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In the book "Islam and human rights", the author showed the multiplicity of Islamic thought, which cannot be understood simply, in black and white, on any topic, including the sensitive topic of human rights. It opens an insight into the existence of lively polemics within Islam itself, illuminates some differences in the interpretations of Islamic holy texts, and presents Islamic thought on the topic of human rights to the reader with an emphasis on its richness and internal tensions, rather than on controversy.

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Ajla ČUSTOVIĆ

SIMPTOM SUKOBA CIVILIZACIJA?

**Rushdie afera u kontekstu rasprave o islamu i
ideji univerzalnih ljudskih prava**

A SYMPTOM OF THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS?

**The Rushdie affair in the context of the discussion about Islam and
the idea of universal human rights**

Abstract

The contemporary debate about Islam and universal human rights is the subject of both academic and public circles. It is an especially complex issue that includes several different, but in this case interwoven areas of theology, political theory, philosophy, linguistics, hermeneutics and intellectual history. In addition to the fact that the discussion requires diving into different areas, it has given rise to multiple discourses within the liberal and Islamic moral tradition that give us numerous but often contradictory answers. Through the contextualization of the Salman Rushdie affair, the article critically reviews the dominant discourse in the liberal moral tradition, which the author calls incompatibility, and in which the discussion of Islam and human rights takes place in the context of the *clash of civilizations*. In that discourse, a narrative is adopted in which Islam is treated as a monolithic concept that is fundamentally incompatible with the modern idea of universal human rights. The author points out that such monologic discourse is unproductive and argues that under the burden of the narrative of the *clash of civilizations*, the discourse of human rights falls into the background.

Key words: *Islam, human rights, clash of civilizations, compatibility, Rushdie*

A SYMPTOM OF THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS?

The Rushdie affair in the context of the discussion about Islam and the idea of universal human rights

Introduction

In August 1999, during a lecture on the freedom of art in New York delivered by the writer Salman Rushdie was attacked by Hadi Matar, an American citizen of Lebanese origin, who stabbed him several times. Rushdie survived the attack, but because of his injuries, he lost sight in one eye and feeling in one hand. The attack came 33 years after the publication of his controversial fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses*^{▼1} which, due to its content, at the time provoked violent reactions from Muslims^{▼2} around the world.

Then, just five days after the publication of the book in Great Britain, the book was banned in India, then in Pakistan, South Africa, Sudan, and in March 1989, "45 Islamic nations within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation^{▼3} voted to ban *The Satanic Verses* in their countries" (O'Neill, 1999: 220). The protests that took place in India and Pakistan claimed the lives of many victims, but like the peaceful protests in Great Britain, they did not receive much attention from the world media. It was only when protesters in Great Britain burned a copy of the book at one of the protests that they got the publicity they wanted, but that same publicity did not bring them the attention they desired, but rather had the opposite effect. Bhikhu Parekh argues in his work that the sudden publicity that they managed to cause by burning the book did not result in a reasonable discussion, but led to a "flood of condemnations" where Muslims were called "barbarians, uncivilized, fanatics, fundamentalists" (Parekh, 1990: 699).

In February 1989, there is a twist that will completely polarize the already flared debate. Iran's then-leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issues a *fatwā*^{▼4} directed against Rushdie. In the *fatwā*, Khomeini calls on all

^{▼1} The title of the book itself is problematic, because it refers to the legend according to which the Prophet Muhammad was deceived by the devil, so the Prophet Muhammad mistakenly transmitted to Muslims some parts of the Qur'an that he thought came from God, and after realizing that he had been deceived, he withdrew them and replaced them with correct parts. It is a legend known in Islamic tradition as the Story of cranes (*Qissat al-Gharaniq*). Furthermore, the book also features a scene with a brothel in Mecca, in which twelve prostitutes carry names and a physical description of the Prophet's wives. He compares the appearance of the brothel courtyard to that of the Kaaba in Mecca, the main shrine of Muslims. Shabbir Akhtar also criticizes Rushdie's choice of name for the Prophet, to whom he ascribes the name "Mahound", indicating that Mahound is "a derogatory name for the Prophet Muhammad, which was used in medieval Christianity... Mahound was in Christian mythology an evil figure who joined forces with the devil and King Herod" (Akhtar, 1989: 4).

^{▼2} It is necessary to point out here that the use of the word "Muslims" does not imply that all Muslims reacted equally, nor that they equally supported what would soon follow. The article uses the word "Muslims" with extreme caution, pointing out tirelessly that this one collective word contains many differences among members of the Islamic religion: linguistic, cultural, geographical, and even religious (e.g. differences between Sunnis and Shias). The support of Islamic intellectuals to Salman Rushdie will show not only that not all Muslims think alike, but that he is changing his attitude towards Islam; he re-accepts Islam as his religion.

^{▼3} An international organization of 57 member states. The main task of the organization is to promote Islamic interests and solidarity.

^{▼4} According to Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *fatwā* is a legal "answer of a qualified scholar to a certain question" (Kamali 2016: 303) which

Muslims to kill Rushdie and all those who participated in the publication of the book, who were previously aware of its contents.^{▼5} Rushdie was then characterized not only as an apostate but also an enemy of Islam, and due to the threats and attacks that followed *the fatwā*, he was forced to hide and live under protection. The incident also led to the severing of diplomatic relations between Iran and the United Kingdom.

