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Khatami' Dialogue among Civilizations as International Political Theory

Fabio Petito[1]

Abstract

Many academics, worldwide have considered Khatami's Dialogue of Civilizations as a powerful rhetoric and antithesis of the so-called 'Clash of Civilization' theory. This article, however, tries to show the originality and depth of Khatami's vision, framed against the background of 'the end of history' and clash of civilization' theories, political frames used by political actors in the post cold war international order. Citing quotations from the number of speeches delivered by Khatami's author tries to identify the notions behind the dialogue, which according to him has been influenced by many philosophical and religious trends, and which more of less justifies Iranian foreign policy and protect national interest rather a genuine vision to construct peaceful and just world. Further, the present article raises many questions regarding the intellectual indifference and liberal west as non receptive to the dialogue, and thus, specially in the wake of recent unease around the globe.

Keywords: Dialogue of Civilization, Clash of Civilization, End of History, Cod War, Philosophical and intellectual trends.

On 4 November 1998, the General Assembly of the United Nations unanimously adopted the resolution proposed by the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mohammad Khatami and designated the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of the dialogue among Civilisations. Since then the idea of Dialogue among Civilisations has been made the object of a plethora of conferances and international meetings but very little attention has been devoted by International Relations and Political theorists to clarify and articulate its possible meaning as framework for the future of international relations and this is even more regretful since Khatami explicitly put forward this

1. Assistant Professor, University of Paris

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vision with this aim in mind. Academics with an interest in global issues, though, found the notion of dialogue among Civilisations a useful rhetorical antithesis to the largely discussed and popular thesis of the Clash of Civilization. In other words, the Dialogue among Civilisations initiative provided something like a 'nice' title for another paper to criticise Huntington or a fitting rhetorical device to be mentioned in the introduction or better in the conclusin to vaguely refer to some kind of undefined normative political necessity of opposite sign to the clash[1].

There are theoretical reasons that can explain this western intellectual indifference -- my favourite candidate being the supremacy of liberalism as a set of analytical and normative assumptions structuring our academic discourses -- however, the fact that it was the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, arguably the representative of the most anti-western revolution my view another significant element in the explanation, "why should our research agenda be designed by a rhetorical *escamotage* used for strategic reasons by some illiberal politician?" this question captures he more of less explicit, often unsaid, political assessment of the academia, but, I would argue, we miss the point if we ae not able to move beyond this position. If the president of the theocracy founded by Khomeini, the real Other for the west (at the ent Communism was for the West a much more comprehensible internal enemy), is serious about the necessity of a Dialogue amog Civilisations, and I believe he is, we might be confronting a paradoxical situation worghy of some thought. How is it possible that the intrinsically antiliberal leader of Political Islam is calling for a global dialogue with the liberal West? Why the tolerant liberal West is not very receptive to this invitation has been primarily directe?

To move beyond the predominant position of indifference and to give back intellectual dignity to Khatami's project, I will analyse his idea of Dialogue among Civilisations and argue, contrary to any interest – oriented and realist interpretion that see this political discourse as nothing but a rhetorical *escamotage* used for strategic reasond, that its originality lies in its implicit International Political Theory that envisages a normative structure for a peaceful (multicultural and globalised) international society beyond the intellectual constraints of the post-89 dominant global political discourses of the 'end of history' (or globalisation of relevant given the too many misperceptions of western intellectual and political circles *vis a vis* the Muslim world -- I will suggest that Kahmami's idealist-normative tension is the result of an original fusion of recent developments in western philosophy and poitical theory (dialogism) with the tradition of Islamic spirituality and doctrine known as Sufism. Before turning to Khatami's vision, however, a brief premise on the idea of Dialogue among Civilisatins in the post-89 context is in place.

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'Dialogue among Civilisations' as a Global Political Discourse: Against the Background of the 'End of History' and the 'Clash of Civilisations'

The end of the Cold War bipolar opposition, strategically organised around spheres of influence and managed through the common language of a realist ethics of statecraft, brought about, among many other things, a large debate on the future of world politics and, more importantly for our discussion, the need to rethink afresh the moral basis upon which a new international coesistence should be constructed. In this context, two intellectual reactions soon became the unavoidable opposite references for any discourse on post-Cold War international order: Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' and Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilisations'[1].

For Fukuyama world history, after the defeat of Communisim, had reached its end as a dialectical process and Liberalism, now the only game in town, represented the only *rational* model available worldwide in the now final consolidation of the linear progress of mankind. From this perspective, the problem of the new moral basis of international coexistence is greatly simplified – if not finally resolved – by the globalisation of Liberalism: the greater international homogeneity based on the liberal values of free market, democracy, and human rights provides the conditions to develop some form of cosmopolitan polity (here the receipts are varied) and fulfil the kantian ideal of a perpetual peace' in the International Relations jagron, the final victory of Liveralism, by expelling or at least substantially mitigating the two definig features of the modern international society, anarchy and war, marks *the end of history* of international relations as we have known theam.

For Huntington the ideological conflicts that had characterised the Cold War would be substituted by cultural conflicts occurring along the fault lines of civilisations. The clash of civilisations' thesis puts forward not only a framework, what Huntington describes as the best available geopolitical map, to understand post-cold war international relations but also an argument for a new moral basis of international relations: an international order based on a plurality of civilisations and grounded in a minimalist morality of coexistence, mainly understood as an ethics of prudence and reciprocal non-interference to prevent the threat of the clash of civilisations[2]. To have a full grasp of full grasp of this receipt for world order we have to consider its two main intellectual components: first, the idea that global politics has been experiencing in the last decades of the 20th century a return of culture and religion as determinant facotr to the formation of political identity' and secondly, a realist notion of politics with its focus, on one side, on conflict, security, and threat to be balanced, on the ogher, by an ethics of responsibility and prudence exemplified

1. Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilzations?', *Foreign Affairs*, 72, no.3 (1993): 22-49.
2. Francis Fukuyama, *the end of history and the last man* New York: Free Press, 1992) and Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?"

