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Standards of Civility in Western Tradition
and the Quran (Comparative Study)

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**STANDARDS OF CIVILITY IN WESTERN TRADITION
AND THE QURAN
(COMPARATIVE STUDY)**

By

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Islamic Studies**

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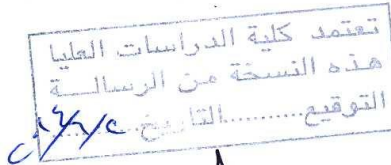
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Dedication

To my family and the ones I hold dear,

Acknowledgment

All Praise be to Allah The Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds, who provided me a strength of his own so as to finish this thesis. I ask Him to accept this work sincerely for His sake, Ameen.

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ABSTRACT

Why civility matters, a theme that is widely attracting the sociologists in the West in current days. They believe that civility is in decline. Accordingly, they have to do something to revive it so as to keep their civilization. However, what is civility? because in the Arabic language we do not have a parallel literal meaning.

The main objective of the study is to identify the word civility and demonstrate that civility codes, which enabled the West to change behavior and paved the way to establish civilized peaceful societies, are actually available in the Qur'anic verses in more comprehensive manner from more than fourteen hundreds years ago.

The study sheds light on the term civility from its first symptoms in Medieval phase and its emergence in the Renaissance up to this day. And how the term was correlated with various historical factors (political, intellectual and socio-economic) that the word itself has represented a specific meaning with specific code of rules and manners in every historical stage. Subsequently, the study illuminates the historical conditions of the period within which the Qur'an was revealed (Al-Jahiliyyah), and how Qur'anic verses that emphasize on knowledge changed mentalities and established Islamic integrity, then they provided the basis of establishing the first Islamic communal entity (Al-Madinah State). This work demonstrates the methodology that the Quran follows so as to construct a universal civility and build up a civilized distinctive Islamic character. The work traces the rules of modern civility in The Holy Qur'an in order to

find common features. In addition, it analyses why civility matters so much to the West and why it does in Islam.

The study stresses that the Qur'an is a complete system of civility rules and manners which endeavor to establish civilized communities from its first revelation to this day. Meaning that civility within the Qur'an standards are fix and stable (do not affected whatever the conditions are), comprehensive (deals with all matters in Human life) and inclusive (addresses man's relationship with Allah, oneself, the other and with the universe as a whole).

The significance of the study emanates from the fact that it deals with civility as a group of behaviors towards the other that was developed and improved in the West during time age and up to this day. Thus, it does not attack the West. It also presents the Qur'an as not a mere book of morals and order of severe worships on the contrary morals and worships were designated in order to build up civilized peaceful societies. The work provides an assessment of divinely-made project of laws of civil conducts presented in the Qur'an and find points of meeting with human-made project of traditions of civility in the West today, in order to validate if there are shared values between both. The study follows the historical approach in dealing with the first chapter (Civility in the West). While in the second chapter (Civility in Qur'an), it follows a comparative methodology in way to find similarities and differences of civility codes between both so as to decide which one is better to be adopted.

The study indicates that the Qur'an is the best inclusive fixed universal book that can be adopted at any time and any place for the welfare of the human beings and for the rest of the world. It points out to the final destination of our good deeds that make them the most beautiful and perfect. It also implies that Muslims hold with the worships and forget about transactions. In fact, Muslims abandoned the real purpose of their religion and of the existence of man on Earth, which led to the decline of the Islamic civilization.

Introduction

I have been always looking forward to the Western world in impressive admiration. A full equality before the law, mutual respect among their citizens regardless of their religious, political, cultural, intellectual, and social diversity. In addition to the peaceful interactions, violent constraint (at least within their own societies), time accuracy, good appearance and etiquette.

It has never come to my mind that media (films and documentaries), when tackling the medieval stage with people of dirty faces and clothes, torturing and killing for no reason, and disgust was everywhere, is in fact informing a historical reality and delivering a message of how they really were. An incredible shift that anyone would ask how did they manage to transform this miserable situations and establish a standard of behaviors that enable them to achieve civil societies and happiness to their members. Although, these great rules are man-made achievements apart from any divine intervention. Furthermore, their secular societies do not impose laws of polite behaviors upon their citizens.

