



The Misguided Clash: A Muslim Rebuttal to Huntington’s Civilizational Divide

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<p>Abstract: The Samuel Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations theory represents one side of the coin only, there is a dire necessity to look at this debate of the civilizational clash from the Muslim’s point of view. To analytically explore, how the Clash of Civilizations theory is being perceived and responded by the Muslim societies, particularly through the Constructivist lens of International Relations. The Clash of Civilizations has been a prominent debate in the post-Cold War world in the context of understanding the international relations, yet there always has been a need to identify and fill a critical research gap in grasping the perspective of the Muslim world towards this theory. This gap overlooks the significance of efforts towards cooperation and peace between the Muslim world and the West, further intensifying the misconceptions and aggravating the tensions, leaving room for stereotypes, islamophobia, and inter-civilizational divide. In addition to this, the Huntington’s theory also oversimplifies the notion of diversity existing within the civilization by tagging it as a monolithic entity described solely on religious grounds, in turn, paving way for the ‘us vs them’ divide between the Western and the Muslim world. The qualitative methods approach is employed to collect insightful data on the topic of <i>the misguided clash: A Muslim rebuttal to Huntington’s civilizational divide</i>. This paper is an attempt to explore the Clash of Civilizations theory from the Muslim perspective.</p> <p>Keywords: Clash of Civilizations, Muslim Perspective, Islam, West, Constructivism, Dialogue among Civilizations.</p> <p>Copyright © 2024 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Review Paper</p>
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I. INTRODUCTION

The conflicts that our world witnesses today are largely steered by the opposing civilizational worldviews, these world views are defined on the basis of culture, religion and civilizations and neither on the basis of politics nor economics, but solely culture or religion. This is what the Clash of Civilizations theory claims, and according to this theory, this clash of civilizations is inevitable and is in the longer run going to shape our global geo-political realities [1]. Samuel P. Huntington’s highly celebrated work in the form of the ‘Clash of Civilizations’ purports that in the post-Cold war world, conflicts among civilizations are to be based on the religious and cultural altercations among different civilizations. According to Huntington’s perception, the major civilizations such as the Western, Islamic, Confucian and others will be entangled in a severe tussle,

as the cultural and religious fault lines between them will prove to be the future battle fronts, in turn shaping the future political arena of the world [2]. This perception of Huntington is just one side of the coin, as the other one is about the Muslim perception to this concept of the Clash of Civilizations. There has always existed a huge gap in research in terms of how the Muslims opine over the role of culture and religion in leading towards the inter-civilisational clash and through which lens they view the Huntington’s theory.

The Muslims perceive that despite the fact, Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations theory envelops some aspects of the global politics; on the other hand, it fails to address the complex nature of cultural identity and geopolitical realities in its essence by overlooking them ultimately, leading towards a divided worldview

¹ Mark Basin, *Civilizations and their discontents: Political geography and geopolitics in the Huntington thesis*, *Geopolitics* 12, no. 3 (2007): 351-374.

² Samuel. P Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster, 1996.

and burgeoning of stereotypes. Muslims are also of the view that Huntington's idea of monolithic civilizations somehow disregards the diversity existent in the Muslim-majority societies by just tagging them under one label of Islamic civilization because according to Muslims point of view, the Muslims have a rich history with remarkable instances of co-existence, pluralism and cultural diversity which is totally ignored by the theory of Clash of Civilizations. In addition to this the Muslims are of the notion that the Huntington's theory presents Islam and west as anti-thesis to each other; two completely different and opposing concepts which are incompatible with each other. To disregard this, throughout history, Muslims contributions have been regarded in the Western civilizations in several fields from science to philosophy and architecture.

Contrary to the Muslims' view, some pro-Huntington scholars come up with the argument that the recent conflicts such as the Gulf War and the emergence of Islamic radical movements, are a testament that there exists a visible tussle between the Western and Islamic civilizations which strengthens the Huntington's notion of the Clash of Civilizations [3]. Firstly, the Muslim perspective does not shun the reality that the conflicts between Islamic and Western civilizations are existent rather it comes up with the argument that these conflicts are entirely political and economic in nature rather than entirely cultural or religious. Secondly, the Shia Sunni sectarian divide which is a manifestation of intra-civilization conflict, is something completely undermined by the Clash of Civilizations which focuses on the general clash among civilizations. Thirdly, Muslims are of the view that the notion of Clash of civilization is weak as it does not take into account the Muslims efforts for dialogue, cooperation, and coexistence for example, the role of Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in the promotion of interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence is a proof to it [4].