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by the classical principles of 'balance of power', non-interference, and deterrence now applied not at the state level ـ ـ as in the classical realist version ـ ـ but at the civilisation one.

These two theses, originated as academic arguments, soon became powerful political frames used by key political actors to justify political choices and decistions. In particular, it is well known the association of the 'end of history' with the policies of important economic organisations such as the IMF and the WTO, the view of the executives of MNCs as well as with the democracy promotion strategy supported, for example, by the Clinton administraion. In a similar fashion, the 'clash of civilisations' has been often associated with NATO's new strategies, US more conservative foreign policy attitudes towards China and the so-called rouge states as well as political organisations campaigning against multicultural society. Of course, after 9/11, the 'clash of civilzations' was again at the centre of the debate on how to explain and made sense of this tragic event.

I take the idea of the Dialogue among Civilisations as being a third political reaction to the end of the Cold War, that although not being a synthesis of the two first ones, could not be set and framed. I would contend, but against the background of these two intellectually nd politically powerful thesis[1]. If the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the global resugence of Political Islam in the last quarter of the 20th century are the most visible exemplification of this rerurn of culture and religion in international politics ـ what Hedley Bull has aptly called the "dultural revolt against the West", after the political revolt of the de-colonisation struggle and economic revolt of the Third World[2] ـ ـ is then Khatami's initiative really about the non-western world finally hoisting which flag or is the beginning of a historical *nemesis* for the arrogant liberal ـ ـ self-proclaimed ـ ـ*Last Man* announcing the *End of History*? It is to the analysis of Khatami's ideas that I want now to turn.

Understanding Khatami's dialogue among Civilisations

Since the election as President of the Islamic Republic of Iran 1997, Khatami has articulated his proposal for a Dialogue among Civilisations. Khatami's starting point is that "[t]oday's world is searching for a new basis on which to regulate human and social relations"[3] and it is UN general

1. This argument is more clearly articulated in the book that followed his article. See Samuel Huntigton, *the Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

2. Here it is fair to mention that Khatami has not been the only political proponents of such a vision although he has to get much of the credit for its politicization. For Example, Václav Havel moving from a very different political and intellectual starting point, has developed a very similar vision ghough under the different rubrics of 'multipolar and multicultural civilization' and 'search for unity in diversity', see Fabio Petito, "Havel and the Future of International Relations", *World Affairs*, vol.7 no.4, 106-19.

3. For the return of culture and identity in International Relations, see Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil, *The Return of Culture and Identity in Interational Relations Theory* (London: Lynne Rienner, For global resurgence of religion and its implications for International Relations see Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos (eds.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile* (New York: Palgrave, 2003); and Hedley Bull, "The Revolt against the West", in *The Expansion of International Society*, eds. H. Bull and A. Watson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

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Assembly, proposed "that the Unitet Nations, as a first ste, designate the Year 2001 as the "Year of the Dialogue among Civilisations"[1].

Interpreting Dialogue among Civilisatons: The Post-89 Context

The main sources of this 'evolving global climate' can be traed to two most discussed topics in contemporary International Relations: the end of the phenomenon of globalisation. Khatami, however, provides a particular reading of these issues. First of all, in his view, the collapse of the bipolar order opens up the possibiliby for a new and just world order based on pluralism and that will not be the monopoly of any single power[2]. Khatami's rejection of any unipolar from of international order goes hand in hand with his critique of the prevalent realist paradigm of international relations -- as exemplified by the Cold War mind-set and the US foreign policy -- and gis commitment to the logic of dialoque. Using, as it has been noted, discernibly Habermasian language[3], khatami in his famous interview on the CNN called for: "American foreign policy [to] abandon its instrumental rationality and stop considering others as objects [and instead] respect the rights of others and adopt an approach based on communicative rationality"[4].

In a key passage of his speech at the UN General Assembly, just after having officially proposed the designation of 2001 as the "Year of Dialogue among Civilisations", Khatami, in a striking as well as unexpected praise of Western values, articulates more comprehensively his view:

Among the worthiest achievements of this century are the acceptance of the necessity and significance of dialogue and rejection of force, promotion of understanding in culture, economic and political rields, and strengthening of the foundations of liberty, justice and human rights. Establishment and enhancement of civility, whether at national of international level, is contingent upon dialogue among societies and civilizations representing various views, inclinations and approaches[5].

From these extracts, it is clear how the idea of 'Dialogue among Civilisations' entails a critique of power politics (and in particular a rejection of the 'clash of civilisations' thesis) combined with a commitment to a paradigm for conducting international relations where morality has a prominent role. In one of his most recent most recent speech, on the occasion of the Conference at the UN launchimg the 'Year of Dialogue among Civilisations', Khatami has even more clearly spelled out this dimension:

We ought to critically examine the prevalent paradigm in international relations based on the discourse of power, and the glorification of might… From an ethical perspective, the paradigm

1. Mohammad Khatami, speech at the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 21 September 1998.
2. Mohammad khatami, statement at the Eighth Session of the Islami Summit Conference, Tehran, 9 December 1997 [www.persia.org/ (24 September 2001).
3. Lynch, 'The Dialogue', 307.
4. Mohammad khatami, interview by Christian Amanpour, CNN, 7 Janury 1998, transcript found in [www.persia.org/khatami/s_khatami06.html] (24 September 2001).
5. Mohammad Khatami, speech at the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 21 September 1998.