On the other hand, desperately, I look to the Muslims conditions in our area, where violence reigns everywhere, frustration, inequality, corruption, bad manners are manifestations of our age. I wander, how is this happening when Allah says: "*Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind*" (3:110).

I know and believe deep inside and many of you that the answer would be our moving away from religion and from our Holy Book the Qur'an. I also know that the Qur'an would have never miss any single element that could achieve happiness to all human beings without mentioning it. However, a huge other campaign of Westerners, secular people and even ordinary Muslims believe it is because we are sticking with religion and refuse to separate it from all aspects of everyday life. Moreover, they give

the west as a model and an experience that proved its success. In addition to examples of Islamic terrorist movements which provoke violence and those who claims Islam and know nothing about it except of worship. They behave aggressively, dressed in a messy way, they represent intolerance and refuse the other. Unfortunately, "Islam is being destructed in the name of Islam" (Al Ghazali, 1985, 27).

I have once read the term civility as an equivalent to non violence, and also as a set of rules that requires good manners, politeness, morals and self control so as to ease social intercourse. Civility in the west is a mindful process of self-control and self-discipline over self desires and immediate impulses. I thought, we do not have a similar term with the same meaning although I knew Islam is the religion of peace, good behaviors and even etiquette. In fact Allah All-mighty is Beautiful who loves beauty.

I had to conduct a research so as discover the Western civility from the beginning of its emergence with all its historical, political, social, economic and intellectual dimensions so as to understand how was the term shaped, and to decide if the term was stable over the years and what are the rules and requirements that shape civil behavior in the west today. The former findings enable me to make a comparison of similarities and differences between the Western experience conditions of establishing a code of behavioral conducts and the conditions that accompanied the construction of the Islamic behavioral laws.

Impressively, while the Westerners believe that civility (on the basis of goodness, equality and non violence) is culture-bound, the Qur'an declares within its verses, which addresses all human beings, that civility is universal principle that cut across boundaries, time and space. Allah All-mighty says:

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise

(each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)" (49:13).

Furthermore, it is of great importance for Westerners to realize that Muslim's Holy Book has a whole set of morals and ethics that endeavor to build a positive open-minded Islamic distinctive character. Accordingly, the moral Islamic law does not have any shortage, it is we that do not abide by. I believe our crisis are more than individual practices but I also know that Allah's laws in the universe have taught us that *"Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves"* (13:11).

However, basically, my first interest is to make an assessment of divinely-made project of laws of civil conducts presented in the Qur'an so as to find points of meeting with human-made project of traditions of civility in the west today, in order to validate if there are shared values between both. This study enables the reader to decide which of both traditions are essential for establishing civil societies free of quarrels. Besides, they do not change under any condition or circumstances.

Finally, and to make this study almost complete, I find myself enforced to search why do the Westerners adhere, strongly, to this code of civility manners, while it is voluntary, in democratic societies, where one has the freedom of self-expression. Accordingly, I have to shed light on the holy reason of all of our good actions and behaviors, The reason that would turn them into perfect and complete civil conducts. I just want Muslims and Westerners to recognize that Islam is not a religion of only worship. In fact, worships are designated so as to discipline our desires and purify our souls, and that the only message of Shari'ah is to construct this world according to morality and ethics.

This research requires that I touch on concepts and ideas from different disciplines such as (history, philosophy, literature, sociology) so as to understand the process of civility in Europe from its beginning until it has reached this particular context today. It also demands that I recall the experience of establishment the first Islamic state in Madinah so as to discover and present a vivid model of Islamic civility.