Moreover, Huntington claims the validity of the Clash of Civilizations theory because according to him, it provides a framework to analyse the international political scenario in the existing century, and according to his understanding, the clash among civilizations is very probably to exist and determine the dynamics of international relations. Opposed to this view, the Muslim perception tells another story, that no matter challenges in the global political arena are rampant, but they as a civilization are in favour of cooperation among civilizations and not conflict. To strengthen this claim,

³Samuel. P Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster, 1996.

⁴Francis Robinson, *Islam and the west: clash of civilizations? Asian Affairs*, Volume 33, 2002-Issue 3, Pg. 307-320, 18 June, 2010.

⁵Jaffrey Haynes, "*The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and Interfaith Dialogue: What is it Good*

there are the initiatives like the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, that focuses on promoting inter-cultural cooperation and dialogue to attain a peaceful and conflict free world [5]. Ultimately, it can be said that, the Clash of Civilizations theory has the ability to explain certain events by streaming with its framework, but it overshadows the concept of unity and cooperation among civilizations, thus leaving room for animosity-based relations, inter-civilisational divide, stereotyping of Islamic civilization, and islamophobia. The general perception of Muslims can be put forth as follows: not clash but cooperation, not division but harmony, not conflict but cooperation is possible but the Clash of Civilizations completely undermines that by raising the iron curtain between the Islamic and Western civilizations as if no cooperation is possible and only and conflict leading to clash is the ultimate end.

II. Research Questions

This research intends to address the questions as stated below:

- i. How do the Muslims perceive the Huntington's Clash of Civilizations theory, with reference to its depiction of the Muslim world?
- ii. What influences the Muslim responses towards the Clash of Civilizations theory, in light of the Constructivist lens of International Relations?
- iii. How does the disunity or unity within the Muslim world shape their perception of the Clash of Civilizations theory?

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

I. The Clash of Civilizations:

In his book titled *The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of World Order*, Samuel P. Huntington presents a plausible explanation regarding the future of global politics in the post-Cold war era. His prime stress lies on the notion of civilizations, (he talks about seven civilizations) and the religious and cultural fault lines between them to be the future front lines, rather than considering the economic or ideological reasons. In his work, he focuses primarily on the tussle between the Islamic and Western civilizations [6]. His work has caught much global attention especially in the West, but it ignores the reservations of the Muslims by simply ignoring the complex nature and nuances of global politics in the world of globalization. It is very important to take the Muslim perspective into account, as this theory casts major implications for in what ways the Muslims perceive their relation with the West and other civilizations.

For?" The Review of Faith & International Affairs 16, no. 3 (2018): 48-60.

⁶Samuel P. Huntington and Robert Jervis, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Finance and Development-English Edition 34, no. 2 (1997): 51-57.

JB Yousaf and HA Abdulsalam in their research titled *Time, Knowledge, and the Clash of Civilizations: An Islamic Approach*, provide an extensive opinion on the time and knowledge from Islamic point of view, and with help of it they indicate the possible implications by adopting the Huntington's view. They believe that Islam is timeless and universal and holds enduring relevance to the contemporary times. According to them, the Muslim societies not only view this clash with the West as only a tussle of cultural identity but also as a defence of Islamic values to be shielded from the western influence [7]. The authors are of the view that the Huntington's Clash of Civilizations provides a very apt framework to analyse this clash.

II. The Roots in History, Culture and Geopolitics:

Bernard Lewis work, *Islam and the West*, provides the readers with a very broad exploration of the historic interactions and modern-day perceptions that exist between the Islamic and the Western civilizations. He very efficiently traces the roots from medieval times to recent geopolitical relations along with this he incorporates the evolution of mutual perceptions, helping us understand the contemporary debates on the Clash of Civilizations framework. His exploratory approach underscores the delicacies existing between the Islamic and Western civilizations, and his work attempts at comprehending the contemporary Muslim point of view over the challenges coming from the western side in form the hegemonic rule and cultural supremacy [8]. His work on the Clash of Civilizations is ground-breaking as it takes into account the historical heritage of the clash between the Islam and the West enrolled in historical clashes such as the Crusades and the Ottoman's rule over Europe, leading to animosity between the two; highlights the cultural division between the two civilizations which also leads to building up of tensions between them; and he considers the geopolitical factors such as the western imperialism and fall of Islamic civilizations in exacerbating the conflict. Overall, Lewis's work is a major contribution in understanding the clash between Islam and the West.