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of Dialogue among Civilisations requires that we give up the will-to-power and instead appeal to will-to-empathy and compassion. Without the will-tp-empathy, compassion and understading, there would be no hope for the prevalence of order in our world. We ought to gallantly combat this dearth of compassio and empathy in our world. The ultimate goal of Dialogue among Civilisations is not dialogue in and of itself, but attaining empathy and compassion[1].

The other key dimension of Khatami's view of Dialogue among Civilisations is more directly related to the rise of globalisation and consists of two apparently contrasting elements: on one side, the acknowledgement of the increasing economic, political, and cultural interconnectedness and its inherent push towards a convergence of people's mind-sets and ways of life' and on the other side, the rejection of the superiority of Western liberalism (in particular as formulated by the "end of history" thesis) as well as of any notion of 'world culture' that is monolighic and overlooks indigenous cultures[2]. Actually, this tension represents one of the main challenge to which the 'Dialogue among Civilisations' wants to respond to. At a first approximation and in a politically simplified language, this search for 'unity in diversity' takes the form, in Khatami's words, of statements like "we want a world that has commonalties, coexistence, but that also has differences and variety"[3] as I said, However, this issue is at the heart of Khatami's elaboration of the idea of 'Dialogue among Civilisations' and I now want to show where, in my reading, the originality and depth of his vision lie.

At this stage, however, a premises is in place: as I mentioned above, I do not take Khatami's Dialogue among Civilistions' initiative as a foreign political discourse *strictu sensu*, that is, as discursive strategy to justify Iranian foreign policy or to protect Iranian national interests, rather as a genuine vision on how to construct a more peaceful and just world order after the end of the Cod War. Statesmen are indeed sometimes at the origin of political visions aiming at the common international good -- especialy when they are intellectuals, as it is the case for Khatami. I would recognise, however, that, also in ghis case, statesmen continue to speak from a specific "national" viewpoint and that the particular international vision they support does often envisage a "special" role for the State they represent. Nevertheless, tracing and reconstructing the intellectual and political arguments of Khatami's vision will help me to provide a reading opposite to the interest-oriented and strategic interpretation that emphasises Khatami's role as foreign-policy maker. But before turning to that, I want to briefly present another alternative -- though always sympathetic -- reading of Khatami's proposal of 'Dialogue among

1. Mohammad Khatami, address at the Dialogue among Civilisations Conference at the United Nations, New, 5 September 2000 [http://www.un.int/iran/dialog05.html] (20 September 2001).
2. Ibid
3. Khatami, "Symposium", 12.

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Civilisations'[1].

According to John Esposito and John Voll, Khatami's opening to the West must be put in the context of his world historical view on the fal and rise of civilisations and the emergence of new leading Civilisations[2]. From this perspective follows that

'dialogue' is not a passive policy of accommodation, it is a competitive strategy to strengthening and transforming Islam civilisation…because, as the West itself evolves and possibly declines, there is the opportunity for Islam to regain its position as the leading progressive world civilisation[3].

This interpretation of 'Dialogue among Civilisations' as learning strategy that has to be enacted by the Islamic world in order to catch up with the technological and economic achievements of the West can well find justifications in some passages of Khatami's writing and public speeches, but I would contend that it is not enough to explain the full meaning and rationale of his initiative. Instead of a mean-end logic, my reading of Khatami's proposal gives key importance to the broder philosophical and religious frame within which, I want to argue, 'the Dialogue amon Civilisations' initiative has been articulated. In order to do that, I look at three defining elements of this 'dialogue' – the participants, the philosophical nature, and the aim – with an eye to make more explicit and unpack what khatami has synthetically espressed in his public interventions.

The participants to the Dialogue among Civilisations

The issue of the participants to the 'Dialogue among Civilisations' has raised several questions. Who are the direct receivers of this call for dialogue? States, individuals, international organisations, non-state actors, such as NGOs, universities, churches? Who – assuming that we can agree on the meaningfulness of such a problematic category as civilisation and, as a consequence, identify a plurality of civilisations – is supposed to legitimately represent the different civilisations in this dialogue? It could be argued that in Khatami's formulation there is a degree of ambiguity on this issue: on one side, he presents this proposal as an alternative paradigm for international relations and emphasises the important role states are called to play, on the other, he stresses how intellectuals (and strangely enough also artists, poets, and mystics should be central to this enterprise[4]. This ambiguity at a closer look results to be only apparent. In fact these two dimensions or levels – the relationships among states and among

1. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, "Islam and the West: Muslim Voices of Dialogue", in *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile,* eds. Faio Petito and Pavlos Hazopoulos (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 237-69.
2. This views have been extensively articulated by khatami in his *Islam, Liberty and Development* (Binghamton, NY: Institue of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University, 1998). In this respect, a changes of emphasis in the public supeeches following the publication of this book – change on which I am going to build for a less strategic reading then Esposito and Vol's – can well be explained by the fact that Khatami's initiative is work in progress open to reelaboration and rethinking.
3. Ibid., 629.
4. Khatami address at the Dialogue among Civilisations Conference

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individuals (belonging to different civilisations)‗‗become irreconcilables only if we believe international relations to be: a competitive arena lived by strange‗‗though anthropomorphic ‗‗creatures called states condemned by their nature of by impalpable (systemic) force to behave according to their national interest[1]. Khatami's rejection of 'power politics' entails not only the fefusal of politics without morality and the consequential reestablishment of the dignity of human being (will-to-empathy and compassion) as the measure for (just) world order, but also the belief that ideas and values, embedded in cultures and civilisations, inform in a determinant way all the politicl process on a *continuu* that goes from the singular individual to the state apparatus. As a consequence for Khatami the role of intellectuals in geneal and in particular with reference to the 'Dialogue among Civilisations' becomes very important:

It should not be doubted that the central role in true dialogue between cultures and civilisations is played by the learned, by thinkers and the formers of public opinion. Scientists, artists and intellectual elites are the listening ears and communicating medium of nations, representing their and psyche. They can chart new paths towards a new horiaon in the dialogue between East and West[2].