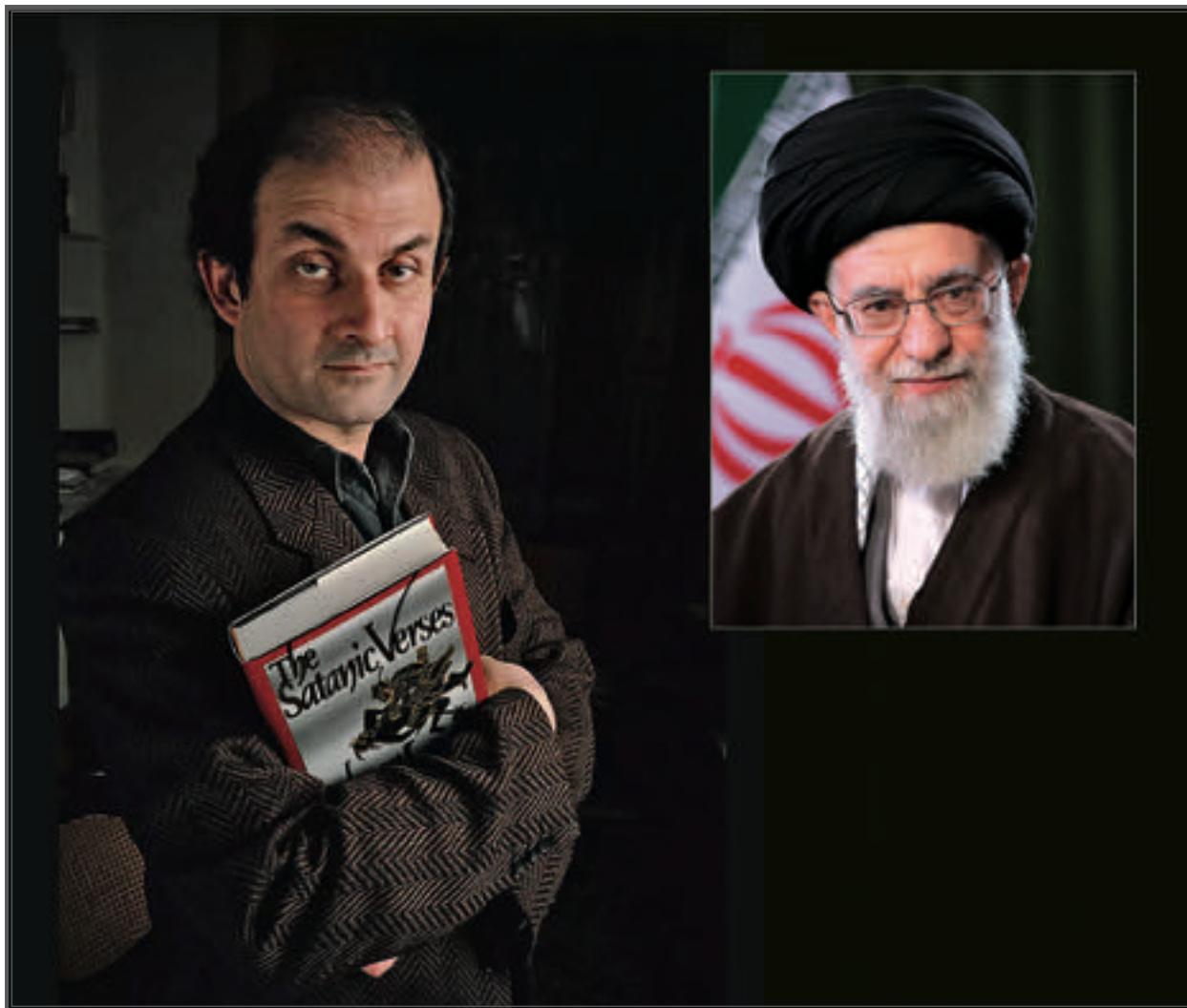


ILLUSTRATION – Khomeini's successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, he publicly replied that Khomeini's fatwa was irreversible. (Photo, David Levenson/Getty)
ILUSTRACIJA – Homeinijev nasljednik, ajatolah Ali Khamenei, javno je odgovorio da je Homeinijeva fetva neponištiva. (Foto, David Levenson/Getty)

is usually based on three sources: "the interpretation of the Qur'an, the Sunnah or the general principles of the Shari'ah" (Kamali 2008: 175), where he explains: "In the event of lack of evidence in these three sources, the Islamic scholar (*mufti*) formulates his own judgment, enlightened by his general knowledge of Shari'ah, morality and customs of society. A judgment usually consists of an opinion that does not bind the person or persons to whom it is intended, nor does it bind anyone else" (Ibid.). Kamali further emphasizes the legally non-binding character of the fatwā by arguing that "the recipient of the *fatwā* is free to seek the opinion of another *mufti* and to get a second or even a third *fatwā* for what interests him." (ibid.)

^{▼5} Full text of the *fatwā* is available at: <https://irandatportal.syr.edu/fatwa-against-salman-rushdie>.

In June 1989, Khomeini dies, but his *fatwā* remains in effect, endangering Rushdie's life, who continues to live under protection and hidden from the public. In December 1990, Rushdie tried to calm the situation by publicly repenting, re-embracing Islam as his religion, and announcing that he would not give his approval for a new edition of the book or for new translations. Khomeini's successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, publicly responds that *Khomeini's fatwā* is irreversible.^{▼6} In fact, the murder of Japanese translator Rushdie's novel Hitoshi Igarashi in 1991 was proof that Rushdie and his associates were given no forgiveness for insulting the Prophet. As expected, *the fatwā* resulted in serious condemnations of Western, liberal intellectuals, as well as many prominent Islamic intellectuals. In addition to publicly condemning Khomeini's issuing of the *fatwā*, various petitions had also been signed in support of Rushdie. One of them is a petition published in March 1989 by The New York Review of Books, in which the signatories jointly declare that "bigoted violence is in fact antithetical to Islamic traditions of learning and tolerance".^{▼7}

The fact that Islamic intellectuals themselves *condemned the fatwā* and attacks on Rushdie in large numbers, with solid arguments that the right to free speech is a value cherished in the Islamic moral tradition,^{▼8} is an undeniable indicator that Islam is not a unanimous, homogeneous whole in which one man speaks for all, especially when that one man sentences someone to death. Apart from condemnation by Islamic intellectuals, *the fatwā* was not supported by the then Grand Imam of Al Azhar University^{▼9} Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi in Egypt. While Tantawi agreed in his statement that the publication of Rushdie's novel was "blasphemy and apostasy" (Slaughter, 1993: 175), he added that "no Muslim can be sentenced to death without a legal process of a full and just trial, the purpose of which would be to establish Rushdie's intentions in writing the book" (ibid.: 176).

Despite condemnations of *the fatwā* by Islamic pens, the liberal moral tradition was loudly dominated by a current in which Islam was understood as a uniform mass of angry Muslims who want to deny freedom to those who fight for it. Anshuman A. Modal notes that "the liberals' comments on *the fatwā* easily slipped out of anger at Khomeini's savagery into disgust with the alleged savagery of Islam in general" (Mondal, 2013: 59).

▼6 Khamenei's statement, as well as the entire article „No Iranian Forgiveness For Salman Rushdie“ available on: <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/12/27/books/no-iranian-forgiveness-for-salman-rushdie.html>. After attacking Rushdie again in 2022, Khamenei, justifying the attacker, publicly stated that "a *fatwā* is fired like a bullet that won't rest until it hits its target." Statement available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11107259/Irans-Ayatollah-Khamenei-says-fatwa-against-Salman-Rushdie-fired-like-bullet.html>.

▼7 The petition was signed by Edward W. Said, Aga Shahid Ali, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Akeel Bilgrami and Eqbal Ahmad. Available at: <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1989/03/16/the-satanic-verses/>.

▼8 Many authors draw attention to the long tradition of theological and philosophical divisions in Islam that have been publicly debated. Saadi A. Simawe notes how medieval historians have documented speculation concerning some issues such as "the validity of the depiction of God and the devil in the Qur'an" and "the credibility of Muhammad's prophethood." In doing so, Simawe reveals that "during the Renaissance of Islam (9/10th century) these issues were publicly discussed" (Simawe, 1990: 186). Also, Simawe reflecting on the Rushdie affair concludes that "some of the metaphysical questions Rushdie raises in the novel are neither original nor unthinkable, they have been publicly discussed by medieval Islamic and non-Islamic thinkers and writers" (ibid.).