Mohammad Hassan Khalil's edited version of the Muslims and the West: Encounter and Dialogue, is a seminal attempt to explore the relationship between the Muslim world and the West in the context of the Huntington's Clash of Civilizations and the Muslim Perspective. This book offers a critique over the Clash of Civilizations that it adopts a very essentialists approach by negating the significance of cooperation and dialogue

⁷ J. B. Yusuf and H. A. Abdulsalam, "Time, Knowledge, and the Clash of Civilizations: An Islamic Approach", *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011):46-58.

⁸ Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West, In National and International Politics in the Middle East* (USA: OUP, 1993): pp 16-30.

between the two civilizations and sheerly focusing on the conflict between these two. This work stresses the need to recognise the diversity within both the civilizations, which cannot be undermined and calls for holistic approach to foster intercultural relations. In a similar fashion, for example in one chapter by Peter Mandeville, this book sheds light on the transnational Muslim networks which play a role in shaping the geopolitics therefore, disregarding the Huntington's so-called idea of monolithic Muslim identity pockmarked against the West [9]. In summation, this insightful work enables the readers to deconstruct the overly simplified narrative of the Clash of Civilisations, and to adopt cooperation to address the complexities of inter-civilizational interactions.

In The Book *Islam and the West*:

Muslim voices of dialogue by John L. Esposito and John O. Vol, a very insightful collection of essays exists which impresses upon the discourse between the West and the Muslim world in a way that it offers an anti-thesis to the Clash of Civilizations theory by utilizing the voices of Islamic scholars. This book challenges the narrative of Samuel P. Huntington in a very striking manner, for the Clash of Civilization is based on the clash between the West and Islam whereas these authors advocate for the significance and role of dialogue, cooperation and peace building in context of the Muslims and Western interactions. Esposito and Vol state that Huntington's theory oversimplifies the Muslim-western interactions and views them in the context of clash only whereas neglecting their extensive history of cultural exchanges [10]. This book underscores the existence of diversity of Muslim perspectives on agendas such as democracy, human rights and globalization, which is one form of interaction between the Muslim and the Western societies. Hence, to view the Islam and West bond in terms of clash is an injustice to the two civilizations because in doing so one is rejecting a long and rich history that exists between the two civilizations.

III. Dialogue among Nations:

The work of Imam Muhammad Khatami, *Dialogue Among Nations: Reflections on Peace and Cultural Diversity*, was a ground-breaking product as an anti-thesis to the Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations theory, as it stressed upon the positive aspects like dialogue, cooperation, and peace among the nations, their cultures and civilizations [11]. His work was also hailed by the United Nations and it encouraged a debate on the possibility and need to foster cooperation

⁹ Zafar Ishaq Ansari and John L Esposito, ed., *Muslims and the West: Encounter and Dialogue*, (Washington D.C.:1997).

¹⁰ John L. Esposito and John O. Vol, *Islam and the West: Muslim Voices of Dialogue, Millennium*, 29(3), (2000): 613-39.

¹¹ Mohammad Khatami, *Dialogue Among Nations: Reflections on Peace and Cultural Diversity*, (1999).

and respect among the nations. Khatami's work highlights shared values and common notion of humanity that binds people across the world irrespective of their cultures and civilizations. He vehemently turns down the perception of East-West clash and underscores via examples the cooperation that has always existed between the civilizations and has always led to nowhere but innovation, progress and development at a mutual level. He through his work conveys the message of peace, empathy and humanity and stresses on the need to overcome the clashes, prejudices and stereotypes that are burgeoning between the civilizations on basis of claims such as that of Huntington's Clash of Civilizations.

A press review titled *United Nations General Assembly Adopts Resolution to Declare Year 2001 'International Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations'* was a reactionary reply to the Clash of Civilizations being tagged as the dialogue among civilizations further calling it to be the best reply of humanity to the worst enemies of humanity. The prime goal of this resolution was to pave way for dialogue, mutual trust building and understanding among different civilizations, via nurturing peace and promoting the message of acceptance and respect on the international level [12].