This emphasis on the embeddedness of values in national coounities and civilisations and the idea that thinkers are representing the spirit and psyche of these communities can be regarded, particularly in our positivistic globaised age, as both analytially problematic and politically dangerous, but I think Alasdair MacIntyre has persuasively elaborated on this essential connection by developing the notion of 'social tradition' as a set of practices embedded in a community[3]. For MacIntyre, every notion of morality (virtue)‗‗as well as any notion of justice and practical rationality (of politics, in other words)‗‗is embedded in a social tradition as a set of practices of a particular community. As a consequence, there is a necessary link between a moral and political philosophy as articulated by a thinker and the broader social and cultural context within which this view has been elaborated. This is why MacIntyre can argue not only that:

There is a history yet to be written in which the Medici princes. Henry VIII and thomas Cromwell, Rrederick the Great and Napoleon, Walpole and Wilbelforce, Jefferson and Robespierre are understood as expressing in their actions, often partially and in a variety of different ways, the very same conceptual changes which at the level of philosophical theory are articulated by Macchiavelli and Hobbes, by Diderot and

1. Probably this statement can be generalised to all state-centric and interest-driven theory of International Relations that excludes a central role for ideational and normative factors, in particular the rational choice approach. For a classical *locus* see Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).
2. Khatami, "Symposium" , 2, italics added.
3. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After virtue*, 2nd edition (London: Duckworth, 1985). For a discussion of MacIntyre's notion of social tradition in the context of the IR debate on international society see Scott Thomas, "Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seiously: The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society", *Religion in International Relations*, 21-53.

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Condorcet, by Hume and Adam Smith and Kant[1].

But also that "a moral philosophy… characteristically presupposes a socology" and, therefore particular values, ethical conceptions and even political visions presuppose a social content and a social context[2]. This set of issues, however, is beyond my present concern and at this stage by aim was only to show how this point can't be simply and easily dismissed as non-scientific, given that also contemporary "communitarian" philosophy has given back to it academic dignity[3]

What I want now to underline is the kind of thinkers to whom Khatami is especially entrusting the duty of engaging in a Dialogue among Civilisations: "together with philosophers, scholars and theologians… great artists (and also poets and mystics) should undoubtedly get due recognition [in this dialogue]"[4]. I want to argue that this apparently minor of even politically irrelevant point reveals a lot about the nature of dialogue Khatami is envisaging: this is a dialogue that aspires to be a "thick conversation", opposing both anti-foundationalist of relativist approaches that prioritise ethics and politics to ontology and a social-scientific engineering of dialogue based on negotiation methodologies to reach technical-limited agreements[5]. This dialogue is always and, in different ways, a search for truth and, as such, it does not hide the deepest differences of the participants and cannot separate the political and social realm from the existential condition of human being. In Khatami's words:

[T]alking and listening combine to make up a bipartite – sometimes multipartite – effort to approach the truth and to reach a mutual understanding. That is why dialogue has nothing to do with the sceptics and is not a property of those who think they are the sole proprietors of Truth. It rather reveals its beautiful but covered face only to those wayfarers who are bound on their journey of discovery hand in hand with other human beings[6].

Who represent or incarnate those *wayfarers* on their journey of discovery hand in hand with other human beings better then the artist, the poet, and the mystic? In another passage in a more direct way Khatami expands on this aspect:

Indeed, meta-historical discussion of such eternal human questions as the ultimate meaning of life an ddeath, or goodness and evil ought to substantiate and enlighten any dialogue in political and social issues. Without a discussion of fundamentals, and by simply confining attention to superficial issues, dialogue would not get us far from where we currently stand. When superficial issues masquerades as "real", "urgent" and

1. Aladair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd Edition (London: Duckworth, 1985), 61.
2. MacIntyre. *After Virtue*, 23
3. A similar approach can be found, in my view, in what has been described as the "theology of nations" of the Pope John Paul II, see Andrea Riccardi, *Governo carismatico. 25anni di pontificato* (Milano: Mondadori, 2003) as well as in the role that according to Arnold Toynbee "creative minorities" have in the birth and flourishing of civilizations. See D.C Somervell, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Vols I-X in one volume*, with a new preface by Toynbee)Oxford University Press 1960).
4. Khatami, address at the Dialogue among Civilisations Conference.
5. On "thick conversation" see Fred Dallmayr, "Conversation Across Boundaries: Political Theory and Global Diversity", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30, no. 2(2001): 331-47 and see also Thomas, 'Taking Religious'.
6. Mohammad Khatami, speech at the Wuropean University Institute, Fiesole, Florence, 15 March 1999 [http://www.] (2001), emphasis added.

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"essential" prevails, and where no agreement or at least mutual understanding concerinig what in truly fundamental is obtained among parties to dialogue, in all likelihood misunderstanding and confusion would proliferate instead of empathy and compassion[1].

The Philosophical Nature of Dialogue

These elements allow us to expand the analysis on the philosophical underpinnings of the notion of dialogue put forward by Khatami. First of all, it is interesting to note how this dialogue does not demand the use of a neutral language. In particular, the 'rawlsian' idea of 'public reason' as the only legitimate language – in the public political forum of liberal democratic societies as well as of international society – in which discussions among 'irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines' can take place is implicitly rejected in favour of a political discussion that does not neutralise or hide the metaphysical background behind the idea of 'the politically reasonable' but that, in a way, pushes them to the forefront searching for an understanding at this deeper level[2].