▼9 In Sunni Islam, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar University is the greatest authority in jurisprudence, and the university itself represents the most prestigious and respected university in Islamic sciences.



ILLUSTRATION ~ When Salman Rushdie was given the *fatwa* or death sentence 25 years ago, Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, E. L. Doctorow and many others stood by him. (Photography by Annie Leibovitz)

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Kada je prije 25 godina izrečena *fetva* ili smrtna kazna Salmanu Rushdiju, uz njega su stajali Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, E. L. Doctorow i mnogi drugi. (Fotografija, Annie Leibovitz)

It is then insisted that the ubiquitous generalized image of Islam as a religion of bigotry restricting freedoms is the image of Islam, which plays a significant role in the rival antagonism of the Rushdie affair. At first, the affair took place around a different notion of the right to freedom of expression, only to ultimately mutate into a hostile question of the clash of entire civilizations, so different that conflict is simply inevitable. ▼¹⁰ The clash of civilizations is a mantra repeated consistently through the Rushdie affair until it became the normative perspective through which almost every subject involving Islam and the West is viewed today. The clash of civilizations or civilizational identities is a narrative that at first subtly ran through dominant liberal, but also Islamic attitudes through statements such as "this is how we do it here", but there is one author

▼¹⁰ Whenever this issue is discussed, it is necessary to recall that Islam and the West are not monolithic, homogeneous concepts, but contain different points of view, ideas, and discourses. When I talk about the Western, liberal world, I am aware that the West, in addition to geographical, historical, political differences, carries various thought ideas among which it is liberal, although dominant, only one of them. Likewise, the liberal moral tradition is not unanimous, but like Islamic moral tradition branches in different directions into numerous, and often conflicting discourses.

whose name today is associated with this postulate of the rivalry of civilizations. His hypothesis resonated with many in the dominant liberal discourse, because for them the Rushdie affair was a symptom of the dark future put forward in the hypothesis, evidence of a clash of civilizations.



ILLUSTRATION ~ The *fatwā* and the burning of a copy of *The Satanic Verses* in Pakistan were severely condemned by Western, liberal intellectuals, but many prominent Islamic intellectuals also joined in the condemnations.

ILUSTRACIJA ~ *Fetvu* i spaljivanje primjeraka *Satanskih stihova* u Pakistanu su ozbiljno osudili zapadni, liberalni intelektualci, ali su se osudama pridružili i brojni istaknuti islamski intelektualci.

This article has two goals. The first goal is a critical review of the adoption of the narrative of the *clash of civilizations* in discussions about human rights, using the example of the Salman Rushdie affair, in order to point out the unproductiveness of such an approach. The second goal is to reject the narrative of the *clash of civilizations* in the discussion of universal human rights, to point to a narrative that insists on the preservation of differences and cultural understanding in truly equal societies. Through these two goals, the article wants to show how if we define something as universal, it implies that it includes those who cherish different values, without being forced to sacrifice some of those values in order to be accepted.

After the introductory contextualization of the Salman Rushdie affair, the article will gradually move towards the stated goals through two main chapters. The first chapter examines Huntington's hypothesis of the clash of civilizations as a narrative adopted by the dominant non-compatible discourse in the liberal moral tradition. In the second chapter, the narrative of the clash of civilizations is critically re-examined and rejected in the debate on human rights as unproductive and destructive. At the same time, the approach of progressive Islamic discourse is adopted with an emphasis on accepting differences, which would confirm the universality of human rights.

The Clash of Civilizations

the Clash of Civilizations is the title of an article published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993 by Samuel P. Huntington. In the article, he presents an almost cataclysmic hypothesis, according to which conflict in the future will not primarily have ideological or economic foundations but predicts that the world will primarily clash, and divide based on cultural differences. He further argues that the conflict "between civilizations will be the last stage in the evolution of conflict in the modern world" (Huntington, 1993: 22). In the future, countries will team up with each other according to the similarities of their cultures, for which Huntington finds reasons in human nature, which requires us to emphasize the differences between us and group them with each other, against each other. But what is characteristic of such the nature of man, is that after we notice and highlight the differences, they inevitably lead us to compete with each other (for Huntington, this takes place both at the level of individuals and at the level of entire civilizations).

One of the principles how people in the future will self-determine and accordingly group is by belonging to a civilization, whereby Huntington warns that "civilization identity will be increasingly important in the future, and the world will be shaped in large measure by the interactions among seven or eight major civilizations " (ibid.: 25). In his reductionist division of the world, Huntington sees the greatest potential for conflict between two civilizations: Islamic and Western and points out that in this case these are layered differences that are: linguistic, traditional, historical, cultural, but above all religious. As the narrative during the Rushdie affair will suggest, Huntington argues that it is an enmity that goes far back in history and that members of the two civilizations have different views on "the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy " (ibid.).

In Huntington's hypothesis, we can notice something else that has surfaced through the Rushdie affair, and which we will go over in more detail in the next chapter. Huntington explains in the article how people self-identify through ethnic and religious affiliation, therefore those who have different self-identification will be viewed through the framework of the terms "We" and "They" (Others), which was also the case with the Rushdie affair. In addition to the grim prediction of the inevitable clash between Islam and the West, Huntington believes that in the future the West will remain dominant as the most advanced civilization that will make it a target of other civilizations, warning of the most dangerous enemy of Western civilization – a revived Islam. Islam according to Huntington has no possibility of reform, but even if it undergoes some changes, it is only to return (set back) in the time of the Prophet Muḥammed. Even if we consider that Huntington's hypothesis arises at the time of the ugly episode of the Rushdie affair, the extent of the ignorance and lack of familiarity on the subject of Islam about which he writes with so much confidence is unbelievable. For him, Islamic societies are becoming increasingly Islamic, and he presents revived Islam as the primary source of world conflict in the future.



ILLUSTRATION – Thousands of Muslims praying at Skenderbej square in Tirana. (Photograph, Gent Shkullaku, AFP via Getty Images)

ILUSTRACIJA – Tisuće muslimana na molitvi na trgu Skenderbej u Tirani. (Gent Shkullaku, AFP via Getty Images)

Furthermore, Huntington emphasizes that "non-Westerners" see the world as governed by the West and that the same West uses many tools, means and institutions to promote and impose their values upon others. By promoting its own values as universal, the West will bring conflict to other, non-Western civilizations because it will provoke "a reaction against "human rights imperialism" and a reaffirmation of indigenous values, as can be seen in the support for religious fundamentalism by the younger generation in non-Western cultures" (ibid.: 41). While he believes that Islamic countries will continue to consume Western global culture (e.g., through music and movies) and use the benefits of modernization, in their desire to retain the values and characteristics inherent in their own culture, they will continue to reject Western institutions (and ideas). In addition, Huntington believes that even if a country is westernized, it will preserve its cultural identity beneath the "Western" surface. A question arises that Huntington does not answer here: is this also the case with Muslims who live in Western countries, accept what Huntington calls Western life with Western values, or do Muslims regardless of westernization forever remain fundamentalists influenced by revived Islam? Furthermore, according to such an assumption, are all Muslims in the Western world a hidden threat waiting to be activated in controversies like the Rushdie affair? We will return to these questions later in discussing the Rushdie affair in the context of the Huntington hypothesis.

