implication is the west has transcended the Orient, that humanity has overcome its original predicament, that the cycle of history from childhood to adolescence has left the Orient at some infantile stage. By contrast, Europe has freed itself from the determinations of temporality. Now that it has entered the new age, its civilization is timeless and universal. The end of history has dawned.

A similar verdict in favour of the west can be found in the writings of Karl Marx. Marx was a keen student of the Hegelian methodology in firmly believing in the newly acquired superiority of western civilization. Whereas Hegel likened this superiority to the constitution of 'historical consciousness' in Europe, Marx explained it in terms of Europe's superior means of production. In *The communist manifesto*, history itself is reduced to a 'history of class struggles' in which the various classes of all previous societies 'stood in constant opposition to one

another' and 'carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight' (Marx and Engels 2002, 219). It must follow causally that the industrially underdeveloped east is at the receiving end of this process. If you get into the habit of thinking that western men (19th century thinkers are quite literally gender specific) will bring about a worldwide socio-economic revolution, the subjugation of Oriental men (and women) is then made acceptable as a means of rescuing the natives from their self-inflicted backwardness. This view is especially pronounced in Marx's article 'The British Rule in India', published in the *New York Daily Tribune* on 25 June 1853. Here, Marx adheres to Hegel's view that India had lost its 'claim' to history. Hindu society as a whole is characterized as 'undignified, stagnatory and vegetative' (Marx 2000, 16). Because the west was in the process of perfecting the modes of production, 'English steam and English free trade' would eventually undermine the material base of Hindu society: inevitably, this process would lead to 'the greatest, and to speak the truth, the *only* social revolution *ever* heard in India' (16). The pains and sufferings of the natives had to be accepted in order to hasten realization of that fantastic project.

In analysing this argument we must not stop, as Said did, at arguing that this type of discourse expresses a particular bias against the Orient (Said 1995, 153–157). India was pasted onto the larger Marxist paradigm that accentuated the integrative force of the social revolution of the proletariat. Marx thought that English imperialism unconsciously gave impetus to this process. So when he accentuated that England had to 'fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating—the annihilation of the Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia' (Marx 1973, 320), Marx was expressing, above all else, his belief in the transformative powers of communism. Moreover, for Marx, significant causal efficacy follows from the industrial revolution in the west to the underdeveloped east, by a direct, not a dialectical path. 'Thus, for Marx, the emergence of the industrial proletariat is taken as the principal cause, because it is also what bears the "cause" to be defended' (Ricoeur 1984, 119). Within that historical configuration, the west was obliged to reintegrate Asia into the new age. There may occur a lag between the causal forces that promote the social transformations and cultural changes, but this lag will finally be overcome. Now that the communist revolution was about to happen, the religiously sanctioned forms of both Oriental consciousness and praxis could be re-established according to the determinations of the new reality in new laws, a new government, a new religion, a radical art, a new culture and so on. Whilst in theory, for both Marx and Hegel, 'men can contribute through their failures and defeats to the human knowledge of the laws that govern both nature and history' (White 1973, 329), their methodologies are clearly biased in favour of Occidental men; for both thinkers the essential historical dynamics emerged from the west; for both, the Orient was yesterday, the west today *and* tomorrow.

In the writings of Max Weber, we find mediation between the materialist focus of Marx and the historical consciousness focus intrinsic to the methodology of Hegel. The reasoning employed in *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (1905/2003) satisfies the quest for historical superiority exactly, with one very important difference: Weber's emphasis on the irreconcilability of Oriental beliefs with western rationality. In other words, whereas the theories of Marx and Hegel were essentially inclusive—that is they both believed that human action everywhere provides the basis for the transcendence of the status quo—Weber's

understanding of civilizational development and rationality was exclusive to the Occident:

Only the Occident knows the state in the modern sense, with a constitution, specialised officialdom, and the concept of citizenship. Beginnings of this institution in antiquity and in the Orient were never able to develop fully. Only the Occident knows rational law, made by jurists and rationally interpreted and applied, and in the Occident is found the concept of citizen (*civis Romanus*, *citoyen*, *bourgeois*) because only in the Occident does the city exist in the specific sense of the word. Furthermore, only the Occident possesses science in the present-day sense of the word. Theology, philosophy and reflection on the ultimate problems of life were known to the Chinese and the Hindu, perhaps even of a depth unmatched by the European; but a rational science and in connection with it a rational technology remained unknown to those civilisations. (Weber 1961, 232–233)