Secondly, although sometimes unequyivocally phrased in Habermasian language with strong emphasis on 'the argumentative authority of Reason', Khatami maintains that "dialogue, before anything else, is a search for emotional contact and sincere trust"[3]. In this respect, the Dialogue among Civilisations envisaged by Khatami closely resembles the model of 'global conversation' articulated by Fred Dallmayr building on "Michael Oakeshott's association of conversation with interpersonal friendship"[4]. Expanding on Charles Taylor's discussion of the deficit of vernacular experience in the Habermasian discourse model. Dallmayr describes a 'thick conversation' or 'thick dalogue' as a communicative exchange willing to delve into the rich fabric of fifferent lifeworlds and cultures. The appeal in such exchange is no longer merely to the rational-cognitive capacity of participants, but raher to the full range of their situated humanity, including their hopes, aspirations, moral and spiritual convictioons, as well as their agonies and frustrations. In this respect thick dialogue remains closely attentive to the "sufferings of vulnerable creatures"[5].

Does not this close attentiveness to the suffering of vulnerable creatures imply attaining that empathy and compassion that Khatami sees as the ultimate goal of the Dialogue Civilisations?

Finally, another element of the dialogical model put forward by Khatami is worth mentioning: this dialogical engagement is not only a process through which a deeper mutual understanding can emerge among different civilisations and compassion and empathy attained, but it is also a

1. Khatami, address at the Dialogue among Civilisations Conference.
2.John Rawls *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) and *the Law of the Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
3. For the centrality of reason in dialogue see Khatami, speech at the European University Institute. Khatami, "Symposium", 1.
4. Dallmayr, "Conversation Across Boundaries", 332 In a similar move Dallmayr rejects a strong separation or distance between his model of conversation and the neo-Kantian model of cosmopolitan discourse proposed by Habermas.
5. Dallmayr. "Conversation Across Boundaries", 346. For Charles Taylor's discussion along similar lines see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) and "The Politics of Recognition". in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

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process of discovery of the "Self" through the meeting of the "Other" and as a consequence, I would contend, it is potentially a deeply transformative event. In a recent speech, Khatami has expressed this point in a rather literary rich and politically daring way:

One goal of dialogue among cultures and civilizations is to recognise and understand not only cultures and civilizations of others, but those of "one's own". We could know ourselves by taking a step away from ourselves and embarking on a journey away from self and homeland and eventually attaining a more profound appreciation of our true identity. It is only through immersion into another existential dimension that we could attain mediated and acquired knowledge of ourselves in addition to the immediate and direct knowledge of ourselves that we commonly possess. Through seeing others we attain a hitherto impossible knowledge of ourselves[1].

Similar paths have been explored in theoretical terms by Hans-Georg Gadmer and Charles Taylor and recently their reflections have been applied to the specific issue of Dialogue among Civilisations by Dallmayr[2]. These theoretical elaborations share an emphasis on the tranformative dimension of the dialogical engagement. The outcome of dialogue so conceptualised, however, is not some form of consensualism or rationally-reached agreement but rather what Gadamer refers to as a "fusion of horizons", a possible enriching change of the "pre-judgements" that we carry with us as indispensable and unavoidable starting point in any dialogical engagement. MacIntyre has expressed the huge challenge that is at stake in this essentially transgressive attempt of going beyond the moral boundaries of one's horizon or tradition:

[T]he fact that the self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities… does not entail that the self has to accept te moral limitaions of the particularity of those forms of community. Without those moral particularities to begin from there would never be anywhere to begin' but it is in moving forward from such particularity that the search for the good, the universal, consists, yet particularity can never be simply left behind or obliterated. The notion of escaping from it into a realm of entirely universal maxims which belong to man as such, wherther its eighteen century Kantain from of in the presentation of some modern analytical moral philosophies, is an illusion and an illusion with painful consequences. When men and women identify what are their partial and particular causes too easily and to completely with the cause of some universal principle, they usually behave worse then they would otherwise do[3].

In this respect, it can be argued that the Dialogue among Civilisations takes MacIntyre's warning seriously by carefully, respectrully and even critically walking the narrow and steep path of search for 'unity in diversity'.

1. Khatami, address at the Dialogue among Civilisations Conference.

2. Hans-Georg. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Winsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989)' Taylor, *Sources of the Self*' Fred Dallmayr, "A Gadamerian Perspective on Civilisational Dialogue", *Global Dialogue* 3, no.1 (2001): 64-75 and *Dialogue among Civilisations: Some Exemplary Voices* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

3. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 221, emphasis in original.

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The aim of Dialogue among Civilisations

After examining the philosophical nature of the Dialogue among civilisations as proposed by Khatami, I want to conclude by asking what is the aim, the real end, the rationale of this call for a Dialogue among Civilisatios: what is really this initiative aspiring to? By answering to this final question, this concluding section rejoins the beginning of this analysis where a reading of this initiative oposite to the interset-focused interpretations – either pointing to the Iran's national interest as the decisive factor in explaining this move or to a broder civilisational interest in the context of the world historical view on the fall and rise of civilisations – was announced. I want to suggest that Khtami's proposal for a Dialogue among Civilisations is driven by the belief that, at this particular stage in the history of humankind, getting closer to the truth – whether its ethical, olitical, social or even religious dimension is concerned – inescapably requires a dialogical encounter between "East and West" (on a large scale). In religious (abramithic) language, that we can reasonably assume familiar to Khatami, there is a kind of *prophetic call* on humankind to find that deep ontological and humane unity that has been lost and this can only be attained by recognising that "[m] an is in fact the meeting point of the soul's East and the reason's West"[1].

