DEBATE - REFLECTIONS

Glocal Resistance and De-colonisation: Civil Society in Khatami's *Islam, Dialogue and Civil Society* (2013) and its Relevance to our Reading of Popular Protest and Political Participation[1]

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Abstract

This piece concerns civil society as conceptualised in Khatami's book Islam, Dialogue and Civil Society, and in a wider sense the Dialogue among Civilisations and Cultures paradigm and the UN year of Dialogue among Civilisations (2001). In this particular text, Khatami discusses civil society in relation to de-colonising spaces, with particular references to West Asia, the Islamic world and the 'West.' However, his discussion bears relevance to other spaces with experience of colonial imperial domination and occupation, historically and contemporarily. While first published a decade before the Arab Spring, it bears relevance also to the clamours for political participation and social development, which so pervaded the risings in West Asia and North Africa, including the oft forgotten Sudan. In this particular discussion of civil society, the focus is on showing the global relevance of Khatami's conceptualisation of civil society as it emanates from the Dialogue among Cultures and Civilisations initiative, in a world where strategic disorder seems to be an increasing answer to resistance practices following local demands for political participation as well as independence from Western political economic structures of dominance—i.e. in spaces attempting to decolonise.

1 I am indebted to Siavosh Bigonah, Yannick Deller and Ravn Kirkegaard, as well as the students enrolled in the 2018 and 2019 *Civil Society Peace Work: Possibilities, Power and Resitance(s)* course in the Peace and Conflict Studies programme at Malmö University, for comments on various drafts of this article.

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> In the civil society that we espouse, although it is centered around the axis of Islamic thinking and culture, personal or group dictatorship or even the tyranny of the majority and the elimination of the minority has no place (Khatami 2013a:22).

Introduction

In 1998, the UN decided to make 2001 its official year of Dialogue among Civilisations (Picco et al. 2001). The initiative originated from then President Seyyid Mohammad Khatami of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI)—one of the front runners of state-based resistance to Western economic, military, political and cultural global dominance. While the initiative itself is the focus of a research project at Malmö University,[3] this piece concerns one particular aspect of the initiative, i.e. the role of civil society in de-colonising contexts as explained by Khatami in the collection of speeches and essays on *Islam, Dialogue and Civil Society* (2013a). This is one of three main original collections of texts by Khatami on the Dialogue initiative so far reaching an audience beyond Persian speakers. The volume was first published in Karachi (Pakistan) in 2000 by The Foundation for the Revival of Islamic Heritage,[4] and is a collection of speeches and essays by Khatami, written both before and after his election to President of the IRI, and hence some of the items in the collection also predates the Dialogue among Civilisations initiative. There are two other collections, *Islam, Liberty, and Development* (1998) and *Dialogue among Civilizations: A Paradigm for Peace* (2001, edited by Bekker and Pretorius), both of which in part overlap with the 2000 and 2013 edition of *Islam, Dialogue and Civil Society*. Together these collections make up the main body of collected speeches and essays on the Dialogue initiative by Khatami in English. For reasons of simplicity this article focuses entirely on

3 The *Dialogue among Civilisations and Cultures: The Politics of Security Networking and Global Ethics* research project (Malmö University, Dept. of Global Political Studies) was initiated in 2017. With a point of departure in the decolonial conceptualisation of interstate relations in the Dialogue initiative, the project aims at understanding the resistance discourses and practices of the currently unfolding geopolitical and global economic shifts, as expressed in both local and global contexts, e.g. from the political organisation of immigrants in France, to the Astana-Sochi Syrian peace negotiations and the process of de-dollarisation.

4 What differs between the 2000 and 2013 editions is page numbers.

the 2013 edition. *Islam, Dialogue and Civil Society* is explicitly centred on a discussion of civil society in a context of decolonisation of Islamic societies. Hence, this particular collection focuses mainly on Iran and the wider *umma*, which explains the Islamic focus in his deliberations. The essays and speeches in the collection leans heavily on peace as an Islamic philosophical concept and tradition, and is as such (together with other similar traditions) a vital source of inspiration for alternative, and more inclusive understandings of peace as concept and praxis (e.g. Huda 2010, Pal 2011, Mahallati 2016) than those of Western theosophy and philosophy. As such, *Islam, Dialogue and Civil Society* points, together with the two other collections, to the importance of socially, culturally, politically and spiritually resuscitating the Islamic world (the *umma*) on the one hand, and the global community of societies with experiences of liberal colonial imperialism on the other. In so doing, this collection, as a part of the much larger project of Dialogue among Civilisations and Cultures, is central because it links the concept of civil society to the project of decolonisation from within an expressly theosophic standpoint, hence opening up to and embracing the spiritual aspects of anti-colonial resistance movements across the globe.