Marx and Hegel do not necessarily express a conscious Orientalist bias towards the east. Their historical verdict in favour of Europe emerges from their methodology which is *a priori* to their appropriation of the Orient in general and Islam in particular. It follows from this that history is projected from the east to the west, where the final destiny of mankind would be realized. This was temporality worked out through the introjection of the other into western time. The other is necessarily seen as 'left behind' only to be reanimated within the new age. In this context, the other becomes the site of western temporality; the retroactive east is finally turned into the recipient of the civilizing mission of western men. A comparable methodological emphasis is found in Weber, with the difference that the achievements of the Occident—the protestant ethic and capitalism—are deemed to be exclusive to western civilization. No dialectical historical consciousness or revolutionary cell could transfer it to the Orient. Faithful to the causal merits of abstraction, Weber not only leaves the Orient behind, he renders it non-existent—an artefact of history that is forever trapped in its 'Oriental despotism'. The causal connection between the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism is central to this verdict, because it provides the structure for an historical consciousness that is thoroughly independent of both the ancient civilizations of China, India, Persia, Egypt *and* the Islamic worlds. Both capitalism and Protestantism were considered distinctively western inventions. Hence, Weber does not only separate 'the specific component of the work ethic on the one side of the religious phenomenon and, on the side of the economic phenomenon, the spirit of acquisition characterized by rational calculation' (Ricoeur 1984, 191), he positions both on a causal chain in a distinct juxtaposition to the Orient in general and Islam in particular. Within such a constellation, tracing the development of history from east to west, central to the methodology of Marx and Hegel, is irrelevant. The west is yesterday, today and tomorrow all in one; it has established its own distinctive temporality.

The mandate of Muhammad

In the previous section, I argued that the west developed its sense of temporal and historical superiority *via* others in general and Islam in particular. Affinities with contemporary theories such as Arnold Toynbee's *Civilisation on trial* (1948) and especially Francis Fukuyama's *The end of history* (1992) are not coincidental, of

course. Whilst Toynbee (1948, especially Parts V and VIII) makes a general argument that the culminating impact of western culture points to the eventual evolution of a universal civilization, Fukuyama is self-consciously Hegelian, re-enacting the end of history thesis in our contemporary epoch by locating it within the historical context after the demise of the Soviet Union and the apparent inhalation of core values of western civilization—capitalism and liberalism—on a global scale (see further Adib-Moghaddam 2002). At last it appears that, according to Fukuyama, the west has managed to rewind the clock of history, rendering Muhammad's revelation useless. After several millennia, after superimposing itself on the rest of the world, the west has positioned itself beyond the ancient empires of the east, even beyond history, explaining Fukuyama's adherence to his view of the end of history. From this perspective, the fact that the riddle of time was solved in the west suggests that civilizational progress is given, not to the culture itself, but to the culture that comes *after* it, the culture that succeeds in solving the riddle left unsolved by the Orient. Ultimately, via colonialism and the capitalist world order, the Orient has been either coerced or habituated into accepting the new temporality, which explains why in many countries in the east, from Turkey to China, we are, officially, in the year 2008.

The Muslim experience of time and history and its effects on the clash of civilizations idea I would like to discuss is different. Whereas some western philosophers developed a particular obsession with restructuring the temporal sequence of history in favour of the Occident, Islam's perceived 'temporal superiority' lets Muslims indulge in the luxury of being born with the 'mandate of history'. From the outset this has allowed Muslim philosophers to move beyond the tedious world of empirical reality and enter the fantastic realm of spiritual exigency. On the one side, the historical mandate expressed in the Qur'an 'seeks to abrogate the excrescences that came to disfigure truth in the course of time, because the generations that had gone before had failed to preserve the earlier revelations' (Sharif 1966, 1198). On the other side, Muslim philosophers, as early as adherents to the Peripatetic or *mashshai* school that developed out of the writings of al-Kindi in the third Islamic century (9th century), developed a particular propensity for 'transcendental' or 'prophetic' philosophy, 'a philosophy that recognizes beyond reason and the senses, the channel of revelation... as means of gaining access to knowledge of the most elevated level' (Nasr and Aminrazavi 1999, 85). This attitude is especially pronounced in the writings of Ibn-Sina (Avicenna 980–1037) and is not entirely absent from the political manifestos of Iran's contemporary revolutionaries as well (see further Adib-Moghaddam 2006; 2007/2008).