In a world where civilizations are almost programmed to clash, the emphasis is not on common values but on irreconcilable differences, and in such a world, the discourse of human rights even if it strives for universal applicability is nothing more than another aspect of competition between civilizations. If Western and Islamic civilization have a different understanding of everything as Huntington insists, it also implies that they also cultivate a different understanding of the idea of universal human rights destined for conflict. But if we take this as an assumption, does dialogue even make sense? Also, something else needs to be thought about here: liberals who do not believe that Islam can be reformed, reject the possibility of reform only if this reform is not as they envisioned it, i.e., in terms of their liberal experience of reform. But if someone tells you that change is possible but only if you change in the way that they have changed and now demand the same change from others, is it really a change and an even more important question for liberals: is this really the freedom and pluralism they defend? The clash of civilizations is the main non-compatibilist premise and suggests that there is an insoluble problem between Islam (as a monolithic, immutable entity prone to extremism and violence) and the West (as a monolithic entity but characterized by pluralism, democracy, and human rights). The challenge for dialogue between Islam and the West for Huntington is that there is no central religious authority in Islam that will be accepted by all Muslims, the inability for Muslims to agree with each other, according to him, implies that they cannot even agree with the rest of the world. ▼¹¹

Huntington refers in the views expressed in *The Clash of Civilizations* to Bernard Lewis' 1990 article entitled *The Roots of Muslim Rage*, which should be addressed here because we will later notice how the narrative of Lewis' article appears in the Rushdie affair in dominant liberal discourse. Lewis, in most of his works on Islam, recognizes different stages of development between civilizations which he takes as a major problem for dialogue between two moral traditions. For him, there are noticeable differences between Islam and the rest of the world, so he writes that these differences are not negligible "in the field of politics – internal, regional, and so international" (Lewis, 2004: 11). Not only does he argue that these differences set Islam apart from the rest of the world, but he sees Muslims through the prism of losers who are now "weak and poor after centuries of being rich and strong" (Lewis, 2002: 169), and Muslims today who were subjected "to lose the leadership that they had come to regard as their right, and to be reduced to the role of followers of the West" (ibid.) and are forced to be imitators of a more advanced and developed civilization.

▼¹¹ There is an interesting argument in the Islamic moral tradition that often eludes liberal authors and concerns precisely the lack of central religious authority in Islam. Reza Aslan affirms that "unlike Judaism and Christianity, Islam has never had a single religious authority. There has never been an Islamic temple or Islamic pope – i.e. A centralized religious authority that has the right to speak on behalf of the entire Islamic community" (Aslan, 2011: 283), which may mean that any interpretation is equally authoritative. Aslan further explains that religious authority in Islam "is not placed within the discretion one person or institution. Instead, it is scattered among a multitude of competitive religious institutions and schools of law" (ibid.). But for progressive Islamic thought, the lack of central religious authority also points to the pluralistic nature of Islam. For example, Abdulaziz Sachedina writes: "True to its internal juridical plurality, the Islamic tradition was concerned with the preservation of freedom against any kind of legal or political authoritarianism, especially in view of its refusal to afford any human institution like the "church" the right to represent divine interests on earth." (Sachedina, 2009: 63).



ILLUSTRATION ~ According to Huntington and Lewis, Islam in its current form is not compatible with the idea of universal human rights, and due to conflicting values, it has no possibility of becoming so.

In this loss, Lewis sees the reason and root of what he calls Muslim rage. This formulation is extremely dangerous because in controversies like the Rushdie affair it wants to encourage us to believe that the reaction of Muslims is something that has boiled beneath the surface for centuries, just to spill over in a conflict that is already inevitable due to the insurmountable differences of the two historical competitors.

The Muslim had to deal with the loss through three stages that Lewis enumerates: "The first was his loss of domination in the world, to the advancing power of Russia and the West. The second was the undermining of his authority in his own country, through an invasion of foreign ideas and laws and ways of life and sometimes even foreign rulers or settlers... The third—the last straw—was the challenge to his mastery in his own house, from emancipated women and rebellious children" (Lewis, 1990: 49). Precisely because of the visible supremacy of the West, much like Huntington, Lewis believes that for some time there has been a revolt among Muslims against this supremacy and "a desire to reassert Muslim values and restore Muslim greatness" (ibid.) or as Huntington calls it "revived Islam". In both cases, reaffirmed Islamic values and revived Islam have at their source a hatred that is "directed towards us" (cf. ibid.). Attention should be paid to Lewis' differentiation between "Them" (They/Others/Muslims) and "Us" ("We") which according to Huntington's hypothesis is exactly what happens in self-identification and competition of civilizations. "We" vs. "They" is a narrative that will largely follow Rushdie's affair. Here we should be interested in the question: Do Lewis and Huntington by "We" also mean Muslims living in the liberal, Western world and who have "westernized" in the sense that they have accepted their secular experience or do these Muslims, for them, remain "Islamic" below the surface because Islam can never be reformed?

Also, we must not neglect the position that by accepting the narrative of the clash of civilizations (including the premise of the root of Muslim rage that Muslims are an angry group of western-obsessed fanatics), through the differentiation of "We" and "They", "them" is excluded from "our" civilization, and since we consider "our" civilization more advanced, we automatically consider "them" backwards. In such a relationship, we assume that "They" need and must learn something from "us", but since their true change is impossible because they self-identify themselves according to different values, then in fact what "they" learn is only superficial and "their" true nature remains that hostile to "our" values. In this contextual framework, most liberal commentators will place the Rushdie affair, seeing it as a clash of backward and advanced civilization on another mutual misunderstanding: human rights. What kind of relationship is possible if it is defined in terms of the "weak, poor and backward" Islamic world (cf., ibid.: 56-7) against the advanced West, whereby the Islamic world has no choice but to imitate Western successes? For Lewis, there is no doubt that this is a "clash of civilizations—the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present" (ibid.: 60). As is the case in the dominant liberal discourse during the Rushdie affair, Lewis and Huntington do not question the absolutist aspirations of their own secular present but consider it a normative standard that others must reach if they are to be civilized like them.

UNTRUSTWORTHINESS OF MUSLIMS

ILLUSTRATION ~ Questions remain open, are these **universal human rights** truly **universal**, as well as why the distrust of Muslims towards the liberal promotion of **universal human rights** has intensified?