What is presented below is an attempt at delineating how civil society is understood in a tradition different from that of the Western theoretical models so commonly believed to be universal. Given the global changes from attempted uni- to de facto multipolarity, as well as the widespread protests (armed, violent and nonviolent) seemingly re-visiting the WANA region since the non-violent protests in Lebanon in 2005, it is vital to include in our knowledge base also those traditions emanating from decolonising spaces, as they grow in importance.

Locating civil society

In 2005 Beirut stopped in silent protest. While Dabashi (2012) disagrees, on sound analytical grounds, with Robert Fisk in defining the nonviolent (mainly urban) Lebanese protests in 2005 as the start of the Arab Spring—it did not really (as Dabashi demonstrates) change the political foundations in Lebanon—the so-called Cedar Revolution speaks to some of the fundamental aspects of civil society-state relations discussed by Khatami (2013a). The Cedar Revolution was, as Dabashi claims, fundamentally colonially framed. While Dabashi (2012) and Khatami (2013a) arrive at the same conclusion, i.e. that anti-colonial struggles pre-Arab Spring were paradoxically 'side-effects, the

by-products, even the unanticipated consequences, of colonialism' (Dabashi 2012, 423), they sharply diverge concerning the role they envision to be played by religious (in this case Islamic) resistance to in particular secular, liberal colonial imperial occupation, dominance and strategic disorder. In other words, while the Arab Spring may be read as an end of postcoloniality, its religio-political aspects are interpreted quite differently. The uprisings in 2011 may be understood both as Arab uprising (political and secular) and as Islamic awakening (political and religious), and to some degree also based in local readings of the political, social, cultural and religious indecency of liberalism enforced in WANA and beyond (Dabashi 2012, Zarif 2016, Bhutto 2019). Among the 2011 uprisings, perhaps the Egyptian case of these diverging readings collided with frightening consequences. Instead of continuing the theoretical debate however, this article focuses Khatami's understanding of civil society in decolonising contexts, in an attempt at an emic reading, and how such a reading makes sense in other contexts with similar experiences, whether Islamic or non-Islamic.

In *Islam, Dialogue and Civil Society* (2013a), civil society is understood as a vital part of a popularly based governance system geared towards de-colonisation of society—while being independent from political and judicial structures, it is central to a participatory system of rule, and vice versa. To put it simply, this understanding of civil society includes the market (the 'bazaar'), artists (musicians, poets, visual artists, film makers etc.), intellectuals (university lecturers, philosophers, 'thinkers'); it may be formed around strong-minded and driven individuals operating individually (often generating followers, e.g. Ayatollah Khomeini), or in organisations and movements (NGOs). Space of activity is granted by the state, but civil society operates independently of it; it is responsible for holding government accountable, and guarantees knowledge-based societal dynamism (Khatami, 2013a). Civil society is understood as vital to overcoming the historical impasse at which societies attempting to recover from liberal colonial imperialism find themselves (see e.g. Mbembe 2003 and Dabashi 2015 for critical readings of the shocks of colonialism in differently colonised spaces), i.e. in a state of passivity—or mimesis—as a result of the decline of colonised societies over the last 500 years, and hence unable to respond to or defend themselves against cultural, political and military invasions (Khatami 2013a, see also any of IRI's UNGA speeches from 1979 until today). This shock also means that civil society must be built back consciously and allowed time to develop at its own pace:

> The civil society we champion is based on our collective identity whose attainment requires the continuous and ceaseless endeavours of intellectuals and thinkers. It is not a treasure that can be unearthed overnight, rather, it is a fountain of life and morality from whose constant effusion we will benefit. Therefore, enjoyment of this treasure is gradual and is dependent on scrupulous cognizance and re-examination of our heritage as well as our doctrinal and intellectual tradition on the one hand, and sophisticated scientific and philosophical understanding of the modern world on the other (Khatami 2013a:23).