The two primary institutions of Muslim philosophy, spirituality and rational exigencies, can be related to the ideational habitat that Islam carved out for itself. When Ibn-Sina, Farabi, Suhrawardi, Khayyam and others were writing, Islam occupied an area that was heir to the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Persia that was suddenly endowed with a prophetic religion with universal claim on top of its pre-existing civilizational heritage (see further Hodgson 1970, 105ff). This historical constellation led the Muslims to believe that they were granted the torch of human history and that they couldn't divorce themselves from the genealogy of humankind. From the Muslim perspective (as for the Christians and Jews before them), their religion was the agent of a new temporality in human history. Yet despite the intrinsic transcendental claim,

the Qur'an and Muhammad himself were not positioned out of the genealogy of mankind but explicitly within it. So whilst according to Christian dogma Jesus is divorced from the finitude of time and hence from the determinations of human history, Muhammad is placed at the juncture of it, right at the centre of the empirical realm of the human existence on earth and the godly experience of the afterlife: 'Do they not travel through the earth to see what was the end of those nations before them' (Surah 30: 9).

They were more distinctive in strength and they cultivated more lands and built more buildings more than what this people have made; their Messengers came to them with evident Signs and Miracles but they denied them and caused their own perdition; Allah did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves. (Surah 30: 9)

Surah 5 verses 68 to 70 are equally specific in their emphasis on Islam's place within the prophetic revelations and genealogy of mankind (Surah 5: 68–70). Islam, from the outset, has been very self-conscious about its role within and beyond the empirical realm of human history, which explains the emergence of the two philosophical institutions I sketched above. Out of this disposition emerged the attitude of the 'natural temporal superiority' *vis-à-vis* other civilizations, especially after Islam conquered the ancient civilizations of Persia and Egypt. If Islam could have transmuted from those events in Arabia into a global movement, Muslims must have been granted the torch of history. If Islam was revealed in order to usurp Christianity's supersessionist claims over Judaism, Muslims were obliged to carry their divinely mandated universal mission to all corners of the world. If Islam swelled into a global phenomenon, it was the duty of Muslim philosophers to transcend the tedious human world and to enter the realm of the other-worldly. But the emergent Islamic *Weltanschauung* could never really transmute into a systematic ideology that would claim history in its entirety from the beginning to the end, because Jesus and Abraham were never really placed outside Islam.

This is a fundamental difference between the views of history that emerged amongst some writers in the west and that I have tried to sketch above. From a western perspective, it was easier to ignore Islam as a continuous historical force, even to negate it as Weber did, because from the outset, Islam was not considered part of the western cosmos. Muslims did not populate Augustine's *City of God*; neither did they appear in the three ages of history described in the *Everlasting gospel* of Joachim of Fiore (1132–1202). By virtue of its ordinances, Christian dogma could not accommodate Islam theologically. Islam on the other side could not afford an exclusionary perspective; it never really could refute Jesus, Moses and Abraham *in toto*. Islam's clash with Christianity (rather than with Jesus) was always relative. Thus, during the Umayyad period of the Islamicate caliphate (661–750), Umayyad writers refuted particular ordinances of Christianity, namely the Holy Trinity, the crucifixion of Jesus and the doctrine that he was the son of God, but they did not challenge his prophetic status. True, during the Abbasid dynasty (750–1258), the period when Islam was institutionalized and relations with others were formalized, Christians, Jews (and Zoroastrians) were designated as *dhimmi*s, the ones who would only enjoy the protection of the Islamic state in return for their allegiance to it and payment of a special 'poll' tax (*jizya*). Moreover, although they were regarded as 'People of the Book' (*ahl-al kitab*), their evidence was not accepted against that of Muslims in the burgeoning *sharia* courts,

