“CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS” REVISITED IN THE ERA OF ARAB REVOLUTIONS

Assist. Prof. Devrim Ümit
Karabük University, Turkey

Abstract

Tunisian Revolution, starting out in December 17, 2010 with Muhammad Buazizi’s, who was a 26 years old high school dropout having to support his extended family of eight as a street vendor, setting himself on fire in front of a local municipal building in the protest of mistreatment by local police officers and physical harassment and humiliation by a municipal officer and her aides, incited protests and uprisings throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region heralding the era of Arab Revolutions, popularly coined as “Arab Spring,” with a participation from all walks of life regardless of age, gender, occupation, social strata, and political standing, yet with youth domination and active use of the social media. Since the coinage has mistakenly minimized the radical transformation that the entire region has been going through in ethnic, geographic, and social terms, it would be noteworthy reminding the “Green Movement” led by the youth in Iran in 2009 protesting the Presidential elections held in June the same year and even the earlier youth demonstrations of North African, particularly the Algerian, background in the suburban areas of Paris in 2005 and 2006 respectively as the early harbingers of this new era for the MENA region. Furthermore, it would be appropriate to conceive the Arab Revolutions in the context of belated arrival of the waves of democratization from Eastern Europe to the region, including Tunis, Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen, more than twenty years after the breakdown of the Berlin Wall, symbol of the Cold War, in 1989 followed by the toppling of the Stalinist regimes one after another in Eastern Europe and by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in late 1991. Given the fact that those mass protests and uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East did not remain confined to the region, but similar demonstrations took place in capital and various big cities of Europe such as Madrid and Athens mainly for economic reasons and in the United States such as New York City where the “Occupy the Wall Street” movement, led by the youth for economic and social inequalities and corruption as well as for the influence of corporations on governments, stirred a chain of similar “occupy movements” in many other cities in the country while displaying solidarity with the Arab uprisings have underlined the global nature of the Arab Revolutions, which burst out to demand the very basic universal human rights such as bread, freedom, and human dignity. These developments put the popular thesis of Samuel Huntington in dispute that the international affairs in the post Cold war period would be determined by cultures rather than ideologies and that the clashes would take place among civilizations based on identity and culture. Therefore, this presentation will look into the ongoing
revolutionary process in North Africa and the Middle East within the thesis and anti thesis of clash of civilizations.

**Keywords:** clash of civilizations, alliance of civilizations, Arab revolutions, Middle East, universal culture

1. **INTRODUCTION**

In an early article, namely, “The Clash of Civilizations?”1 published in *Foreign Affairs* of 1993 in response to *The End of History and the Last Man*2 by Francis Fukuyama and with arguments parallel to “The Roots of Muslim Rage”3 by Orientalist Bernard Lewis from whom he borrowed the notion of clash of civilizations, an eminent political scientist, Samuel P. Huntington assumed that global affairs in the post Cold War period were determined by culture and religion rather than ideological, political or economic reasons and the clash among the nations would be civilizational:

> It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic.

The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.4

In the Cold War period, Huntington argues, while the main question evolves around on which side one places himself, in the post Cold War period, the identity of person is at the heart of the question and cultural identity cannot be easily changed. He further divides the world between the West and “the rest,” more specifically between the Muslim world and the United States and counts seven or eight civilizations while holding that the clash between the West and the Muslim world is inevitable. It goes without saying that Huntington’s ambiguous notion of clash of civilizations provided the policy makers in the West, particularly in the United States with a reason and paradigm to continue the fighting following the end of the Cold War. Given the heated debate that the oft-cited article stirred across the globe, Huntington developed his thesis to a book, namely, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*,5 published in 1996 and received moderate reactions,

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3 Lewis, Bernard, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990. “…Islam, like other religions, has also known periods when it inspired in some of its followers a mood of hatred and violence. It is our misfortune that part, though by no means all or even most, of the Muslim world is now going through such a period, and that much, though again not all, of that hatred is directed against us.”
both in academic and political circles. However, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the book became more popular than ever to the extent of earning the first place in best seller list of New York Times in 2003. Huntington in his interviews frequented during this period emphasized that the recent attacks indicated the accuracy of his assumption on the central role of religion and culture in clashes among civilizations.\(^6\) Most of the conservative and neo-conservative circles both in the East and West welcomed the Huntington thesis while unlike minded intellectuals and scholars such as Edward Said and Richard W. Bulliet vehemently opposed the unavoidability of the clash of civilizations, the former through the concept of civilization and the latter through his coinage of “Islamo-Christian civilization.” A cultural Marxist himself, Said in his article, “The Clash of Ignorance,” shrewdly observes the fallacious aspect of Huntington’s thesis that the latter addresses the “civilization” as a uniform “shut down, sealed-off” entity and disputes that certainly neither Huntington nor Lewis has much time to spare for the internal dynamics and plurality of every civilization, or for the fact that the major contest in most modern cultures concerns the definition of each culture, or for the unattractive possibility that a great of demagogy and downright ignorance is involved in presuming to speak for a whole religion or civilization. No, the West is the West, and Islam Islam.\(^7\)