As a matter of urgency in struggles for independence, civil society plays a central role in reviving indigenous knowledge and historical experiences, while avoiding extremes (e.g. pure authenticity, which is exclusionary/isolationist/racist), and keeping afoot in relation to the present. The goal is to increase society's knowledge of itself, based in individual self-betterment (see e.g. Mottahedeh 2009, Elling 2019 for discussions of the importance of this process, embedded in the concepts of *adab*, *ihsan* and *jihad*), for the creation of peaceful societies based on Islamic peace philosophy (Khatami 2013a).

The focus of civil society, i.e. the revival of indigenous knowledge, traditions and social justice, is at the very core also in Badshah Khan and Mahatma Gandhi's principled nonviolent activism, as well as in the African *negritûde* movement—hence pointing to its resonance beyond Iran and Islam. Islamic civil society, as explained by Khatami, has a distinctly *nonviolent* approach to activism (violence is perceived of as an uncivilised, immoral and corrupting form of communication), and the state is seen as benevolent, the guarantor of social, legal, economic and territorial security. Should a government deviate from its fundamental role as provider of securities, civil society must hold it to account, based on well-functioning channels of communication between itself and the state/government (Koolaee 2009; Khatami 2013a). If channels for venting frustrations are lacking, or communicated grievances systematically neglected, the people must be expected to revolt against the government. In other words, and granted that a society is truly independent of influences from external powers and interests, 'citizens of an Islamic civil society enjoy the right to determine their own destiny, supervise the governance and hold the government accountable. The government in such a society is the servant of the people and not their master' (Khatami 2013a:22). Civil society also intertwines private and public, since the individual is seen as responsible for

educating/bettering hirself to become a responsible citizen engaging in the social sphere, and hence civil society (Khatami 2013a). This idea, i.e. of the people as political force, and guarantor against corruption of the state by elites is in fact much older than Islam as are Christian notions of resistance and nonviolence, also shared with Islam.

While being open to inspiration from the European conceptualisation of civil society, as it developed from the political philosophies rooted in the Greek and Roman traditions, and hence the Enlightenment paradigm (Adorno and Horkheimer 2016), which has dominated Western thought over the last two centuries, Khatami (2013) defines civil society in terms of Islamic governance discourse and practice. It is firmly based in Khomeini's conceptualisation of *vilayat-i faqih* (Islamic governance) as presented in *Hukumat-i Islami* (Khomeini 2002), a collection of lectures delivered to students attending religious seminaries. The call to religious leaders to become engaged in politics (Khomeini 2002) can most likely be linked to Mulla Sadrā's conceptualisation of action as the defining trait of being human, as the power of becoming through conscious action (2015) in contrast to animal instinct-guided behaviour—action without thought or conscious and informed choice. This, again, is connected to the fundamental notion of individual responsibility in Islam, that is, the individual is seen as accountable for hir actions, particularly regarding religious principles, i.e. the regulation of behaviour towards God(s creation), hirself and others (Mottahedeh 2009, Khatami 2013a). In short, the individual person owns the responsibility to think, speak and do good—as a religious requirement.[5] Thinking, speaking and doing good (and in a wider sense *adab* and *erfan*) is tightly linked also to the ability to listen; 'Listening is not a passive activity. It is an active engagement where the listener is exposed to the world created, discovered, or experienced by the speaker' (Khatami 2013a:32). As such the importance of thinking, speaking and doing good, as well as the ability to listen, are all central to the transformation of global relationships, and hinges on the required cognitive move on the part of the West accepting 'that the era of colonialism has come to an end' (2013b:502). Hence, the individual person has the right to education, as education is one of the main routes to knowledge of how to think, speak and do good. Education may come in

5 The notion of thinking, speaking and doing good is seemingly inherited from Zoroastrianism, which influenced Christianity and Islam (see Boyce 1982, 1996 and 2001).

many ways, but central is the knowledge of the word not only as spoken by others, but as read by the individual self, and the ability to formulate your own reflections in written text and in conversations with others (Khatami 2013a). This requirement is rudimentary, the very basic. On this build's further education; the sciences, humanities, the arts. Some might take education further, scholastically, literarily or mystically in attempts at reaching the inner essence of meaning and being (e.g. towards *erfan*, excellently explained in Mottahedeh 2009).