their accession to political power was limited and they could not marry Muslim women. It is also true that polemics by Muslims writers such as al-Jahiz (869), Ali al-Tabari (855) or al-Warraq (around 861) and refutations of Christian dogmas by Zaidi Shi'i al-Qasim bin Ibrahim (785–860), the Asharite theologian al-Baqillani and the Mu'tazilite theologian Abd' al-Jabbar (1025) engendered a dense group of arguments against Christianity that were soon to be archived, indexed and researched in the *madrasas* of Baghdad, Isfahan, Cairo and Damascus. But if there is a common thread permeating these early interactions, it is Islam's clash with the early Christians, rather than a total negation of their existence as a religious community (see further Peters 1984, 79 and Hodgson 1970, 105–106).

The reader should be aware that I have not deduced a 'western perception of history' from the samples sketched above and juxtaposed it to an Islamic one. I would like to indicate that I am not indulging in a total comparison here. What I have tried to establish are the nuances of the clash mentality *within* the constructs we have come to call 'Islam' and the 'west'. Thus far I have argued that there is a difference between a world-view, whose theological tenets constantly alert it that it has been born within a pre-existent genealogy of prophetic revelations (Islam), and one that refutes everything coming after it (Christianity). What is important for my line of argument, moreover, is my suggestion that after the Enlightenment, the west felt empowered to transfer Muhammad, Jesus, Moses and everybody else with a transcendental mandate to the laboratories of human sciences. Islam never really felt compelled to follow suit because it continued the attitude that the torch of human history has been handed over to Muslims following the events in Arabia in the 7th century. From the perspective of Muhammad's adherents it was thus unnecessary to search for a new temporal axis of human evolution, unnecessary to search for a new ending of human history as Marx, Hegel, Weber and others endeavoured. For many Muslims, Muhammad remained the ultimate individual and *madinat-al-nubi*, the city state of Medina, the ideal human community.

For Islamicate civilization, the end of history could only be reached by moving forward along the historical axis established by Islam, which explains why in contemporary Muslim societies, the radically transcendent *Allah* and the radically immanent human world haven't been replaced by an empirical reality in which 'God is dead' as Nietzsche so famously alluded. It may also explain to Bernard Lewis why there are not many clocks in public places in the Muslim world (Lewis 2002, 117). From the perspective of many Muslims, time and by implication history, have been on their side since those events in Arabia. They can thus indulge in the arrogance of their temporal superiority without having to check constantly 'what time is it?'. How else does Islam continue to transcend? How else does it continue to constitute a transnational space, spiritual, cultural and political as well? For its adherents, this 'Islamutopia' continues to open up fables with fantastic figures and gnomic personalities; it imagines the ultimate *umma* encapsulated in the idea of Muhammad's rule over the city state of Medina (*madinat al-nubi*); and ultimately, birth of the ideal *homo Islamicus* who would seal the genealogy of human kind towards his 'inevitable' transcendental fate.

I argue that western modernity is disturbing to many Muslims because it is diametrically opposed to this 'Islamutopia' because its utilitarian dictum makes it impossible to believe in *madinat al-fadilah* (the perfect state), because it shatters transcendence *a priori*, and because it destroys the syntax of a religious language—and not only the syntax of the *Qur'an*, but also that of any contemporary

Islamic constructs that promise a return to the rightly guided period of the *rashidun*, the pious compatriots of the prophet Muhammad. This is why 'Islamutopia' allows for romantic fables and mythical imagery: it travels with the very language of the *Qur'an* and the *hadiths* and hence becomes a part of that fantastic transcendental project of the *umma*. On the other hand, western modernity threads 'Islamutopia', desiccates faith, contests the very plausibility of theodicy; it dissolves Islam's utopian grain, demystifies the romantics of the Islamic revelation. It threatens, in short, to change the Islamic calendar from 1429 (1387 in Iran) to 2008.