Universal Human Rights and the Rushdie Affair

Questioning the universality of human rights in the context of the Islamic and liberal understanding of them began to be greatly debated even before the Rushdie affair. Chronologically speaking, it is difficult to specify the exact moment when this issue developed into a problem that has spawned a multitude of discourses at the academic as well as the public level. In most of the papers that deal with this issue, the starting point is taken the moment of Saudi Arabia's refusal to vote for the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), arguing that Article 18^{▼12} is opposed to Islamic law. Although Saudi Arabia is the only Islamic country that has officially refused to vote for the Universal Declaration, it is necessary to point out that several Islamic countries, despite the signing, "criticized the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for its perceived failure to take into account the cultural and religious context of non-Western countries. Iran claimed that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was "a secular understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition", which could not be implemented by Muslims without trespassing the Shari'ah" (Mubarak, 2013: 21-22).

Also, one should certainly not omit the fact that some Islamic countries, although having formally signed the Universal Declaration, continue to violate the fundamental human rights guaranteed by it. One example is Afghanistan, which signed the Universal Declaration without objecting to Article 18, but the criminal code continues to criminalize blasphemy and prescribes the death penalty for apostasy.^{▼13} Another example is Pakistan, which "not only signed the declaration, but its UN representative criticized Saudi Arabia's claim that the agreement violates Islamic law and principles" (Price, 1999: 163), and under Pakistan's penal code, blasphemy is punishable by death.^{▼14} In addition to the Universal Declaration, Pakistan joined the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 2010 (1966).^{▼15} wherein Article 6(2) provides that "in countries which have not

▼12 „Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom to change religion or belief and the freedom to express, individually or in community with others, publicly or privately, his religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice and rituals.“

▼13 Although these are rare cases, the death penalty for blasphemy and apostasy are also present in the recent past. In 2006, for example, Abdul Rahman was reported to the authorities by his own family because he owned a Bible. Rahman fell away from Islam and converted to Christianity, for which he was sentenced to the death penalty for apostasy. Due to international pressure and the struggle of NGOs, he was released and Italy gave him political asylum. Another example is the death penalty for the blasphemy of journalist Sayed Pervez Kambaksu in 2007, for distributing blasphemous texts. His sentence was commuted to twenty years in prison after international pressure. Ultimately, a year later, Kambaksu was pardoned and with the help of Norwegian diplomats flees Afghanistan.

▼14 Pakistan's penal code under 295C states: The use of derogatory remarks, etc., for the Honorable Prophet. – Whoever, in words, whether spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any attribution, insinuation, directly or indirectly, desecrates the holy name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad shall be punished with death, or life imprisonment, and shall also be subject to a fine" (available on <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/64050/88951/F1412088581/PAK64050%202017.pdf>).

▼15 Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

abolished the death penalty, the penalty of death may be imposed only for the most serious crimes."^{▼16} But unless we pay attention to the Shari'ah, which is the source of Pakistan's penal code, we can easily miss the fact that under the most serious crimes, the *ḥudūd*^{▼17} crimes, where one finds precisely apostasy. The death penalty for apostasy^{▼18} and the criminalization of blasphemy are not in the primary focus of this article, but they are certainly an indispensable element of the whole issue because they concern the right to freedom of belief and the right to freedom of speech - which, along with the rights of women, represents the main points of tension around which the most common issue is the question of the (in)compatibility of Islam with the idea of universal human rights. Also, the case that is reviewed in this article in its complexity includes a discussion of the right to freedom of belief, as well as the right to freedom of expression.

While the article will largely contextualize the circumstances surrounding the publication of the book in 1988 and what followed, it is important for this discussion to understand that the circumstances in which we live today are different from the circumstances in which Saudi Arabia refused to give its voice to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and equally that "the world in which we live today is vastly different from the one in which the controversy occurred" (Mondal, 2014: 13). Furthermore, we are referring to the culmination of events^{▼19} which had been continuously happening since the publication of the book to the present day,

^{▼16} Despite the decline in the number of sentences handed down and executed in Pakistan, the International Federation for Human Rights (2022) says there is still "a wide range of crimes punishable by the death penalty and includes crimes that do not fall into the "most serious crimes", including blasphemy. Report available at: <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/pakistan/World-Day-Against-Death-Penalty-capital-punishment-Pakistan>. Despite the decline in the number of sentences handed down and executed in Pakistan, the International Federation for Human Rights (2022) says there is still "a wide range of crimes punishable by the death penalty and includes crimes that do not fall into the "most serious crimes", including blasphemy. Report available at https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2020%20Blasphemy%20Enforcement%20Report%20_final_0.pdf.

^{▼17} *Ḥudūd* crimes are those "crimes" for which Islamic jurisprudence holds that fixed penalties are prescribed for them in the Qur'an: theft, fornication, alcohol consumption, slander, terrorism and apostasy. But although the Qur'an is thought to prescribe fixed sentences for these crimes, in Islamic jurisprudence there is a very vivid debate among lawyers and theologians over the interpretation of the Qur'anic parts that deal with crimes and punishments. For example, while there is a consensus among the four legal schools in Sunni Islam that the punishment for apostasy is death, many modern theologians and lawyers point to how Muslims in the Qur'an are asked to leave the punishment for apostates to God on the Day of Judgment. Many contemporary authors, such as Kamali, argue that the death penalty for apostasy is contrary to the main message of the Qur'an that "there is no coercion in religion", moreover according to Kamali, the whole debate is "controversial" because when it comes to the death penalty for apostasy, Kamali writes that "the Qur'an is completely silent on this issue." (Kamali, 2019: 142).

^{▼18} Although I will not deal with it in more detail here, I certainly want to note that in contemporary discussions in the Islamic moral tradition, progressive authors such as Abdullahi an-Na'ima and Mohammad Hashim Kamali argue against the death penalty for apostasy. Elsewhere, I question the death penalty for apostasy in more detail and reject it as a practice contradictory to the idea of universal human rights, see: Čustović, Ajla. 2020 *Death penalty for apostasy in Islam. Politička misao*, 57,1:127-149.