Said further admits that horrendous attacks of September 11 were used to justify Huntington’s ideas and to “rant on about the West’s superiority.”\(^8\) Countering the common assumption that the differences between Islam and Christians are irreconcilable and the clash of civilizations are inevitable in the end, Bulliet, in his book, penned as a furious intellectual response to the terrible events of September 11, \textit{The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization},\(^9\) draws on the similarities between Islam and Christianity through a historical perspective in terms of birth, growth, and institutional development within his coinage of “Islamo-Christian civilization,” while putting the “unquestioned acceptance” of Judeo-Christian civilization as a synonym for Western civilization in question:

\begin{quote}
Looked at as a whole, and in historical perspective, the Islamo-Christian world has much more binding it together than forcing it apart. \textit{The past and future of the West cannot be fully}
\end{quote}

\(^6\) In an interview following the 1\textsuperscript{st} anniversary of September 11 attacks, Huntington continues to define the notion of religion as the most important element of civilization: “I’m only following the tradition of Max Weber! There is clearly a relationship here: religion is an important element—\textit{probably the most important element}- in defining a civilization though, of course, it is not the only one. \url{http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?217225} date of access: 06.23.2013. Italics are mine. In another interview five years after these attacks, Huntington maintains his argument that “cultural identities” and “cultural antagonisms and affiliations” will play a “major role” in global politics in the coming decades. \url{http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=2949=en=1=0} date of access:06.23.2013.


\(^8\) Ibid.

comprehended without appreciation of the twinned relationship it has had with Islam over some fourteen centuries. The same is true of the Islamic world. The case for Islamo-Christian civilization as an organizing principle of contemporary thought is rooted in the historical reality of those centuries. One might hope that historians of Western civilization and Islam will see the value of readjusting their perspectives to take this reality into account.10

The prominent historian convincingly offers a more sound approach through a new and refreshing outlook to the relations between the West and the Muslim world and renders an intellectual foundation on which a productive as well as a peaceful relationship could be built between the United States and the Muslim world:

Civilizations that are destined to clash cannot seek together a common future. Like Matthew’s Islam, Huntington’s Islam is beyond redemption. The strain of Protestant American thought that both men are heir to, pronounces against Islam the same self-righteous and unequivocal sentence of “otherness” that American Protestants once visited upon Catholics and Jews.11

Buliet further counters the typification of Islam and the treatment of the Muslim world and the Muslims as uniform entities and their treatment as scapegoats for the actions of some of their coreligionists. “Jim Jones, David Koresh, and Meir Kahane do not typify Christianity and Judaism in the eyes of the civilized West, but those same eyes are prone to see Osama bin Laden and Mullah Muhammad Omar as typifying Islam.”12 By the same token, on July 22, 2012, nearly two months before the tenth anniversary of the September 11 attacks, when a governmental building in Oslo, capital of Norway, was bombed and a youth camp in an island, miles away from the center of Oslo, was hit by a shooting rampage, leaving many dozens dead, some as young as 16, the initial reaction in Norway and the West was that these attacks were carried out either by outsiders or by Islamist jihadists. Even when Anders B. Breivik, a Norwegian, was captured and tried for the attacks he committed, he was deliberately conceived as a mentally disoriented person rather than a consciously committed and violent hater of Islam.13

2. ARAB REVOLUTIONS

By the turn of the twenty-first century, growing popular discontent among the peoples living in North Africa and the Middle East against their autocrat leaders of decades and suppressing governments found voice in the streets in late 2010. Initially seeking liberal and democratic reforms within those governments, the protests and demonstrations later on demanded change in those leaders and governments. In Tunisia, Bouizi’s desperate self-immolation in December 17, 2010 to protest his humiliation at the hand of a female municipal official and her aides catalyzed a civil resistance including mass youth demonstrations and street riots throughout Tunisia, dissenting various political and socio-economic