Of the most important literatures I reviewed are:

- 1- *Civility a Cultural History* (2009), is a book written by Benet Davetian. Davetian is one of the most contemporary writers that is very much interested in cultural studies; mainly the study of civility. I relied to some extent on this book for historical confirmations. This book discusses the genealogy of Western courtesy and civility from the Middle Ages as courtly manners, the Renaissance as secular civility to the Enlightenment period and the French revolution, in England and finally the American experience of democracy and the informal civility. Then it tackles multifaceted anatomy of civility; there is a chapter that makes comparison between France, England and America. Finally the book tackles the decreasing aspects of civility and how to achieve a resurgence of its values.
- 2- Another important book that I depended on in my research thesis is *Civility: Manners, Morals and the Etiquette of Democracy* by Stephen L. Carter [Ney York: 2009]. The book emphasizes the need to be civil in order to live happily and peacefully. The examples the book gives are very much similar to the Islamic values such as respecting others, loving neighbors, forgiving, even one controls his own anger is a sacrifice and many others morals as well as ethics but the difference is that the writer

considers them as divine Christian and Jewish morals. It provides generally standards of civility and addresses the American democratic experience precisely as a reflection of civility. In his opinion "the basis of principles of civility -generosity and trust- should apply as fully in the market and in politics as in every other human activity"(173). He also believe that civility rules of self-discipline could only save democratic societies, which guaranty the freedom of self-expression over self-control, because as he puts it "The real freedom is to commit yourself to less freedom" (93)

- 3- In *The civilizing process* by Norbert Elias [USA:2000) which has become the standard reference for students of civility". This book, which I rely heavily upon in my thesis, is constituted of two volumes. The first one traces the change of behavior in the secular upper classes. It starts from the symptoms of initially refined behavior in the middle ages which first called courtesy. The writer provides excerpts from all over Europe concerning various courtly precepts such as table manners, sleeping, eating, spitting, women and men relationships and others taken from various poems, epics, in addition to ecclesiastical literature throughout centuries, of course starting from the Middle Ages, so as to prove the unity of behavior around Europe, and what characteristics they conveyed. In the second volume he studies thoroughly feudalization, the state formation and how did the West establish their civilization. He answered the question of why people changed their behavior from eating with their fingers, urinating and defecating in the street or even at the dinner table, spit wherever they want, to a sudden care of appearance and he connects this

change with the transformation from the same period in the degree of violence and immediate impulses. Elias's first concerns was to associate the change of the social structure with the structure of affects for, as he puts it:" it was the structure of society that required and generated a specific standard of emotional control"(169). He is convinced that people recognized that if they wanted the project of the nation-state to survive, they had to cooperate by controlling their impulses which led to a turnover to a set of rules for expression concerning every aspects of their life.

- 4- Civility today, the requirements or rules of civil conduct which aim is connecting effectively with others, prescriptions I searched a lot for in Qur'an verses, and the answer of why people of a precise community should follow civility, are topics covered in *Choosing Civility: The twenty five rules of considerate conduct* [New York:2002] by P. M. Forni, the cofounder of the John Hopkins Civility Project.
- 5- In Jacques revel's *The Uses of Civility* (1989), who illuminates why Erasmus's work *De Civilitate Morum Purilium (On Civility in Boys)* (1530) where the term civility was first mentioned, is innovative. In fact, in almost all of the books that I refer to in this thesis agree on the same view. Mainly, Elias's *The Civilizing Process*. Furthermore, he demonstrates why there had been an evolution of manners between the period of 1500-1800. Then he concludes that civility addressed different audiences with specific group of manners whether in every stage of history or even in the same period.



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أسس المدنية⁽¹⁾ الغربية في التراث الغربي و القرآن (دراسة مقارنة)

إعداد

ماجدولين محمد صادق علي

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الملخص

لماذا يعني أدب التعامل لنا الكثير هو الموضوع الذي يجتذب الكثير من علماء الاجتماع في الغرب هذه الأيام حيث يعتقد البعض منهم أنه في تراجع. ولذلك يجزم الجميع أنه يجب اتخاذ التدابير في سبيل إحيائه حفاظا على الحضارة الغربية. مع هذا ما هو أدب التعامل؟ حيث إن civility ليس لها مرادف في اللغة العربية مساو لها في المعنى.