^{▼19} The terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 was certainly one of the events that changed the world, especially the world in the context of the relationship between Islam and the West (with all the caution of using these terms). Many authors such as Edward W. Said (see: Said, Edward W. 2003. *Krivotvorenje islama*. VBZ. Zagreb.) they cite as a crucial moment in which he identified with terrorism in the Western public and slam and which deepened misunderstanding, distrust and hostility. At that time, a superficial, incisive approach to Islam was often written about jihad as a holy war of all Muslims against the rest of the world. *Jihad* is understood then, but still today, in liberal discourses as an expansionist campaign by Muslims that will stop only when all people accept Islam or agree to live under Islamic rule (see: Lewis, Bernard. 2004. *The crisis of Islam – Holy War and Unholy Terror*. Phoenix. London). It is *jihad* today that many liberals cite as an indispensable element of Islam that best explains the incompatibility of

and had a common context whereby in the dominant discourses of Islamic and liberal moral tradition there are two main actors: Islam and the West within the narrative of conflicting civilizations. In fact, the West has been characterized as diverse, free, progressive and open, and Islam as backward, repressive, closed and inhumane^{▼20}, such as it was implied in Huntington and Lewis' vision of the world. Although the article previously referred to the generalized terms "Islam" and "The West", Said's rhetorical question should be highlighted here: why is Islam often opposed by the West and not by Christianity? Said answers this question saying

"the assumption is that whereas "the West" is greater than and has surpassed the stage of Christianity, its principal religion, the world of Islam — its varied societies, histories, and languages notwithstanding — is still mired in religion, primitivity, and backwardness. Therefore, the West is modern... the world of Islam, on the other hand, is no more than "Islam," reducible to a small number of unchanging characteristics despite the appearance of contradictions and experiences of variety that seem on the surface to be as plentiful as those of the West" (Said, 2003: 7).

What is troubling in such a narrative is that it abounds in superficial concepts that label others with a series of imprecise labels, which are then easily handled. In addition to such labels being dangerous, they are extremely flawed because they "herd people under falsely unifying rubrics like "America," "the West" or "Islam" and invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse, (Said, 2004: 878).

After Khomeini's publication *of the fatwā*, the media attention that the protests gained by burning the book, was a kind of assessment of the compatibility of Islam with the lofty value of British society – the right to freedom of expression. Despite many failing to support Khomeini, and the protests not including all Muslims, the nature of Islam has been identified with the reaction of several of his followers. Nicole Falkenhayer realizes that it was the Western media that "passed the verdict" according to which Muslims were left out of the debate about the right to freedom of speech because of Khomeini's reaction, and in her

Islam and Muslims with Western, liberal societies. Furthermore, the world we live in has also witnessed the murder of Dutch director Theodor van Gogh after directing the short film *Submission* in which the naked body of a woman is written in parts of the Qur'an that can be seen under a transparent veil, the 2005 terrorist attacks in London, controversy caused by drawings of the Prophet's head on the body of the dog of Swedish artist Lars Vilks in 2007, who years later was the victim of numerous attacks, The publication of caricatures of the Prophet with a bomb in a turban in Denmark in 2009, the terrorist attack on the editorial board of Charlie Hebdo newspapers in France after publishing a caricature of the Prophet and the European ban on wearing *hijābs*.

▼20 Akhtar, in his critique during the Rushdie affair, exposes how certain concepts that describe Islam predominate in contemporary Western thought: "barbaric, fanatical, outdated, exotic, oppressive, sensual" (Akhtar, 1989: 9). It directs readers to pay attention to the titles of books published about Islam, which in their titles most often have words such as: terror, rage, dagger, sword, violence and the like. Such titles still exist today, but it should certainly be noted that it should not be generalized and pointed out that books were written that seriously, academically dealt with Islam without sensationalist titles. Yet Western authors who write about Islam with the desire to truly understand it, without being influenced by the dominant current, are often characterized as apologetics in the name of Islam.

work points to the presence of media “antagonistic rhetoric, which has *culturized*▼²¹... the conflict between *the West and Islam*” (Falkenhayner, 2010: 129). Differing views on the right to freedom of speech (and whether the right to free speech also includes the right to offend someone) media aspirations have been reduced to cultural and civilizational differences, and the Rushdie affair thus becomes “the center of the great battles between Christianity and Islam, secularism and fundamentalism, Europe and its former colonies, the receiving country and its immigrants, post and pre – modernists, art and religion and between skepticism and faith” (Parekh, 1990: 696). For example, one of the great critics of Islam Daniel Pipes has repeatedly written about the Rushdie affair. While according to Said most liberal actors will write about Islam and the West, Pipes sees in the Rushdie affair a clash between the Islamic and Christian civilization. Pipes seems to recognize that there are different directions in the Islamic moral tradition and expresses sympathy for “non-fundamental Muslims”. For Pipes, these kind of Muslims are in an unenviable position, because “they are left to fight with their radical brothers, but also with the prejudices of Westerners, who unjustly unite them with their rivals.” (Pipes 1990). But in the same Pipes article, Rushdie describes the affair as an event that “Christian and Islamic civilizations have entered into a confrontation unlike anything seen in centuries” (ibid.). Pipes thus equates the action of an individual, who does not speak for all Muslims (because no Muslim can) and despite the fact that Muslims in the majority condemned the *fatwā* and the violence, with Islamic and positions it against the Christian civilization. This kind of narrative masks a dangerous suggestion, that on the one hand Christianity has values such as the right to freedom of speech that are considered inherent in it, while on the other side is Islam, which not only does not possess these values, wants to limit them.▼²² The problem with this approach, in addition to destructively simplifying concepts, is that if we hold that values such as the right to freedom of speech, are values that are inherent in Western, Judeo-Christian identity,▼²³ and then we position Islam on the other hand in the context of skirmishes and conflicts, there is no discourse about universality.

▼²¹ I borrow this term from Falkenhayner, by which I imply that the conflict is assigned a cultural background, i.e. that at the core of this affair is the difference between irreconcilable cultures which ultimately is what Huntington assumes in his hypothesis.

▼²² One example can be found in the letter “Words for Salman Rushdie” written by 28 writers and published on March 12, 1989 in The New York Times Book Review. Octavio Paz writes: “We are seeing the disappearance of the modern values that came with the Enlightenment. The people who condemned you live before the Enlightenment. We face a historic contradiction in our country.” Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/12/books/words-for-salman-rushdie.html>.

▼²³ For example, Charles Taylor, after noting that “liberalism cannot and should not claim complete cultural neutrality,” argues that “the separation of Church and State is traced back to the earliest days of Christian civilization. The original forms of separation are different from ours, but the foundations for modern development have been laid. The very term secular is originally part of the Christian vocabulary” (Taylor, 1994: 62). In addition, Taylor concludes that for mainstream Islam, “the separation of politics and religion as we expect in western liberal society is out of the question” (ibid.). In addition to adopting the Us and Oni divide himself, Taylor does not define what it considers under mainstream Islam. Also, Falkenhayner in her work cites the example of the writer Faye Weldon who argued that “the Bible can serve as the foundation of a decent society, while on the other hand this is not the case with the Qur’an” (Falkenhayner, 2010: 116).



ILLUSTRATION ~ The West uses many tools, means and institutions to promote and impose its own values as universal. There is no debate about universality, which is contributed to by claims that values such as the right to freedom of speech are inherent in the Western, Judeo-Christian identity, on the other hand Islam is positioned in the context of skirmishes and conflicts, as well as the rejection of Western institutions (and ideas).