This indicates that the Clash of Civilizations is an overrated and overly negative perspective, whereas the world needs not clash but to rejoice the diversity in unity worldwide, and to appreciate the shared cultures and values that are necessary to unite the humans all across the world, thus realising a united world. Hence, it can be seen that how international organizations like United Nations is even rejecting the notion of Huntington's Clash of Civilizations.

Minhas Majeed Khan's article *Is a Clash between Islam and the West inevitable*, delves into the prospects of conflict taking place between the Islam and the West. While examining the historical and contemporary geopolitical traction existing between the two civilizations, he is of the view that this clash is unavoidable but it can be mitigated by adopting the diplomatic means and by fostering mutual understanding [13]. He also sheds light on how these sensitive religious linkages are being exploited by the extremist religious groups for attaining their underlying political ambitions. Therefore, this highlights the importance of dialogue and diplomatic engagement among the diverse societies.

¹² United Nations. *"United Nations General Assembly Adopts Resolution to Declare Year 2001 'International Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations'"*, United Nations, January 9, 2001. Accessed [May 01, 2024]. URL: <https://press.un.org/en/2001/ga9952.doc.htm>.

¹³ Minhas Majeed Khan, *"Is Clash between Islam and the West inevitable"*. *Strategic Studies* 36, no. 2 (2016):1-23.

IV. Impact on the International Relations:

The paper titled *The Clash of Civilizations? Religious Rivalry and its Impact on International Relations* provides a comprehensive analysis on the significant role played by the rivalries based on religion in shaping the global political structure. This paper offers a comprehensive critique on the Clash of Civilisations theory of Huntington's. One key argument of their work is that irrespective of the role of religion that it plays in modelling the international relations, more significant is the role of the religious rivalries which are way more intricate than the way in which Huntington presents them. In reality, it is not just the religious clash rather it is grounded on several other factors such as economic, political, social injustices, which need not be seen in a single shade of the clash between civilizations [14]. The authors empirically try to illustrate that these so-called religious conflicts are the bigger pictures, often portrayed and tagged as the religious conflicts but deep inside, there are several other agendas such as the struggles for resources, power and territorial gains.

Moreover, this work elaborates on the role of organizations and religious leaders whose role has been very constructive in resolving the conflicts on the grounds of peace building, and this is what offers a prominent critique on the claim of Clash of Civilizations theory that religious always leads to conflict and not cooperation. For example, the research provides an in-depth analysis of the role of religious leaders and institutions in promotion of interfaith harmony and mutual cooperation building in the conflict facing areas like the Northern Ireland and the Balkans [15]. It can be interpreted from this work that the Clash of Civilizations presents an unwarranted critical view of religion's role, portraying it as solely negative and conflict-driven.

O' Hagan's work on *Beyond the Clash of Civilizations* in the Australian Journal of International Affairs is a very bold challenge to the claim of the Huntington's Clash of Civilizations theory, because she posits that the clash of civilizations is not as simplistic idea as presented by Huntington. Furthermore, the concept of global interactions cannot be merely defined under a simple and solo concept of religion as it has more strings attached to it [16]. According to her analysis, the Clash of Civilizations theory fails to grasp the complex nature of inter civilizational interactions, as it undermines the impact of socio-economic, historical and other contemporary factors in the realm of international relations. This literature review identifies the void that

¹⁴ Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *"The Clash of Civilizations? Religious Rivalry and Its Impact on International Relations,"* *Journal of Religion and Violence*, 1(2000):214-231.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Jacinta O'Hagan, *"Beyond the Clash of Civilizations?"*, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 59, no.3 (2005): 383-400.

Huntington had left in his work by ignoring the concept of diversity, interconnectivity, and existence of cooperation among the global societies.

Gabriele Marranci in civilisations Theory: Rethinking Islamophobia, is also of the view that Islamophobia is not a product of cultural differences only rather it is an outcome of an amalgam of facts such as politics, economics, social influences, etc. His paper offers a critique on the essentialist argument of the Clash of Civilizations theory on the clash between Islam and the West by pointing out that islamophobia plays role as a proper mechanism to maintain power imbalance and to render ground for the discriminatory practices [17]. His work calls for a reinvestigation of the Clash of Civilizations theory to understand the complex interrelation among culture, religion and politics which play a vital role in shaping the views and perceptions about Islam.