هدف الرسالة الرئيسي هو التعرف على مفهوم أدب التعامل الذي هو جزء من التاريخ الثقافي للغرب ومن ثم إثبات أن قوانين أدب التعامل وقواعده التي مكنت الغرب من تغيير طبائعهم ومهدت لبناء مجتمعات مسالمة ومثالية، موجودة في القرآن الكريم و بصورة أشمل منذ حوالي أربعة عشر قرنا. تلقي الدراسة الضوء على تعبير أدب التعامل منذ بداية ظهور أعراضه الأولى في حقبة العصور الوسطى، ومن ثم ظهوره في فترة النهضة في أوروبا إلى يومنا هذا. و كيف أن هذا المصطلح ارتبط منذ بدايته بعدة عوامل تاريخية (سياسية وفكرية واقتصادية واجتماعية) بحيث إن الكلمة ذاتها مثلت مجموعة من السلوكيات في كل حقبة من الزمن. ثم توضح الرسالة الظروف التاريخية للفترة التي أنزل الله فيها القرآن (الجاهلية)، وكيف أن آيات القرآن الكريم التي أكدت ابتداء

(1) إنه قد تبين ومن بعد الدراسة أن كلمة المدنية ليست هي الأدق كترجمة لكلمة civility وأن مصطلح (أدب التعامل) هو الأكثر تعبيراً لمعنى هذه الكلمة.

على أهمية المعرفة غيرت العقول وأسست لبناء الشخصية الإسلامية المتحضرة والمستقيمة. ومن ثم أيضا وفرت القواعد الأساسية لبناء أول كيان مجتمعي متحضر مستقل في الإسلام.

هذا العمل يوضح المنهجية التي اتبعتها آيات القرآن لإنشاء آداب تعامل عالمية و شخصية إسلامية متحضرة. أيضا و من خلال آيات القرآن الكريم تنتبع هذه الرسالة قواعد أدب التعامل الحديثة في الغرب في سبيل إيجاد سمات مشتركة. كما أن الدراسة تحلل لماذا يعني أدب التعامل الكثير للغرب ولماذا يجب أن يكون كذلك للمسلمين. و تشدد الدراسة على أن القرآن الكريم هو نظام متكامل من قواعد السلوك و الأخلاق التي تسعى بقوة لتأسيس مجتمعات متحضرة منذ ظهورها، ما يعني أن مقاييس وآداب التعامل في القرآن ثابتة ومستقرة (لا تتأثر بالظروف)، وواسعة (تتعامل مع جوانب الحياة البشرية كافة)، و شاملة تتوجه لعلاقات الانسان كافة مع الله، مع نفسه، مع الآخرين ومع الكون بأكمله.

تكمن أهمية هذه الدراسة في أنها تحدد آداب التعامل على أنها مجموع السلوكيات التي تمكننا من التعامل مع الآخر و هي النظرية التي تطورت في الغرب منذ القدم و حتى الآن فالدراسة بذلك لا تنتقد الغرب. كما أنها تقدم حقيقة القرآن الكريم وهي أنه ليس مجرد كتاب من العظات الخلقية والعبادات. على العكس إنما وجدت لبناء مجتمعات مسالمة و متحضرة. تقدم الدراسة تقييما لمشروع أدب التعامل المتمثل بسلوك وأخلاق قائمة على أساس الصنع الإلهي و كيف تلتقي مع مشروع أخلاقي غربي بشري لإيجاد قيم مشتركة.

تتبع الدراسة منهجية التقصي التاريخي في التعامل مع الفصل الأول (أدب التعامل في الغرب) بينما تتبع المنهج المقارن في الفصل الثاني (أدب التعامل في القرآن الكريم) في سبيل إيجاد العوامل المشتركة و المختلفة لأدب التعامل في كل من القرآن الكريم و الغرب ومن ثم إثبات أن قواعد القرآن الكريم أفضل.

تشير الرسالة على أن القرآن الكريم هو أفضل الكتب الثابتة و الشاملة و العالمية التي يمكن تبنيتها في كل زمان و مكان لمصلحة البشرية و لأخر الأجل. كما تشير إلى القبلة الرئيسية التي نتوجه لها في كل ما نعمله من خير بحيث تصبح هذه الأعمال أجمل وأكمل. و توضح أن المسلمين تمسكوا بالعبادات و نسوا أن الإسلام هو دين معاملات. في الحقيقة تخلى المسلمون عن الهدف الأجل لهذا الدين و للوجود الإنساني على الأرض مما أدى لتراجع الحضارة الإسلامية.