The ideal society is a society in which every individual is educated, and not only knowledgeable of, but acting in accordance with the principles of thinking, speaking and doing good. Such a society will, ideally at least, not do harm to its own societal body nor to others. As such this is a pre-requisite for peace—with one self, as well as with others (Khatami 2013a), whether we think in terms of self and others as individual persons, or as, let us say, states. Entities based on such a principle, i.e. an individual's responsibility for others, for society, for its own survival as well as the survival of other individuals, wherever these may be (reminding here of Sa´dī's poem *bani adam*[6] inscribed at the United Nations entrance), necessarily must be founded on participatory structures of rule and cognisant of needs and wants in the population—or else, risking an overthrow. The population will act as a counterbalance; educated, a population will demand accountability of those in positions of rule (ibid.). Yet another aspect of individual responsibility and individual education, hence learning to take the responsibility you as a member of a larger whole should strive to take, is the concept of rights. According to Ja'fari, rights are fundamentally, intrinsically, individual (Miri 2012, Ja'fari 2014), and one might suggest, importantly, dependent on your ability to carry, claim, take on increasing responsibilities.[7] Rights, then,

6 The poem is recited in a number of versions, the one below is from http://www.zaufishan.co.uk/2011/09/iranian-poetry-bani-adam-inscribed-on.html)
Human beings are members of a whole,
In creation of one essence and soul.
If one member is afflicted with pain,
Other members uneasy will remain.
If you've no sympathy for human pain,
The name of human you cannot retain!

7 Quoting Ja'fari (2014, frontispiece): 'Among all of the weighty words uttered by man, two are literally of particularly profound depth—"right" and "duty".'

are directly tied to, weighted against, reciprocal to the capability of taking responsibility. With growing responsibility, comes also increasing demands on your correct behaviour, i.e. you are expected to treat others, particularly those of lesser knowledge and standing, with dignity, exactly because of your elevated position, greater knowledge, and increased responsibility.

Resistance and civil society in de-colonising spaces

Where does this reasoning, as discussed by Khatami, land in relation to civil society in decolonialising contexts? What *is* civil society, what does it *do*? Even if he recognises civil society as an important (and potentially positive) aspect of globalisation, Khatami's conceptualisation is focused on intrastate civil society as a positive, nonviolent force of resistance *and* rebuilding, i.e. creating social and cultural defences against strategic violence, formation of confusion and disorder, disinformation, and devaluation of Self (Khatami 2013a). While remembering that the essays in *Islam, Dialogue and Civil Society* discusses civil society in relation to the Islamic Republic of Iran, I will focus on this understanding of civil society in a context of broader global resistance to and struggles for the independence from Western norms structures and economic dominance. The conceptualisation thus understood has relevance to other Islamic societies, and has transcending elements making this understanding pertinent to other, similar contexts beyond the Islamic world.

Occidentosis and the Praxis of Resistance

One of the two threads I would suggest is absolutely central in understanding Khatami's conceptualisation of civil society ties in with a notion, which from the 1960s onwards, particularly in relation to the Iranian revolution of 1977-79 and its prelude, gained traction among intellectuals and theologians of various political inklings, perhaps because of its simple way of formulating the very complex experiences of colonialism in Iran; Jalal Al-e Ahmad's *occidentosis* (Ahmad 1983, Khomeini 1986, Mottahedeh 2009, Dabashi 2011a, Bakhshandeh 2014, Mahdavi 2014, Elling 2019). The notion of occidentosis, or more popularly known as *westoxication*, attends to what Khatami (2013) refers to as enchantment of the west, i.e. the uncritical embracing of western ideals, behaviours and tastes, and concomitant rejection of one's own heritage, a disregard of experiences, manners and ways of humanness, as these were formed and negotiated in time and space

through the cross-fertilization with other civilisations and cultures—i.e. the ways in which you become human in a particular social context organically incorporating also outside influences—that which may be summed up in the traditions on which a society's stability rests. Occidentosis results in the erosion of a society's fundaments, its soul (or in social science terminology, its identity) and hence social, religious, political and moral anchoring points. When colonised peoples 'view themselves […] in a western mirror and get to know one another through the West' (Khatami 2013a:16) such an erosion has become manifest, and is directly opposed to Khatami's understanding of dialogue, which 'is such a desirable thing, because it is based on freedom and free will. In a dialogue, no idea can be imposed on the other side. In a dialogue, one should respect the independent identity of the other side and his or her ideological and cultural integrity' (Khatami 2013a:16.). It follows of course that 'a genuine meaningful discourse can take place only when the parties concerned find themselves in their own genuine true position, otherwise the dialogue between an alienated imitator and others is meaningless and certainly void of any good or benefit' (Khatami 2013a:21). Civil society is vital in finding ways and means to the own 'genuine' and 'true' position and creates a firm basis from which it is possible to, with self-confidence, engage in meaningful discourse in order to achieve 'sophisticated understanding' contingent on 'the cultural and moral dimensions of other societies and nations' (Khatami 2013a:21).