10 Buliet, 45.
11 Ibid., 5.
13 In the end of the painstaking trials concluded in August 2012, Breivik was sentenced to 21 years in prison for a possibility of extension of his sentence which may most likely turn his sentence into lifetime tenure in prison as Norwegian laws do not allow death penalty. Ümit, Devrim, “Turkey: Bridging Europe and Islam,” Human Security in Turkey: Challenges for the 21st Century, Özerdem, Alp and Özerdem, Füsun (ed.), Routledge Press, 2013.
issues in the country, resulted in the fled of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali along with his family to Saudi Arabia on January 14, 2011 only in less than a month following the outbreak of the civil resistance, thereby ending his autocratic rule of 23 years. When public protests also targeted Ben Ali’s party, Constitutional Democratic Rally (CDR), led by Prime Minister Muhammad Ganuchi, running the interim government as well under a new President following the fled of Ben Ali, Ganuchi resigned on February 27. The civil movement highlighted the higher inflation, unemployment, poverty, and corruption as well as the political repression and the lack of civil and political rights and freedoms while indicating no less similarities to the protests which led to the violent overthrow of Nicolae Ceausescu’s regime in Romania in 1989. Soon after the fled of President Ben Ali, the acting President announced the elections for the Constituent Assembly to govern the country and the draft of a new constitution. In the aftermath of the elections in October 23, 2011 with a postponement of three months, not only Moncef Marzouki, returning Tunisia after being in exile for nearly nine years, became the acting President of the country, but also the previously banned moderate Islamic party, the Ennahda (Renaissance) Party won the 41% of the votes and the right to establish the coalition government with the center-left, secular, and reformist Congress for the Republic and the left-leaning the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties, commonly known as Ettakatol. The Constituent Assembly managed to draft the new constitution only in early January 2014 following many suspended talks and comprises between the Islamists and secular-liberal opposition groups and upon eventual stepping back of the former to ease the tension with the latter and not to risk the democratic gains and the promising transitional period since the outset of the revolutions. Currently, a government mostly constituted of technocrats including the Prime Minister is in charge, yet loaded with difficulties over the appointment of key ministers such as Minister of Interior Affairs and the upcoming Parliamentary elections planned to be held later in 2014.

The utmost despair act of self-immolation of Bouizi resonated across the region while bringing in imitating incidents as well as demonstrations and protests held in solidarity since conditions in many countries were parallel. In Egypt, inspired and incited by the uprisings in Tunisia, mass protests began to take stage on January 25, 2011 at Tahrir Square in Cairo on the eve of which governmental officials, warned by Tunisian type of civil resistance, took all the preemptive measures including the ban on access to Internet as social media had been actively used to organize the protests in Tunisia. The protest day was coincided with the National Police Day in order to demonstrate the police brutality and decades-old state of emergency. During the massive demonstrations, with demands similar to those in Tunisia such as bread, freedom, and human dignity as well as the overthrow of Mubarak regime. 83 years old Hosni Mubarak had ruled the country through his National Democratic Party (NDS) for 30 years with a semi-presidential one-party system following the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat in 1981 for whom he served as Vice-President. Mubarak appointed Omer Suleiman, the former head of the Egyptian General Intelligence Directorate, as Vice President in 30 years in an attempt to appease the civil unrest and announced that he would not run for re-election in September 2011 elections, but to no avail.

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On February 11, 2011, Mubarak resigned from Presidency while the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) headed by the Field Marshal took power and announced the dissolution of the two houses of the Parliament, suspension of the Constitution, and the rule of military for six months for a transitional period until the elections would be held. Constitutional referendum was held in mid March  and, in late May, Mubarak was ordered to stand trial and on June 2, he was sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of “premeditated murder” of protestors, that is, he failed to protect them in the first six days of the revolution. As Egypt has a bicameral parliamentary system with an elected President, parliamentary and presidential elections were handled simultaneously. September 2011 was initially chosen for the Parliamentary elections, but postponed to November in order to open space for a wide swath of parties. A three stage elections for the lower house of the Parliament, People’s Assembly, were held from November 28, 2011 to January 11, 2012, followed by another three stage elections for the upper house, Consultative Assembly of Egypt, held from June 1 to June 8, 2012.

In the end of the elections for People’s Assembly, Democratic Alliance led and dominated by the Freedom and Justice Party, established by Muslim Brotherhood, received nearly the 40% of the votes, while the Salafi Islamists and parties from center (national liberals) and center-left (liberal democrats), namely, New Wafd (Delegation) and the Egyptian Bloc, won nearly 30%, 10%, and 7% of the votes respectively. In the end of the elections held for the Consultative Assembly of Egypt, Freedom and Justice Party won 45% while the Islamist Bloc, New Wafd, and the Egyptian Bloc won nearly 30%, 9%, and 3% of the votes, yet many parties including the Egyptian Bloc put the public, representative, and constitutional aspects of the elections for the upper house into question. In the end of the Presidential elections held in two rounds in May and June, Mohamed Morsi, candidate from Muslim Brotherhood, on June 24, became the country’s first elected President in the post revolution period and, a few days later, took his symbolic oath of office in a packed Tahrir Square. On June 30, Morsi became the official President of Egypt while the SCAF formally turned the power to the newly-elected President.

However, earlier on June 14 before the second round of voting for President, Egypt’s Supreme Constitutional Court declared the elections to be unlawful and ruled that the Parliament be dissolved.  