V. Unity and Disunity within the Civilization:

Asli Ege in his work 'Clash of' or 'Clash Within' Civilizations?" introduces another dimension to the Huntington's Clash of Civilizations Theory by taking into account the Middle Eastern Affairs. Ege suggests investigating whether the conflicts are only taking place between the Islamic and the Western civilizations or also within the Islamic world itself. He believes that the conflicts in the region are shaped by a number of internal dynamics and external influences, offering insights into the multidimensional nature of the Middle eastern affairs [18].

In spite of the fact that extensive literature is present on the area of the Clash of Civilizations theory; there exists a critical gap in developing a clear understanding of the Muslim perspective and their rebuttal of Huntington's work. Most of the research conducted on this respective area is the reflection of the Western perspective and policy responses; there remains a vacuum in studies elaborating on the Muslim perceptions and interpretations in reaction to the Huntington's Clash of Civilizations theory.

IV. Hypothesis:

It is hypothesised that *the Muslims perceive the Clash of Civilizations theory as a Western-centric construct which oversimplifies diverse Muslim identities and cultures and undermines the efforts of collaboration amidst perceived civilizational clashes.*

¹⁷ Gabriele Marranci, Multiculturalism, Islam and the Clash of Civilizations Theory: Rethinking Islamophobia, Culture and Religion 5, n0. 1, (2004):105-117.

¹⁸ Asli Ege. "Islam and the Middle Eastern Affairs from a Huntingtonian Perspective: "Clash of" or "Clash

V. Theoretical Framework:

The Clash of Civilizations theory needs to be seen as a social construct whereby a social construct is a mix of human beliefs, interactions or perceptions, which are all subjective in nature. To better understand the Muslim perception towards the Huntington's Clash of Civilizations, the Constructivist approach of International Relations can be adopted. The constructivist approach in International Relations is defined as a theory which relies on the ideas, norms, and identities when it comes to shaping of the behaviour of either states or individuals in the international arena [19]. According to the theory of Constructivism, the Clash of Civilizations theory needs to be seen in a broader context in relation to the Muslim perspective, that means that the perceptions regarding the cultural differences are not predetermined rather they are loose and flexible in nature and are shaped by a number of other factors like the historical experiences, social linkages, variety of discourses that exist within the civilizations.

To suggest that the Muslim perception and response towards the Clash of Civilisations theory is based solely on their religious beliefs is a misconception. In reality, it is influenced by a number of factors, including complex social, political, economic, and cultural relationships. Therefore, viewing things through a single lens of the West and tagging things as so is half of the story. The Muslim perspective adds another tint to this conception. In short, interpreting the civilizations in the context of cultural and religious differences and fixing it as a reality that the clash on such differences is inevitable, widens the shaft between the civilizations on the lines of the 'us vs them' notion, thus, leaving no room for cooperation or peaceful co-existence. In other words, instead of internalising and accepting the Clash of Civilizations theory as a reality, efforts to challenge this narrative must be promoted, to underscore that there must be promotion of peace and cooperation among the civilizations via overcoming the gaps and divides on the religious and cultural lines, essential for the achievement of a serene and harmonious world.

VI. Revisiting the Huntington's Clash of Civilizations Theory:

To expand on the Huntington's Clash of Civilisations, it is essential to grasp the various dimensions which Huntington takes into account while proposing this popular paradigm. According to him, the world is composed of several civilizations as compared to the previous bi-polar dynamics, global politics is now going to be shaped by these multiple civilizations. He considers the Roosevelt's policies of attaining a uni-

Within" Civilizations?" *Research and Development on Social Sciences*: 267.

¹⁹ Emanuel Adler, *Constructivism in international relations: Sources, contributions, and debates: Handbook of International Relations*, (Sage, 2013), 112-144.

civilizational world to be hollow for in the post-world war era, there exists a tussle among cultural identities which is shaping the global politics. He believes that the scales are shifting, as the non-Western powers have begun asserting their power in the international arena thus, leading to a decline in the influence of the West. The distinction between the hard power and Soft Power as proposed by Joseph Nye helps explain this shift as the non-western countries are excelling in both in the post-Cold War era. Islam is on the rise even in the Western states, and this Islamic rejuvenation is perceived as a threat to the Western states [20].