As a consequence of occidentosis—i.e. being 'no more than inferior and deformed images of the West' (Khatami 2013a:16)— people become rootless, able only to appropriate the outer shell, such as behaviours, views and ideals without being able to access the cultural core of these, because they have no inner (indigenous) attachment or tacit understanding of that, which they appropriate—it becomes pure mimicry (e.g. Ngũgĩ 1984, Bhabha 1994, Fanon 1994, Dabashi 2011b). From such a position of inferiority dialogue becomes impossible. A society so destroyed becomes an easy prey to external domination, an experience many colonised peoples share (e.g. Mbembe 2003, Ngũgĩ 1984, 2009, 2012), an experience which has produced whole intellectual and scholarly traditions opposing colonial subjugation and the structural, cultural, symbolic, epistemic and direct violence involved in the stereotyping and homogenisation of peoples and policies towards the colonised (stretching from apartheid structures of rule of the early colonisation of the Americas to current development aid); the universalisation of provincialities (e.g. *negritûde* and postcolonialism, see

e.g. Césaire 1972, Senghor 1974, Said 1978, Dabashi 2008, Wilder 2015); and searches for 'authenticity' with political consequences, such as the creation of pan-Arab and pan-African political entities, attempting to create a unified front against western colonial and post-colonial domination—the Ba'ath party taking power in North African and Arab states in the 1950s and -60s; the de-linking policies of Tanzania, Burkina Faso and Eritrea; or the First Nation based un/successful resistance to apartheid-like forms of rule in e.g. Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia and Guatemala.

The concept of occidentosis is, importantly, not a rejection of European civilisation, nor of western culture(s), but a rejection of its claims to universal validity and applicability, followed up by violent and militarised occupation of other civilisations' and cultures' lands and peoples, with the aim of transforming and, considering the above, muting and exoticising these. Europeans and European civilisation and culture(s) are considered as *as* valid—to them—as e.g. Iranian civilisational history and culture(s) are to Iranians (Khatami 2013a).

Because of these extreme experiences of liberal colonial imperialism—and its intended strategic attempt at erasing non-western societies' knowledge, cultures, experiences, histories—civil society in actively decolonising contexts plays a different role than in western political environments. Its purposes must focus on the re-generation of such societies' souls, anchoring points, humanness—as a defence against annihilation—while acknowledging the absolute historical reality of civilisational and cultural exchanges as pivotal to the organic development, through time, of all human societies. Thus:

> The cultural strategy of a dynamic and vibrant Islamic society cannot be isolation. As a progressive religion, Islam shuns building fences around people's consciousness. Instead, our strategy must focus on making our people immune, raising and educating them to resist the cultural onslaught of the West on their own. Only a strategy of immunization represents a viable solution for today and tomorrow. This requires us to allow various disparate views to engage one another in our society. How is it possible to make the body immune without injecting it with a controlled and weakened virus, so that it can resist the more extensive and threatening invasion of that virus? The way to make the body resistant to viruses is certainly not by preventing any viruses from coming near it. Instead we must see to it that the living organism has the

> apparatus to resist the virus itself (Khatami 2013a:68).

Civil society therefore cannot exist in isolation, neither from its own societal roots, nor from other societies; its development as a positive societal force rests on its capacity to engage also regionally and globally (Khatami 2013a). As a force of revival, civil society has multiple foci, none of which can be left out. Societies are complex, and such complexity needs to be reflected in civil society, which therefore encompasses both the arts, religious and educational engagements, the bazaars/market (as economic hubs, tying the local to the global, and as a connection between people and the political sphere), and political movements (Khatami, 2013a). Its existence guarantees local and elite political accountability, as a counterforce to moral corruption—a part of human fallibilities.