That is why Khatami has gone as far as saying, in a politically unusual fashion, that "[o]ne of the issue that should be on the agenda of dialogue is: is there truth of not?"; and continuing along these lines of reasoning, "if we accept these two assumptions – that truth exists and that man can generally get to the truth – then the real aim of dialogue is understanding", he reaches the conclusion that "[I}n dialogue based on understanding and sincerity, I believe we can get closer to the truth"[2]. As said, this dialogue in Khatami's view must have as main protagonists East and West since:

West and East are not only geographical regions, but also kinds of worldview and ontologies. In genuine dialogue, one can accept what is true in each outlook, highlight the better truths in each by accepting their capacities, values and developments, and in a changing world look for the common human element in the median between material and spirit[3].

This quotation contains all the main elements of the argument put forward by Khatami. In a simplified and schematic way, Khatami is presenting us with a series of three related dechotomies: West and East, modernity and tradition, materialism and spirituality. It is his believe that in this parti8cular historical context, the path for humankind progress and for the construction of a more just and peaceful world order necessarily lies on the border etween these dichotomies. In several passages of his speeches Khatami stresses, on one side, the imbalance suffered y the West with its over-reliance on

1. Mohammad Khatami, speech at the European University Institute, Fiesole

2. Khatami, "Symposium", 5.

3.Khatami, "Symposium", 2.

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rationality and its fascination with materialism, on the other, the need for the East to embark on a critique of tradition and gain true knowledge of the critical approach of Western culture[1].

This analysis is supplemented by the firm belief that the Western techno-political hegemony grounded in its intellectual over-reliance on rationalityis already experiencing a deep crisis at different levels‗‗intellectual, political and social ‗‗and if "the establishment of peace, security and justice in the world" must be achieved "[t]he next century should be a century for turning to a kikd of spirituality that the Oriental Man has several thousand years of experience in its pursuit"[2].referring to a wide range of problems that beset the world today such as the crisis in the relationship of man and nature, the ethical crisis that has developed in scientific research and the family crisis, Khatami reaffirms the centrality of the Dialogue among Civilisatios also in finding practical solutions since "[I]t now appears that the Cartesian-Faustian narrative of Western civilizations should give way and begin to listen to other narratives proposed by other human cultures"[3]. Along similar lines, the Irish Jesuits, William Johnston has reminded that at the beginning of the twentieth century the Jewish thinker Simone Weil (1909-43) spoke prophetically of Europe's need for Eastern spirituality: "It seems that Europe requires genuine contacts with the east in order to remain spiritually alive. It is also true that there is something in Europe that poooses the Oriental spirit, something specifically Western… and we are in danger of being devoured by it"[4].

These criticisms, however, are always balanced by Khatami's praise for western culture and its achievements. In this respect it might seem not easy to make sense of how Khatami reconciles his own strong foundational starting point with an unconditional openness to the transformative dimension of dialogue and to its unpredictability in terms of result as expressed, for example, in the following passage: "Dialogue is a bi-lateral or even multi-lateral process in which the end result is not manifest from the beginning. We ought to prepare ourselves for surprising outcomes as every dialogue provides grounds for human creativity to flourish"[5].

Interpreting Khatami's Vision of Dialogue among Civilisations: The Role of Sufism and dialogical Theory

The just-mentioned apparent contradiction might well be resolved by pointing to the 'insincere' or strategic nature of the call for a dialogue among Civilisations in one of the two versions that I have already mentioned. From this standpoint, the declared openness to the surprising outcomes of

1. For the critique of the West see in particular, Khatami, "Symposium", 7 and the speech at the European University Institute. For a critique of the East it is also very interesting to look at the speeches that Khatami has delivered in the context of the Islamic Conference Organisation.
2.Khatami, speech at the European University Institute. For the same argument made from Christian standpoint see William Johnson, "*Arise, My Love*…": *Mysticism for a New Era* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000).
3. Khatami, address at the Dialogue among Civilisations Conference.
4. Simone Weil, cited in William Johsnston, "Arise, My Love…": Mysticism for a New Era (Maryknol, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 40.
5. Ibid.

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the dialogue is nothing else then a costless rhetorical devise. How can someone who believes to be the possessor of Truth -- in this case as revealed in Islam -- truly show such understanding Khatami has of Truth and the access man has to it is much more philosophically rich and nuanced then we tend to expect -- in the western word -- from an Islamic thinker! (this could be also said, perhaps to a lesser degree, for a religious thinker *tout court*)[1].

An answer to this apparent paradox--of great political relevance given the too many misperceptions of western intellectual and political circles *vis á vis* the Muslim world--it is to trace the roots of Khatami's arguments to the very rich and ancient philosophical tradition of doctrinal Sufism. Sufism is "an interpretation of Islam that prioritises the religious and spiritual dimension, focusing on man's interior walk of perfection", wich, grown in the world of the Muslim confraternities in the very first centuries of Islam expansion, has suffered a major setback in the 20th century as result of the international rise of wahhabism and the criticisms of various Islamic reformers[2], but is today the object of a new attention by number of Muslim reformists such as Abdolkarim Soroush in Iran, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan in India and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in Malaysia. These Islamic intellectuals have been exploring new perspectives in the spirit of what another Iranian Islamic reforme Ali Shari'ati has called "the war of religion against religion"[3]. This religious martix, it seems to me, is an essential reference to locate intellectually Kahatami's argument and to make sense of passages like the following one:

There was a time when poets who promoted colonialism, such as Rudyard Kipling, used to say that "East is East and West is West and never the wwain shall meet'. Today, the vision of a unipolar world and the dissolution of all cultures and civilisations into the dominant culture of the world is another expression of such a prejudiced and nation-oriented view. Goethe said, "The East is God's, the West is God's", and Iqbal, as if to indicate the origin of the German poet's inspiration, adorned his Message of the East with the Qur'anic verse that "East and West belong to God". The objective of both poets is to show a point where East and West meet. This common point of contact, in both views, is the divine origin of humanity. The feeling of estrangement the East and West have towards each other will be dissolved when each stops viewing itself as an absolute phenomenon and see its "self" in relation to the "other" and in relation to this common