Furthermore, Huntington presents a unique structure of civilizations divided into the core, lone, cleft and torn countries. According to him, core states aim leadership, while the lone states try to mask themselves as core states to retain their cultural identity, whereas cleft states are the one in which deep divisions may occur owing to the existence of large groups belonging to different civilizations. According to Huntington, a clash of cultures is definite, because the western universalism seems to lose its influence to the non-western civilizations as they are on rise to assert their cultural worth. Thus, a mighty clash between the western civilization based upon its arrogance and the Islamic civilizations on the grounds of intolerance is inevitable, and one may bring the Sinic assertiveness in this tussle of civilizations too. He brings the struggle to gain possession of nuclear weapons under debate by considering the example of Saddam Hussain's delayed invasion of Kuwait until the acquisition of nuclear weapons, he elaborates that the one lesson the Gulf war conveyed to the world is that until unless you do not have nuclear nukes you cannot fight the USA, this is what according to Huntington interests the other states especially the Muslim states to go nuclear to fight against the West in future [21].

According to him, the circumstances based on events like the western favouritism towards Israel, sanctions on Iran's nuclear program, invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, are perceived by the Muslim world as an attack of the West on the Islamic civilization. In Huntington's view, it is Islam which has challenged the dominance of the West two times in history, once the attack on the Byzantine empire and the secondly the blockade of Vienna. Furthermore, Huntington talks about the Kin country syndrome which refers to the tendency of countries within the same civilization to support each other in times of conflict on the basis of a sense of kinship owing to same ethnic ties or religious similarity. This Kin country syndrome can be supported with the instance of the support of Muslim countries provided in the case of Kashmir, Sudan and Chechnya. His theory suggests an idea of fault line wars, which is to

say that instead of the traditional wars within civilizations, now the wars will be between the civilizations most probably between the Islam and the West. He believes this is so because Islam has bloody borders as Islamic civilization is more prone to conflicts i.e., the Afghan war, the Gulf war [22]. In the last, he lays stress on the significance of avoiding the aggression for the West to escape the downfall, he also underscores the role of United States and advises that America must remember its roots coming from Europe in order to maintain its status and to not to lose its cultural identity. In short, according to Huntington's views, conflict of civilizations is inevitable.

VII. The Response to the Huntington's Clash of Civilizations:

The Clash of Civilizations theory sparked a whole new debate across the globe, particularly as it revolves around the sensitive issue of religion. Huntington's central argument was regarding the Clash of Civilizations, based on the cultural and religious fault lines, which according to him were going to prove to be the future battle lines. Several religious scholars hailing from different religious backgrounds as well as academicians and policy makers came up with their own ideas to refute the arguments presented by the Clash of Civilizations paradigm because if the Clash of Civilization proposes the ultimate reality, then why is there ongoing discourse around peace, cooperation and unity. To avert such negativity propagated by such a narrative, to retain cooperation, and to show the world that the Clash of Civilization is just one side of the story and the other side needs to be heard too, many big names such as Noam Chomsky, Edward Said, Joathan Fox, Stephen Walt, Muhammad Khatami, Fouad Ajami, Fethulla Gulen came upfront to rebut the Huntington's claim as the dominant paradigm.

VIII. The Muslim Perspective on the Clash of Civilizations Theory:

The response of some eminent Muslim personalities on the debate of Clash among Civilizations put forth by Samuel P. Huntington is important, especially with regards to negating what Huntington calls as the 'inevitable clash of the Islamic and the Western Civilizations'. This theory of Huntington was not hailed warmly by the Muslims because it created a prominent division between the two civilizations by placing them in a one-on-one tussle, one against the other widening the gap between the two on the notion of 'us vs them' concept, thus garnering feeling of animosity and hatred. Mostly, the anti-thesis to Huntington's views given by the Muslims is in the form of a dialogue theory. Nevertheless, the work of Imam Muhammad Khatami and Muhammad Fatehulla Gulen is remarkable which has been much appreciated all across the world.

²⁰ Samuel. P Huntington, the Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, Simon and Schuster, 1996, p31-37, 41.

²¹ Samuel. P Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, p.135-139.

²² Ibid, p.301-318.

Syed Muhammad Khatami was the one who rebutted the Huntington's views on the civilizational clash, and in turn gave an anti-stance to it in the form of the 'Dialogue among nations' to counter the clash among the nations. He was a staunch believer of recognising diversity to ensure progress and because of his appealing ideas, he garnered a lot of international appeal. The United Nations, declared 2001 as the Year of *Dialogue among Civilizations* [23], in recognition of Khatami's vision. This was indeed a remarkable achievement for the whole Muslims community. His ideas were so compelling and acceptable that they were being recognised in contrast to Huntington's proposal of Clash of Civilizations theory [24]. He adopted a conflict resolution-based approach and also proposed strategies to mitigate such conflicts in the future. According to him, there are two group of civilizations: one which views diversity as a menace and the other which considers it vital for development. His views made his proposition to bear more weight in the international arena as compared to the work of Huntington [25].