What I have suggested implies that the sources of the clash of civilizations mentality within the Muslim worlds are different from those within 'western' civilization. Alas, if the dichotomization of world affairs would have been one-sided, its penetrative ontological force wouldn't worry us until the present day. Instead of the Abrahamic consensus accentuated by the revelation through Muhammad, there emerged an epistemology of difference which was intensified by Muslims themselves, not so much during the life of the Prophet himself, but mainly at the time when Islam was transmuted wholly from the transcendental realm to the empirical spaces of world politics (Hodgson 1970, 113).

The political process of empire building almost inevitably accentuated the ideational cohesiveness of the emerging Islamic structure. The argument that Islam's clash with Christianity could never be absolute does not mean that it was not there in relative terms. Nor does it mean that Islam's clash with the capitalist, secular west could not be absolute. Rather, the self-perception of Islamicate civilization, that it had to act upon the historical and prophetic mandate bestowed upon Muhammad by God, engendered the impetus that led to the expansion of the Muslim empire almost overnight from Arabia to Sassanid Iran and the southern Byzantine provinces of Syria and Egypt and from there all over the world. By virtue of its self-perception, the emerging Islamic polity was compelled to compress the complexity of world politics into an Islam versus rest dichotomy.

The object of any totalitarian methodology is a decrease in complexity; it is a retractile ideology propagating hermetic consolidation through reduction, the shrinkage of the self and the other into neatly defined ideational territories. This is the ultimate mode of persuasion underlying the us-versus-them dichotomy. This methodology operates on both sides, of course. It is not reducible to the west. What we find is that the 'Manichean allegories' (Young 2001, 90) sustaining the structure of discursive formations such as *Orientalism* or the *clash of civilizations* are dialectical; there is both an outflow of othering and an inflow; what is common to both dimensions is an almost metaphysical emphasis on distinctiveness, typically explained with reference to unbridgeable cultural differences or transcendental religious ordinances (or in the case of race theory, to natural selection). 'It must be known', wrote the Muslim scholar Katib Chelebi in the 17th century, symptomatically,

that mankind, ever since the time of Adam, has been divided. Every division has its own tenets and its own mode of behaviour, which seem at variance with those of other divisions. As God Almighty says 'Every party rejoices in its own'... men of vision should acquire knowledge and become acquainted with the division of mankind into various sorts, and with the state and condition of every part. (Chelebi 1957, 29–30)

Chelebi transmutes the epistemology of difference into the transcendental realm of religious ordinances which gives his argument a powerful genealogical grounding. His emphasis on knowing 'the other divisions of mankind' who all have their 'own tenets' springs from that principal vantage point: the accentuation of difference is prior to the motivation of knowledge. In other words, without establishing the divisions of mankind, Chelebi could not have formulated his mission of acquiring knowledge about them in the first place.

The same strategy of totalitarian periodization and a comparable epistemological assault on the narrow-mindedness of the historical analysis of the other can be found in Sayyid Qutb's foreword to Sayyed Abul Hasan's influential book *Islam and the world: the rise and decline of Muslims and its effect on mankind* which was originally published in 1950:

[T]his work is not only a refreshing example of religious and social research but also of how history can be recorded and interpreted from the wider Islamic view point. . . . For quite some time, we in the East have, unfortunately, become accustomed to borrowing from the West not only its products but also the techniques of recording history . . . they apprehend life from a specific and narrow point of view [that] often leads them to draw the wrong conclusions. (Qutb 2005, ix-x, emphasis added)

Here we find a comparable logic, comparable distinctions, comparable periodization of differences and comparable strategy of persuasion. Qutb imprisons the vast differences of western peoples in terms 'they' and 'them' during the period when Europe was recovering from the ruptures of the Second World War. At the same time he is not only reducing the east to the Islamic world and hence undervaluing the presence of other Asiatic peoples but he is also inventing a unitary 'Islamic gaze' and by that allowing himself to articulate this 'Islamic' viewpoint to the reader. The discourse of *Orientalism*, we may thus assert, undervalues the ability of the 'Oriental' to develop similar epistemological devices in order to positively differentiate itself from other communities. This has not only been in reaction to the 'imperial gaze' as Said (2000) suggests in his later writings, but a parallel process with comparatively ancient manifestations as its European pendant.