1. For example see this statement: "The understanding of Truth is historical-bond and complete truth is never acquired but rather genuine an dconstant search is the attitude that is more proper to it", Khatami, Eighth Session of the Islamic Summit Conference.
2. Marietta Stepanyants, "Introduzione", in Marietta Stepanyants (ed.), *Sufismo e confraternite nell'Islam contemporaneo. Il difficile equilibrio tra mistica e politica* (Torino: Edizioni Fondazione Agnelli, 2003), x. See also the chapter by Alberto Ventura in the same voloum.
3. Marietta Stepanyants, "Il sufismo nel contesto delle dinamiche politiche contemporanee", in Marietta Stepanyants (ed.), *Sufismo e confraternite nell'Islam* contemporaneo, 341. Ali Shari'ati cited in ibid.

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origin. This is how East and West help each ogher towards perfection[1].

Here the Sufi sources and inspirations are evident for, as Andrey Smirnov has recently argued with specific reference to Ibn Arabi, Sufism maintains that the beautiful plurality of religious beliefs finds a deep harmonious unification in the ungraspable and un-containable gretness of god[2]. This also explains why many authors have pointed to the intrinsically well-disposed attitude of Sufism *vis á vis* the process of inter-religious dialogue[3].

Furthermore, as I have spordically indicated my analysis, Khatami's initiative seems to express in the international sphere the very same conceptual changes, which at the level of philosophical theory have been articulated by the dialogical approaches that have critically analyse the logocentric assumptions of our philosophical thinking and tried to overcome the stalemate of the Communitarian/Cosopolitan (liberals) divide. This communitarian path to cosmopolitanism, to use Richard Shapcott's formulation, has been primarily outlined by Gadamer in his model of dialogue as "fusion of horizons" and it is therefore not surprising that in the post-89 era, the father of hermeneutics and perhaps the greatest witness of 20th century European philosophy could talk in the following terms on the need of creating 'new global solidarities'[4]:

[t]he human solidarity that I envisage is not a global unifomity but unity in diversity. We must learn to appreciate and tolerate pluralities, multiplicities, and cultural differences. … Unity in diversity, and not uniformity and hegemony – – that is the heritage of Europe. Such unity-in- diversity has to be extended to the whole world – – to include Japan, China, India, and also Muslim cultures. Every culture, every people has something distinctive to offer for the solidarity and welfare of humanity[5].

Khatami's initiative of Dialogue among Civilisations can therefore be, in some way, interpreted as a transgressive and transformative dialogical journey open to unpredicatable outcomes and inspired by this "contemplation in action or mysticism of everyday life" that Fred Dallmayr sees as the kind of spirituality urgently needed for the cretion of a more peaceful and humane global order[6].

1. Khatami, "Symposium", 3-4.
2. Andrey Smirnov, "Il concetto di 'esere' nel sufismo: quale spazio per una tolleranza universale? Il problema della diversitá religiosa" in Marietta Stepanyants (ed.), *Sufismo e confraternite nell'Islam contemporaneo. It difficile equilibrio tra mistica e politica* (Torino: Dizioni della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 2003).
3. See the chapters by Scattolin, Gursory, Rafique and Murata in Marietta Stepanyants (ed.), *Sufismo e contraternite nell'Islam contemporaneo.*
4. Richard Shapcott, *Justice, Community and dialogue in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also Fred Dallmayr, "A Gadamerian Perspective on Civilisational Dialogue", *Global Dialogue* 3, no. 1 (2001): 64-75 reprinted in Frea Dallmayr, *Dialogue among Civilisations: Some Exemplary Voices*, (New York: Palgrave, 2002), ch.1.
5. Thomas Pantham, "Some Dimensions of Universality of Philosophical Hermeneutics: A Conversation with Hans-Georg Gadamer", *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* 9(1992): 132 quoted in Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism*, xiii. (Gadamer quoted in Dallmayr) also pag 219 of Alternative visions.
6. Fred Dallmayr, "A Global Spiritual Resurgence? On Christian and Islamic Spiritualities", in Petito and Hatzopoulos (eds.), *Religion in International Relations*, 209-36.

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Sketching Dialogue among Civilisatios as International Political Theory

As I have argued, Dialogue among Civilisations as global political discourse was set and framed by Khatami against the background of the end of history and the clash of civiliations these. We can start from here to sketch Dialogue among Civilisations as International Political Theory, that is, an argument for the moral basis of a multicultural and globalised international society. In a simplified and schematic way, it can be said that the Dialogue among Civilisations shares *analytically* essential assumptions with the thesis of the clash of civilisations while *normatively* is closer to the approach endorsed by the end of history.

In fact, against the analytical and empirical argument about the globalisation of liberalism being the last stage of the modernisation and secularisation of the world, the Dialogue among Civilisations stresses the global resurgence of culture and religion in world politics and identify in the quest for cultural authenticity the main present political issue in the relationship between the Western and non-Western world. But where Huntington sees the clash of civilisations scenario as mainly a social-scientific *prediction,* the Dialogue among Civilisations sees it as a dangerous *possibility* produced by wrong policies that need to be opposed.