In Khatami's vision, dialogue is a quest for truth and understanding while acknowledging the diversity of various perspectives. He laid stress upon the argument that dialogue is not the domain of the ones who claim ownership of truth, but it is revealed to those who are committed to discover the truth. According to him, the contemporary world requires to grasp the worth of dialogue by rejecting the power of monopolies, in turn, recognising the value of liberty, justice, and human rights. The "Dialogue among Civilizations" offers a critique to the Clash of Civilizations [26]. In this paradigm, he designates empathy and compassion a superior status than the will-to-power mentality, in order to achieve an enhanced sense of cooperation among the civilizations. It can be understood that the ultimate goal is not only dialogue itself rather it is more about sowing the seeds of empathy and compassion among the civilizations of the modern world.

Fouad Ajami has also offered a vigilant critique on the Clash of Civilizations. In his response to the Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis, he underscored the significance of the state in international conflicts. According to him, states act as per their self-interests instead of their civilizational identities. He further questioned the validity of viewing the conflicts through the lens of civilizations by quoting the examples of the Gulf War in which President Saddam Hussein resorted to the Islamic rhetoric to gain support, not out of

genuine allegiance to the Islamic civilization rather as a strategic manoeuvre. He also challenged the idea that that conflicts like the Balkan Wars were triggered by the civilizational faultiness on the basis of cultural or religious differences by asserting that it is the local power struggles which play the role as a primary motivator especially when you have leaders like Milosevic and Tudjman, who adhere to the cultural narratives just to bring justification to their actions [27]. Hence, Ajami contends that by attributing conflicts to clashes of civilizations, we oversimplify the complex geopolitical realities and in turn, we obscure the underlying narrow self-interests which are being pursued by the states in the global arena. Generally, Fouad Ajami's critique is quite targeted as it highlights the multifaceted nature of conflicts and also unravels the tendency of the state leaders to exploit the cultural and historical narrative for their own benefit. By simply viewing the conflicts through the civilizational framework risks overlooking the nuanced geopolitical dynamics and often lead us to misguided and misperceived interpretations of the geopolitical events.

In contrast to Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis, Fethullah Gulen came forward with a critique on the Clash of Civilizations proposition. He laid due stress on the dangers of this narrative with the apprehensions of it becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. Gulen proposed that when we will frame the future in context of the clash of civilizations, we would be setting such goals that will ultimately be driving the policies towards fulfilling the same targets, as proposed under the Clash of Civilizations. Instead of the clash, he advocates for tolerance, inter-faith dialogue, and compassion to be the most important anecdote in resolving the conflicts [28]. His arguments maintained their foothold in the Islamic teachings of the Holy Quran, and from Quran he brought the references to the significance of observing tolerance and forgiveness. He was of the view that no religion is inherently based on conflict because even the religions such as Islam and Christianity also convey the message of peace and harmony and not conflict, clash or war. Furthermore, he criticised the misinterpretations of Islam in the form of the origin of extremist groups like Al-Qaeda because such agendas sabotage the essence of Islam, a religion which highly regards the value of dialogue and peace. Moreover, he underscored the significant need of inter-faith dialogue, especially among the Abrahamic religion regardless of their historic animosities. Gulen has acknowledged the Muslim's hesitant attitude owing to their past difference of

²³ Muhammad Khatami, address to 'Dialogue among Civilizations' conference at the UN, September 5, 2000, accessed at www.un.int/iran/dialog05.

²⁴ Muhammad Khatami, Interview by Christian Amanpour, CNN, January 7, 1998, accessed at www.persian.ag/Khatami/s_khatami06.html.

²⁵ Nazar-ul-Islam Wani, "Muslim Response to Huntington's Theory of Clash of Civilizations," *Islam*

and Muslim Societies: A Social Science Journal 12, no. 1 (2019): 1-20.

²⁶ Muhammad Khatami, speech at United Nations General Assembly, September 21, 1998.