In the Rushdie affair, a destructive but very dominant discourse emerged in the foreground by which migrants (in this case Muslims) and the British were separated into two groups: Us and They (Others), and in this division what was identified under "our values" They must accept if they want to live in "our" society, in "our" territory, under "our" conditions. Migrants were told, as Parekh explains, "that by coming to the United Kingdom they were in agreement with its way of life and committed to abiding by its laws, norms and values" (Parekh, 1990: 701). Mondal argues similarly when he observes that in the liberal discourse that commented on the Rushdie affair, "Muslims were excluded from 'our' cultural 'norms and values', which 'they' must 'learn' in order to demonstrate their integration into society" (Mondal, 2013: 61). Accepting the ridicule of one's own values is thus a kind of initiation into a liberal society, it is a procedure in which a Muslim must renounce his own identity in order to be accepted in the liberal reality of society that forces him to make this change under the guise of "universality". But if one accepts the narrative of the clash of civilizations, it implies that a Muslim can only change superficially but beneath the surface a Muslim remains a Muslim – fundamental and backward, a hidden threat to the society that allegedly embraced him with open arms.



ILLUSTRATION ~ A protester holds a sign during a march about the exploitation of and discrimination against immigrant workers, in Trafalgar Square, London, in 2007. Photograph: Matt Cardy/Getty Images)

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Prosvjednica drži natpis tokom marša o izrabljivanju i diskriminaciji radnika imigranata, na Trafalgar Squareu u Londonu, 2007. (Fotografija: Matt Cardy/Getty Images)

Also, if we take Huntington's thesis on cultural diversity as the basis of international conflicts as correct and true, the universality of human rights as promoted by the Universal Declaration is neither possible nor acceptable. If we start from the fact that it, even only geographically, originated in the West, Huntington's division of the world implies that the civilizations into which that world is divided have insurmountable cultural differences that will result in their conflicts. If human rights originated geographically in Western civilization, which is so culturally different from Islamic civilization, it implies that human rights derived from the values of one civilization are not applicable to another civilization. Therefore, when we talk about universal human rights and if one seeks to prove their universality, this debate cannot include the context of a clash of civilizations.

The inability to understand each other, came to the fore most in the right to freedom of expression. The Rushdie affair not only showed us the power of discourse that absolutizes their positions through the paradigm "Us against all, with us being the ones who are right", but also showed us that in such cases when discussing universal human rights, it is precisely the discourse of human rights that falls into the background. Modal argues that in the Rushdie affair there was a "fetishization of the right to freedom of expression as a totem of Western culture and as a mark of the cultural superiority of liberalism" (Modal, 2013: 61), and that the right to freedom of expression was defended in the context of "our" civilization and "our" values thus "excluding Muslims from the framework of 'freedom' and therefore 'civilization'" (ibid.: 62). Parekh similarly notes that liberal public opinion wanted to let Muslims know that "British society highly valued freedom of speech and that it was non-negotiable; Muslims must either respect this or migrate somewhere they feel more comfortable" (ibid.: 700). At the same time, the narrative of conflicting values in the struggle between Us and Them served as a catalyst because soon it was no longer just a debate about the right to freedom of speech but began to argue about the very right to life. Charles Taylor first writes that the statement "that is how we do it here" should not be used lightly in multicultural societies, but in the very next moment he adds that this is the answer "that must be given in cases such as the Rushdie controversy, in which "that is how we do it here" covers issues such as the right to life and freedom of speech" (Taylor, 1994: 62).

The adoption of such a narrative nullifies any attempt at equal dialogue, thereat it is not just a civilizational competition, but a belief that other civilizations envy them, that through the false integration of individuals they want to destroy them from within because they can never truly change. The debate over the right to free speech as in the case of the Rushdie affair grew into a question of civilizational conflict in which one side is the victim who benevolently accepted the Other and the other side is the "hidden enemy". According to the dominant liberal discourse, the Rushdie affair was not about two different understandings of the right to free speech, but as Peter Hervik argues in the case of the Danish controversy, it is a conflict in which freedom of speech is understood as "a universal human right threatened by Islamism" (Hervik, 2012: 48). Talal Assad concludes similarly when he states that according to the liberal position (left and right alike), the Rushdie affair was "an Islamic attack on the principle of freedom of speech" (Assad, 2003: loc. 2524) which is why many liberals have questioned whether "Islamic tradition can even find its legitimate place in modern Western society" (ibid.).

The narrative of the clash of civilizations in the context of human rights suggests that on the one hand there is

a civilization to which human rights are inherent and inseparable from its identity, while on the other side there is a civilization that has no natural predisposition to change and become compatible with what the first civilization considers universal because it stemmed from its own experience. But if something is universal, applying it should not require substantial change from others, right? This question concerns the liberal and Islamic absolutist alike. After all, if we believe that it is a conflict at the level of civilizational identities, asking others to change their identity to become compatible with theirs, is nothing less than a hegemonic attempt to dominate others in the name of universal values. Universal values do not imply that others are offended in order to introduce them to a more advanced civilization and “teach” them how “we” do it. The only thing that speaks about such attempts is that they are cultural imperialists who have no sense about others, their values and their experiences.



ILLUSTRATION ~ A possible Western and Islamic model of fashion trends in women's clothing - if we believe that it is a conflict at the level of civilizational identities, the demand that others change part of their identity in order to become compatible with theirs is truly a hegemonic attempt to dominate others in the name of universal values.

The liberal approach wants to convince us that nothing is *taboo*, everything must be open to critical questioning, even the deepest beliefs. However, we cannot ignore the fact that there are many examples whereby the right to free speech is neither absolute nor unlimited.^{▼24} Why is it, then, that Muslims are expected to understand it that way? As Hervik points out in his review of the Prophet's caricature depiction in Denmark, freedom of speech is "a universal human right, but it has legal restrictions and should not be used for unnecessary provocation." (Hervik, 2012: 48).

▼24 There are many examples, but Here I will list only two: Blogger Alison Chabloz, in 2018 was sentenced to twenty weeks in prison with a ban on publishing on the Internet for a period of one year. She was convicted after posting poems on her site denying the Holocaust. In Spain, in 2021, musician Pablo Hasel, was arrested and sentenced to a year in prison for glorifying terrorism and slandering the monarchy in his songs. I emphasize that I do not cite these examples to point the finger at others and thus justify Khomeini's move, but to further indicate that the right to free speech is not an unlimited right.