On the normative side, it is self-evident that the proposal for a Dialogue among Civilisations is formulated as a rection to the clash of civilisations thesis. In simple terms, the former is designed to prevent and avoid the latter. The reason that explains why from rather convergent empirical considerations and analyses, the supporters of the dialogue strategy reach very different conclusions from Huntington has to do, in my view, with the very different notion of (international) politics these two positions assume: where Huntington subscribes to a *realist* political framework, the dialogue strategy is committed to a more *idealist* framework closer to the notion of politics implicit in the end of history thesis. In the first case, struggle for power is perceived to be the unavoidable necessity of politics and this condemn international politics to be the realm of conflict *recurrence and repetition* that can only be partially mitigated by a *consequentialist* ethics of statecraft based on non-interference. In the second case, an idealist commitment to politics as a search for *justice* and for mutual understanding through *conversation* prevails, and as consequence, international politics is perceived s a realm where *progress*, however difficult, is nonetheless possible on the base of an ethics of *ends.*

Sying that, however, does not imply that the Dialogue among Civilisations as an argument for the moral basis of contemporary international society can be interpreted as a *via media* theoretical position between the clash of civilisations and the end of hsitory; rather I have suggested that if the attention is shifted from theory to practice, the radical distance of the Dialogue among Civilisations from the other two these becomes apparent. In particular, while the two share a pragmatic political commitment to

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what I call a Western-centric and Liberal global order, the Dialogue among Civilisations points towards and calls for the reopening and re-discussion of the core Western-centric and liberal assumptions upon which the normative structure of the contemporary international socity is based.

From this perspective, the idea of a Dialogue among Civilisations as an argument for the moral basis of a multicultural and globalised international society represents the only powerful normative challenge to the contemporary political orthodoxy, not only in the sense that it opposes Western political hegemony but also, and more importantly, because it calls for the reopening and re-discussion of the core Western-centric and liberal assumptions upon which the normative structure of the contemporary international society is based. By way of conclusion and following Khatami's intutions I want to point to some theoretical and political lines that need to be included by any reflection on the normative structure of contemporary international society that want to be sensitive to this call.

Firstly, if the normative structure – the global ethos – future global coexistence is to be genuinely universal, it cannot only be liberal and Western-centric. Genuine universality requires a thick coneption of the presence of different cultures and civilizations in world affairs; in many ways it must also spring from there. A fundamental void looms when this global ethos reflect the tenets of cosmpolitan liberalism, a political tradition that forecloses the centrality of cultural and religious identity in the everyday practices of "really existing communities"[1].

Secondly, any reflection on a principled world order based on Dialogue among Civilisations has to acknowledge something like a fundamental ethical and political crisis of the secularised and liberal Western civilisation. To this critical situation, the Dialogue among Civilisations seems to bring the promise of an answer, or better, a way, a path on which to start walking in search for an answer through the dialogical encounter with the pre-modern humanistic wisdom of the great world civilizations and traditions.

Finally, the present situation of international politics imposes on us all a moral and political obligation to pursue a politics of inter-civilizational understanding since it cannot be ignored that on 11th Septamber 2001, during the year designtaed by the United Nations as the 'Year of Dialogue among Civilisations', the shadow of a future 'clash of civilization' has beten down incredibly fast on the world and brought a growing atmosphere of fear and war in which we have been fast drawn since those terrible terrorist attacks. Not only that: the search for a new global ethos, that is unity in diversity, is today even more necessary to defend the plurality of world politics against any imperial temptation; for in the words of Hans Georg Gadamer "[t]he hegemony or unchallengeable power of any one single nation… is dangerous for humanity. It would go against human freedom"[2]. With this context in mind, a politics of

1. Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Really Existing Communties", *Review of Interantional Studies* 25, no.1 (1999): 141-46.
2. Thomas Pantham, "Some Dimensions of University of Philosophical Hermeneutics: A Conversation with Hans Georg Gadamer", *Journal Indian Council of Philosophical Research* 9 (1991): 132.

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understanding would be already a great achievement. But to really face this challenge at its roots we need to imagine a way out of this strict grid of choices imposed by the contemporary Western-centric and liberal global order towards the construction of a multicultural peaceful international society. For this we need to criticise the present unipolar Western-centric and liberal global order and support a politics of inter-civilisational dialoue; in the hopeful wait that the future might see the emerge of unpredictable and heterodos political alliances in the spirit of Dialogue among Civilisations.

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گفتگوی تمدنهای خاتمی به‌عنوان نظریه بین‌المللی سیاسی

فابیو پتیتو[1]

چکیده

بسیاری از دانشگاهیان در سراسر جهان به موضوع گفتگوی تمدنهای مطرح شده از طرف خاتمی به‌عنوان بیان و کلامی نیرومند و ضد نظریه‌ای در برابر آنچه نظریه «برخورد تمدنها» نامیده می‌شود می‌نگرند. در این مقاله تلاش شده است تا اصالت و عمق نگاه خاتمی نشان داده شود نگاهی که مخالف زمینه نظریه‌های «پایان تاریخ» و «برخورد تمدنها» و نیز مخالف قالبهای سیاسی نظم بین‌المللی دوران پس از جنگ سرد است که توسط بازیگران سیاسی به کار گرفته می‌شود. با ذکر نقل قولهایی از چندین سخنرانی که توسط خاتمی ایراد شده است نویسنده در پی آن است تا مفاهیم و معانی ورای گفتار را تبیین کند مفاهیمی که به گفته وی متأثر از بسیاری گرایشهای فلسفی و دینی است و کم و بیش بیانگر سیاست خارجی ایران و حافظ منافع ملی ایرانیان بوده و نگاه نسبتاً اصیلی و اساسی است برای ساختن جهانی سرشار از صلح و عدالت. علاوه بر این مقاله حاضر پرسشهای زیادی درباره بی تفاوتی و عدم اعتنای روشنفکرانه غرب لیبرال مطرح می‌سازد که گویی به چنین گفتاری مواجه نشده است. بویژه در بحبوحه ظهور ناآرامیهای اخیر در سراسر جهان.

کلیدواژگان: گفتگوی تمدنها، برخورد تمدنها، پایان تاریخ، جنگ سرد، گرایشهای فکری و فلسفی.

۱. استادیار، دانشگاه پاریس

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