Reflexive Indigeneity as State-based Resistance

This brings me to the second thread: the transposing of individuality as explained above to the societal realm signifying the space in which civil society takes shape, ultimately expressed in situ, in the particularity of place. Societies, shocked by colonial imperialism and hence structural, cultural, symbolic, epistemological and direct violence—i.e. invasion and/or subjugation of mind, faculty and resources, militarily, socially, politically, economically, religiously—cannot become fully independent without a dynamic civil society focused on the regeneration of indigeneity as a matter if dignity and decency, a regeneration which must be allowed time to rise to meet external influences on an equal footing and hence capable of emerging organically from within itself in reflexive dialogue with other cultures and civilisations (Khatami 2013a). This is an absolute of independence, as is popular participation focused on holding government to account, i.e. a government accountable only to its population, not to outside interests or powers (Khatami 2013a). Khatami's transgressing of scales—from the individual to the global—is mediated by a civil society, which 'seeks neither to dominate others nor to submit to domination' and which 'recognizes the right of other nations to self-determination and access to the necessary means for an honourable living' (Khatami 2013a:22). Hence, while civil society is understood as independent from the state, he also repositions the anti-colonial and anti-imperial state itself as a locus of resistance in the global community—the states resisting liberal imperial dominance become a civil society of states on a peaceful mission of global transformation:

> The way to oppose thought and culture is not through the use of military, security, and judicial means, for using force only adds fuel to the opposite side's fire. We must confront the thought of the opponent by relying on rationality and enlightenment and through offering more powerful and compelling counter arguments (Khatami 2013a:120).

When Khatami (2013a) refers to 'Western' civil society as originating in the Greek city states, he points to the emerging political theories in the European renaissance (its rediscovery of itself through Islamic civilisation), developing into the Enlightenment, maturing in European modernity (from ca. mid-1700s), organically leading to the emergence of a civil society with a particular focus (e.g. the 19th century abolition, labour, women's and peace movements, and the liberties so often referred to in Western contemporary political and media discourses). Building on the experiences of the Iranian revolution, and its first (beginning) episodes in the 1880s and early 1900s, and referring briefly also to similar experiences of anti-colonial resistance across the colonised world, he envisions the continuation of these movements of resistance as the bedrock from which local civil societies appear organically, i.e. from within themselves, focused on remaking, remodelling, reawakening the cultures and civilisations from which resistance once sprang—in constant dialogue with themselves and each other in a strive to become independent of the colonial imperial structures still shackling many of these societies in structural dependency on the West (Khatami 2013a). These structures, and their very real effects are precisely described in his discussion of the future of Islam:

> Politically, the West aims to govern all corners of the world and to dominate the theory and practice of international relations. It possesses the material and symbolic forces of power simultaneously, and it will stop at nothing to achieve its goals and protect its interests. Our struggle with the West is of life and death importance. (Khatami 2013a:118)

Resisting such structures requires a civil society endeavouring to bringing whole societies, cultures, civilisations back into themselves, and back onto the global political scene. Civil society—as made up of responsible, disciplined and educated individuals—with that as their main goal, is a precondition, an absolute, for the healing of society and to keep government structures un-corrupted, i.e. from straying from the path towards independence and the possibility of dialogue with other societies, cultures and civilisations on

equitable terms. This is fundamental to dialogue as explained by Khatami (2013a). Ultimately, the state is the guarantor of igniting motionless sectors in society with dynamism through its active engagement—while refraining from dominating such activities, granted that these do not counteract revolutionary decolonisation: 'any system is bound to impose some form of restriction when its whole existence and the fundamentals of its rule are endangered' (Khatami 2013a:68). Importantly, if the anti-imperial revolutionary system is to be preserved there are 'no other choice but to offer society sophisticated and adaptive thinking' (Khatami 2013a:69). The development of such thinking is dependent on all sectors of civil society, from the market to the universities, as well as on educational immunisation because 'The battle of ideas is far more fateful and determining than political and military conflict' (Khatami 2013a:72).