²⁷ Fouad Ajami, "The Summoning", *Foreign Affairs* 72, no.4, 1993.p.2-3.

²⁸ Penaskovic, Richard. "M Fethullah Gulen's Response to the Clash of Civilizations Thesis."

opinions and conflicts but he presses upon them to focus on the commonalities and to go beyond polemics [29]. Therefore, he ultimately rejected the Huntington's rigid view about the dichotomy existent between the Islam and the West, and advocated for a more optimistic attitude and interconnected world where civilizations can co-exist and interact with each other in a positive manner.

Benazir Bhutto in her book 'Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy, and the West,' challenges the idea of Samuel Huntington of the Clash of Civilizations theory, she is of the opinion that the actual conflict is the conflict within Islam itself and not between the Islam and the West. According to her views, this internal struggle is between modernism and regression, reformist and traditionalists, freedom and oppression, and education and ignorance. She believes that democracy and dialogue is the key to resolve the tensions existing within Islam. In her view, Islam is inherently compatible with modernism and civil society. She rejects the idea that Islamic culture is inhospitable to democracy, rather she insists that only by institutionalising democracy in the Islamic world the clash between the Islam and the world can be averted. Her focus throughout the book is on promoting democracy in Pakistan. Additionally, she advocates vehemently for tolerance, brotherhood, democracy to ensure peace and harmony among different faiths [30]. It can be concluded that her argument that democracy and dialogue are crucial for resolving the conflicts within the Muslim world in order to foster peace with the West cannot be undermined.

Feza Azami, a well-known poet, stalwartly conflicted with the ideas of Huntington. Through his art in poetic form, he attributes the conflicting regions like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan to the implementation of this theory by influential figures like Huntington, Kissinger, Bush and Blair. He expresses dismay while witnessing the crippled state of the Muslim world. Through his emotional frenzy, he calls for dialogue between cultures stressing the need to accept the universal values of love, tolerance, peace and profession taught by all the religions. He argues that the true essence of Islam lies in the worship of single being and the shared belief in common values. His poetry is a proof to his will to see all and sundry to exist in harmony, in peace without creating civilizational discrimination [31]. In short, he believes that true salvation lies and unity and not confrontation. It can be said that his work very beautifully encapsulates the need for dialogue and cooperation which is a compelling alternative to the clash of civilisations narrative propagated by Huntington.

²⁹ Yilmaz, Ihsan, ed. *Muslim World in Transition: Contribution of the Gulen Movement*. Somerset, New Jersey: Tughra Books.

³⁰ Benazir Bhutto, *Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West*, Simon and Schuster, Great Britain, 2008, p.265

IX. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, where at one hand the Huntington's Clash of Civilizations theory has initiated a world-wide debate especially in the post-Cold War period, there exists a critical gap in understanding the Muslims perspective and response to this theory. In spite of the fact, volumes of literature exist on the subject primarily represent the western perspective, there is a dearth of studies illustrating Muslim perspectives and interpretations of the Clash of Civilisations theory. This gap is very important to fill because it fails to notice the significant aspects of Muslim responses particularly in light of the clash of civilisations theory when seen through the constructivist lens of IR. Moreover, the disunity or unity within the Muslim world plays a very important role in shaping their perception of this theory.

Huntington's oversimplification of diversity within civilizations as monolithic entities solely defined by religion exacerbates misconceptions, stereotypes, and tensions, fuelling the 'us vs them' divide between the Western and Muslim worlds. For fostering cooperation and peace between Muslim societies and the West, and for combating Islamophobia and inter-civilizational divides it is vital to address this gap. The future research should prioritise exploring the Muslim perspective on the Clash of Civilizations theory to provide a more comprehensive outlook on this complex issue. Finally, it can be concluded that the powerful individuals play with the minds of the ordinary people with their conflict prone strategies, but it is the role of the global society to question such narratives, and to advocating for peace, justice, and human rights all across the globe. While achieving a conflict-free world may seem utopian aspiration, a shift from war to peace is underway. However, the promotion of theories like Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" threatens to augment tensions between the West and Islam, emphasizing the need for collective action to refute such divisive doctrines and advocate for sanity and cooperation in international relations.

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³¹ Feza Azami, *From the Graveyard of Civilizations-A Muslim rejoinder to the Huntington's Clash of Civilizations*, Translated into English by Farzana Ahmad, Trafford publications, Canada, 2007, p.1

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