True, in the 19th century, the east in general and Islam in particular were densely narrated. But the 'east' was not silent, not intellectually muted during this process. The 'west' was 'made available', interpreted, abstracted and contracted in a comparably structured process by scholars and writers in Muslim societies. Consider the Persian travel narrative of *safarnameh* and here especially Mirza Saleh of Kazerun's travelogues of Europe where he lauds the magnificence of the Bodleian Library at Oxford, acknowledges the shared propensity for learning in Iran and England whilst deprecating the arrogance of the Vice Principal (Reverend Frodsham Hodson 1770-1822) and the 'extreme pomp' of an Oxford degree ceremony, which appeared to him as 'nothing but tomfoolery and excess' (Shirazi 1364/1985, 321-324). Nineteenth-century chroniclers such as 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti (1825), Niqula al-Turk (1828) and Haydar al-Shihabi (1835) developed a comparable ambience *vis-à-vis* Europe in general and the French in particular, expressing their admiration for the personality of Napoleon whilst deprecating the violence and antireligious tone of the French revolutionaries (Abu-Lughod 1963, 26 ff). Further back in history, Ibn Batoutah's writings in the 14th century emphasized the superiority of Islamic civilization, which, according to him, transformed Gibraltar into a 'supreme' city (See Ibn Batoutah 1879), whilst

the chronicles of Ahmad Sinan Celebi's polemics in the 15th century accentuated the immorality of the Christian monarchs in order to unearth further instances of Muslim self-aggrandizement and corresponding denigration of the other (see Moser 1980). We may even find an eastern pendant to Orientalist views on the 'tedious' sameness of 'Muslim cities'² in the writings of the 19th-century Qajar monarch Nasir ed-Din Shah, for whom 'the cities of Firangistan (Europe in general) all resemble one another. When one has been seen', the Shah emphasized with immense 'Occidental' authority, 'the arrangement, condition, and scale of the others is in one's possession' (Redhouse 1874, 105).

Let us also consider the writings of Seyyed Fakhroddin Shadman and here especially his most important work entitled *Taskhir-e tamaddon-e farangi* (*The conquest of western civilization*), published in Tehran in 1948. Shadman makes the case for *farangshenasi*, or 'Occidentalism' in Iran, much the same way Lord Curzon and others stated the case for Oriental Studies as a means to fill the gap in the 'national equipment' of England 'which ought emphatically to be filled' (Curzon 1915, 191–192). Indeed, Shadman himself makes the analogy between Occidentalism and Orientalism rather explicit:

The vastness of the precise science of farangshenasi was revealed to me in England when I first realised how difficult a task it was. But inquiry into the conditions of other nations, particularly farangi ones, is so beneficial that it is worth the trouble. I believe this subject is so important that it must be taught in all Iranian schools. . . . The task of a *farangshenas* has at least ten times more importance, variety, and hardship than that of an Orientalist. It is a pity that in all of Iran there are not even ten farangshenas [while] for us to get acquainted with farangi civilisation, we need thousands of enlightened, Persian speaking Iranians who are [both] *Iranshenas* and farangshenas. (Boroujerdi 1996, 58)

The rigorous Iranian picture of the 'west' was intensified in innumerable ways: in Ali Shariati's emphasis on the archetypal difference between the spiritual orientation of the Orient and the empirical quest of the Occident; in Jalal-al e Ahmad's deprecation of the state of *gharbzadegi*, the 'westtoxification' of Pahlavi Iran in the 1960s which he likened to a cultural disease; in the influential writings of Ayatollah Khomeini, Abolhasan Jalili, Ehsan Naraghi, Hamid Enayat and Dariush Shayegan; and in contemporary philosophical controversies in post-revolutionary Iran between Reza Davari-Ardakani (pen name Davari)—who argues that the 'west' must be seen as the ultimate other against which an Islamic identity must be construed—and Hossein Faraj-Dabagh (pen name Abdolkarim Soroush)—who argues that the 'west' is integral to the 'east', that it is epistemologically flawed to invent the 'west' in isolation of the Islamic worlds in general and Iran in particular (see further Adib-Moghaddam 2007/2008). Moreover, this intellectual narration of the Occident was re-enacted in the cultural sphere. The English, especially, have had a particular place in the cultural imagination of most Iranians, with their presence amongst Persians in the different epochs of mutual relations typically being reduced to acts of plethoric