Also, although the article will not devote itself to this in more detail here, it wants to address one issue that may be expanded elsewhere. Liberal discourse expects Muslims to question what is "sacred" to them, but at the same time, liberals themselves treat the right to free speech as something that is "sacred" to them. Only, in their case there is no discussion about it. The right to free speech rises above debate, scrutiny, and questioning. Why should the values of a culture, civilization or society be in a privileged position when we talk about the universal? It is arrogant to insist on the right to free speech at the expense of the right of others not to be offended and ridiculed, especially when there are legal restrictions on that right that is treated as absolute in the Rushdie affair (and other cases that include "Islam" and "the West" as absolute). According to Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) everyone has the right to freedom of expression ▼²⁵ and for dominant liberal discourse that right also includes the right to offend someone. However, paragraph 2 of the same article tells us that this freedom is not absolute but includes "certain duties and responsibilities" and in order to maintain public order and security can be subjected to "formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties prescribed by law" as it is. If the right to free speech is absolute, then no one can be in a privileged position; no group, no minority, no event or belief. From prejudice we are protected by everyone or no one, the idea of the equality of all implies equal respect for the dignity of others, the dignity that Muslims were deprived of in the Rushdie affair. ▼²⁶

Although not all Muslims reacted the same, Slaughter correctly concludes that "it is difficult for non-Muslims to understand how the deeply personal reaction Muslims had to the revelation of the Satanic Verses" (Slaughter, 1993: 169). In the research for this article, not a single author was found among the Islamic authors to whom the *Satanic Verses* are acceptable (which by no means that they justified Khomeini's *fatwa*), but as Ziauddin Sardar responds „The Satanic verses were written in a derogatory and insulting way to portray the Prophet as a myth; And if it is a myth, then (like all other myths) it can be discarded. I do not think there is a single Muslim believer that would not object to that." (Sardar 2008.).

Parekh points out in his work that freedom of speech is not the only value we must cherish but must be in balance with other values. He explains that while freedom of speech is an important value, other values such as "human dignity, equality, freedom to live without harassment and intimidation, social harmony, mutual respect and protection of reputation and honor must be respected" (Parekh, 2017:2). According to Parekh, while it is understandable that sometimes these values will come into conflict in certain contexts, it is up to the human community to balance them and not allow any of these values to be "so absolutized that it always nullifies the others" (ibid.). In addition to achieving a balance between the different values that society needs

▼²⁵ Available at <https://www.zakon.hr/z/364/%28Europska%29-Konvencija-za-za%C5%A1titu-ljudskih-prava-i-temeljnih-sloboda>.

▼²⁶ Home of the authors pointed out the duplicity of the British anti-blasphemy law, which "protects only Anglican Christianity ... Christianity therefore enjoyed a special political status and was not treated the same as other religions" (Parekh, 1990: 702-703). Pinaki Chakravorty similarly explains that a UK court has dismissed the blasphemy charges "on the grounds that a blasphemy violation of common law applies only to attacks on Christianity." (Chakravorty, 1995: 2217).

to cultivate equally, it is imperative for Parekha to practice mutual cultural respect between members of the community. Mutual cultural respect has several advantages but Parekh points out two:

"He assures Muslims that their culture is valued by wider society and that they need not panic and turn inside or become uncompromising. The wider society assures them that it remains in charge of its cultural life, that Muslims do not seek to undermine them with irresponsible demands and that differences between them can be resolved through rational dialogue in a spirit of shared commitment to living together" (Parekh, 2008: 26).

Huntington's connection to the world is one-dimensional, it draws clear boundaries on the world map that cannot be drawn in the real world and among real people. Our civilizations, our worlds, our societies touch, permeate and complement each other in multiple ways. When discussing "Western" distrust of Islam, Said questions "what is so threatening about the growing presence of Muslims in the West?" (cf., Said 2001). In response, Said argues that in "creating a defense, the West relied on the humanism, science, philosophy, sociology and historiography of Islam... Islam has been inside since the very beginning" (ibid.), indicating that the boundaries that Huntington draws, as well as the narrative of conflicts of civilizational identities - make no sense. Said calls Huntington's hypothesis a "recipe for war", because Said's word is a dynamic interdependence, a mutual and continuous interpenetration, but he explains that he does not propose a "united, simplified, concise culture that includes everyone without distinction" (ibid.). Instead, aware of our unbreakable connection, Said speaks of "the preservation of differences and coexistence" (ibid.).

Relying on Said's "preservation of differences" and Parekh's "mutual cultural understanding", Huntington's reductionist view of the world is rejected here. Cases like the Rushdie affair are a clash of two human rights or as Parekh says two different values: the right to express our own opinions and the right not to be victims of prejudice. Keeping the balance of these values in an equal society, perhaps, should be understood in a way that those like Rushdie accept that just because they have the right to say something, certainly does not mean that they should.

Conclusion

Cases such as the Rushdie affair equally in the Islamic and liberal moral tradition thrust dominant discourses to the forefront, which simplify their interlocutors and reduce them to concepts that they view as contrary to their own values. Thus, a genuine debate on human rights, which should result in a deeper, mutual understanding of two different concepts of human rights, is reduced to competing with each other and to a clash of civilizational identities. It is interesting to note, however, that such cases in both moral traditions encourage the strengthening of these negative, monologue discourses in which the Other is presented as backward, underdeveloped and incompatible with their universalist aspirations. While in the liberal moral tradition, such cases are understood as a clear indicator of the backwardness of Islam that has no place in the liberal world (even if Islam is reformed, and the reformation of course involves Muslims accepting the mockery of their own values), in the Islamic moral tradition the same cases are perceived as an equally clear indicator of the backwardness of morally degrading Western societies, their null and void values and an undesirable way of life that would be devastating for Islamic societies in the event that the Muslims accept it.

In both dominant discourses, the stakeholders believe that they should teach the other because they are more civilized and advanced, and they conceal their own ignorance with simplified concepts that arise precisely from the ignorance of the interlocutor. The Rushdie affair is not a symptom of a clash of civilizational identities but is another case of a mutual inability to understand our rich, multidimensional reality in which we are bound by inseparable bonds.

For a discussion on human rights, it is necessary to accept the premise by which monologue discourses exclude themselves from dialogue. Whether it is the dominant liberal or dominant Islamic discourse in their traditions, it is a discourse that handles monolithic concepts doomed to an inevitable conflict of irreconcilable values and interests. Thus, the richness of our reality is reduced to one-dimensional labels, to the belligerent differentiation of the labels "We" and "They", i.e. "Us" against "Them." The Rushdie affair is not a symptom of a clash of civilizations, but is a symptom of common ignorance, and also a chronic disinterest in understanding those who live, believe and think differently from us. It is a symptom of cultural arrogance in which one tradition imposes its experience on others as universal, and the adoption of the narrative of a clash of civilizations is nothing but a promotion of the superiority of one tradition over another tradition. Monologue discourses are weakened by insisting on an equal dialogue in which all interlocutors are equal and in which no culture or tradition is imposed as superior, nor are others required to change and adapt to what one tradition set as a normative standard. Only through dialogue can we achieve a common foundation of truly universal human rights in which the values of one tradition will not be sacrificed in the name of another

tradition. In the words of the former President of Iran Mohammad Khatami: "humanity, culture and civilization will prevail only if the spirit of dialogue prevails" (Khatami, 2001: 30).

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