While Khatami speaks about the particular Iranian experience, he makes it relevant also to the broader Muslim community (by leaning on the Qur'an, Islamic history and philosophy), as well as to other societies, cultures and states through shared experiences of colonial imperialism and domination. The Iranian revolution of 1977-79 was a popular nonviolent[8] revolt, based in the kind of civil society Khatami defines as Islamic. The Islamic-ness of this revolt fundamentally resides in the rise of a population against a corrupted political leadership, i.e. a civil society—consisting of individuals with followers (such as Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini), political parties (left and centre of a classical Enlightenment political scale), religious schools, the business community (the bazaars), banned media—holding political elites and rulers to account. In this particular case on the account of a lack of independence, on the ruler not having stopped, but rather facilitated societal disease; occidentosis. This diagnosis was shared across the political and religious communities; many of whom also defined revolution as the cure (Mottahedeh 2009, Dabashi 2011b, Elling 2019). Civil society did, what civil society should do: revolting, holding to account, it facilitated popular

8 According to (Zunes 2009) 'The Iranian Revolution of 1977-79 was the first in a series of mass popular civil insurrections which would result in the overthrow of authoritarian regimes in dozens of countries over the next three decades. […] The Iranian revolution relied on many methods of unarmed insurrection—such as demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, contestation of public space, and the establishment of parallel institutions—that would be used in the Philippines, Latin America, Eastern Europe and elsewhere in subsequent years.'

participation as resistance to a state which was seen as attacking rather than supporting the populace. That experience is far from particular to Iran—it is shared globally, by the vast majority of the world's population. From the late 1940s through to the present, we have seen a number of revolts among subjugated populations, whether subjugated by groups of their own society or external actors (South Asia, Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, China, South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Kenya, Ghana, Upper Volta/Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Nicaragua, Haiti, Mexico, Bolivia, Cuba etc.). What is particular to Iran is the active resistance against cultural and intellectual colonisation, carried through by civil society, and the religio-political alternative to formulating the revolution in Enlightenment terms, which resonated with a majority of the population (Leverett and Leverett 2013). We see similar tendencies in the First Nation resistance movements in the Americas, particularly in North America, while in South America these movements have become large-scale popular movements of resistance not only against the apartheid-like, but also classist structures of rule through their Marxist (i.e. Enlightenment) inclinations, attracting the poor majority far beyond the First Nation communities.

Conclusion

As such, civil society as understood in the Dialogue among Civilisations and Cultures paradigm is based in a resistance praxis of reflexive glocal cosmopolitanism, which is multi-level, multi-site, multi-actor, poly-historical and polycultural.[9] It may take place in formal settings (such as academic conferences, i.e. intellectual diplomacy); in cooperation between artists, musicians, authors; in indigenously grounded, inclusive and glocally reflexive civil society contexts; through tourism and cultural and

9 It is *poly*cultural rather than *multi*cultural. In the social sciences the concept of multicultural/ism harbours the very same confrontative conceptualisation as alliance building, as in violent (defined in its complexity by Galtung 1969 and 1990 and Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) struggles of minorities or dominated groups for space, dominance, influence or bare existence and representation in relation to a majority or dominant population's universalising (construed as beneficial) political, religious, cultural and economic authority. Polycultural on the other hand, implies *the existence of* several cultures at the same time, in the same place, with no conceptual connotations to skewed power or violence involved in the relations between these.

educational exchange programmes; in media reporting (suggestive of peace journalism); in the development of personal contacts both in the high-end of international diplomacy and at the lower end, such as friendships based on actual encounters with others, in real-life or on social media; in inter-faith meetings; and in trade and security networking practices. It consists of single individuals (models) and their followers, the economic community, non-state organisations focused on individual and societal self-betterment (e.g. art, education); religious communities and congregations; intellectuals and academics; the economic community (Khatami 2013a).

In conclusion, civil society in a postcolonial or decolonising context is, in short defined as central to the revival of indigenous identities aiming at rebuilding society from within itself, in a reflexive exchange with other societies, cultures and civilisations but must at all times be local, i.e. foreign involvement runs counter to the essential notion of indigeneity and independence (Khatami 2013a). It is expected to work together with the state as long as the state serves the population and guarantees its political participation, and otherwise to revolt, based on broadly shared concerns (i.e. revolt must be popularly widespread and cross-sectional). In this sense, civil society understood as anti-colonial resistance is translatable far beyond the Iranian context, hence speaking directly to the notion of spreading the Iranian—social and anti-imperial—revolution for independence, sovereignty and freedom from domination by the West, and for equitable international relations, marked by dialogue rather than monologue and hegemonic aspirations (Khatami 1998, 2001, 2013a, 2013b).

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