²'Nothing is more foreign to a Muslim town in the Maghreb', writes Tourneau in a typically Orientalist vein, 'than the rectilinear avenues of a Roman or a modern city: an aerial photograph of any Muslim city makes us think of a maze, or a labyrinth' (Tourneau 1957, 20). See also on this subject Hourani and Stern (1970).

materialism, imperial conspiracy, elitist arrogance, political amorality or ethical inferiority: 'The English', a famous quote taken from the 1970s television series based on Iraj Pezekshad's best-selling novel *dai jan Napoleon* ('My dear uncle Napoleon') warns, 'are always the enemy of those, who love their homeland'.

Beyond Orientalism

In conclusion, I reassess my interpretation of the accumulated historical material. Have I not obscured the differences between Orientalism, an institutionalized academic field, and Occidentalism, an aggregation of statements culminating in narrative, cultural and theoretical representations of the 'Occident' as a unitary, metaphysically inferior entity? Have I not overstated the parallels between the 'Occidentalization' of the west by Orientals and the 'Orientalization' of the east by Occidentals? Is it not true that Orientalism is 'thicker' than its Occidental pendant, that 'the very presence of a "field" such as Orientalism, with no corresponding equivalent in the Orient itself, suggests the relative strength of Orient and Occident', that the 'crucial index of Western strength is that there is no possibility of comparing the movement of Westerners (since the end of the eighteenth century) with the movement of Easterners westwards' (Said 1995, 204)? One must agree with Said in quantitative terms: Orientalism has perhaps a rather more powerful presence due to the sheer volume of representations produced about the east in general and Islam in particular. But this does not negate the ontological force of a corresponding image about the west amongst Muslims. The relatively low number of travellers to Europe in the 19th century does not divorce Orientals from the epistemological pressures of Occidentalism (see Abu-Lughod 1963, 76–77, 84–86 and 96ff). The Oriental Muslim, as we have seen, has created her own field in which to enclose the west, her own caricature of the Occidental, her own stage in which to enact her parodies of the other westerner. What we may establish then is an ideational pattern of representations of the west that is systemic in all but institutional structure, an unstructured Muslim archive that is informed, even constituted, from the narratives that belong to those experiences.

Only if we believe in a totalitarian historicism that deletes historical memory from consciousness and subliminal awareness, only if we believe that 19th century 'Orientals' were somehow detached from the ideas of their ancestors, only if we believe in the thorough, unthreaded distinctiveness of historical epochs, can we sustain the notion that there exists no comparably powerful discursive pendant to Orientalism in the 'eastern' mind. Did not the Muslim scholar writing in the 19th century have recourse to the encyclopaedic treatises of Muslim historiographers of previous centuries? Do Islamic institutions like the al-Azhar in Egypt, or the Muslim seminaries in Isfahan, Qom, Najaf and Mashhad, not rightfully claim historical continuity? Do not their libraries and archives hold books, articles, declarations and so on that go farther back than the 19th century?

It appears that for the 'Oriental' the 19th century did not occur in an entranced suspension of history, that the singularity of the discourse of Orientalism threatens to obscure its presence in history during, before and after that period. In my opinion the Islamic worlds continued to both socially engineer their own image of the 'west' and to have an ontological presence beyond the western imagination. Indeed, is that not the historical consciousness holding one side of the clash of civilizations thesis

together during our present epoch? Acknowledging that this is the case is the first step towards deconstructing the clash thesis all the way down to its ancient archives, not in order to reify it of course, but to show that it is based on a questionable ontology, that it has served particular political interests, that it is not inevitable. The first step towards harmonizing intercultural relations is to develop a critical approach to the human sciences, which requires us to divorce ourselves from the tribal methodologies that are contemporaneous with us. We have a very fundamental choice here: contribute to the vast archives of the clash thesis or resist it.

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