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19 “Egypt court rules entire parliament illegally elected, orders body to dissolve after unconstitutional
The next day, amid the mass protests in Tahrir Square, the SCAF formally dissolved the Parliament and appointed a 100-member panel to draft the constitution until the new elections for Parliament would be held. Parliament-picked Constituent Assembly had been in charge to this end for a while under the threat of interception by the SCAF while the ruling of the administrative court was still hanging over it. Amid the tensions among Morsi who declared a temporary constitutional announcement, granting himself with unlimited powers in late November 2012 until a referendum would be held for a new constitution and in the name of, he claimed, protecting the Constituent Assembly that would adopt the 2012 draft constitution very soon against the prospect of its dissolution by a court degree, which brought about massive anti-Morsi, largely of Islamist stock, and pro-Morsi, largely of secular and liberal stock including human rights and woman rights activists as well as Christians, demonstrations nationwide, the Supreme Constitutional Court, which closed the path to appeal entirely by declaring the judgement of the SCAF over the unconstitutionality of the Parliament and the subsequent dissolution of the Parliament upon the Court decree to be the final decisions, and the SCAF under the Chief Army General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who finally committed coup d'état in early July 2013 toppling the Morsi regime, turning the life imprisonment of Mubarak to house arrest through a decision of the interim government, and suspending the draft constitution with new parliamentary elections short of prospect.

In Libya, the conditions were even more severe in terms of fundamental human rights and freedoms as Muammar Gaddafi ruled the country for 42 years with an iron hand since his coup d'état in 1969 even though he claimed to play a symbolic role since 1977 when he officially stepped down. However, kleptocracy was common as members of Gaddafi family and its close political allies were in every key position while always having the lion’s share in every source of income and Sharia was the base of law in a system where citizens were denied basic human rights and freedoms with no room for political representation. Inspired and incited by the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, anti-Gaddafi and anti-government mass demonstrations under the same motto of bread, freedom, social justice, and human dignity started on February 15, 2011 escalated with the “Day of Rage,” led and conducted by all opposition groups in and outside Libya, to a rebellion spreading across the country and leading to the foundation of the National Transitional Council, an interim governing body composed of all anti-Gaddafi groups. Libya soon found itself in a civil war intervened in mid March by a multi-state coalition, based on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, including the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Turkey, and the Arab League.
During the military intervention, Sirte was claimed to be the new capital of Libya by pro-Gaddafi groups, but Gaddafi was captured and killed by the rebel forces on October 20, 2011. Following his ousting, the National Transitional Council took power for the transitional period until the Parliamentary elections would be held and in early July 2012, for the very first time in their history, the Libyans voted for the Parliamentary elections in the end of which an interim government, in charge of drafting a new constitution to be approved by a general referendum, was formed by the elected General National Congress upon officially handed power by the Council in the aftermath of the parliamentary elections. With constantly changing governments along with the sectarian divisions and regional fractionalism as well as failures to draft a new constitution engulfs the country with unpredictable consequences in an unforeseen future.

In Syria, conditions were no less different, if not more complicated. As going out to streets to protest the dictators and autocratic regimes had already become a transnational pattern in North Africa, protests in Syria, starting on January 26, 2011, turned to mass demonstrations in mid March including the big cities such as Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Hama and asked the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad, whose family has been reigning the country since 1971 and the end of the Ba’ath Party regime which has been ruling since the coup d’état of 1964. Al-Assad family is of Alawite origin, an offshoot of Shite Islam, constituting nearly the 12 percent of total Syrian population which is a mixture of Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Druzes, Palestinians, and Turcomans. When those protests were cracked down harshly through security forces and government troops especially in the northern part of the country, Syria entered a period of civil war which is still going on with a death toll exceeding 100,000 people comprised of mainly combatant troops and armed insurgents as well as civilians including protestors and government officials according to various United Nations reports while Amnesty International points to war crimes and similar violations committed by government forces and abuses by armed groups in opposition. The latter reports includes mainly long enfranchised minorities such as Kurds, subjected to ethnic discrimination and being labeled as “foreigners” as well as to denial of citizenship until 2011 and their cultural and linguistic rights, and rather poorer rural areas mostly populated by conservative Sunni Muslims while the country has been ruled in a one-party system without free elections and with tight state control through law of emergency remaining in effect since 1963, but abolished in 2011, and while has been living with high inflation and youth unemployment. Armed groups in opposition, composed mostly of Sunni Arabs along with other ethnic and religious segments of the population along with a small number of

22 Bashar al-Assad became President upon the death of his father, President Hafez al-Assad in 2000.
Alawites, soon organized under Free Syrian Army (FSA) of which headquarters were located in Hatay until September 2012 and have been fighting throughout the country comprising the big cities and even areas close to Damascus while the Syrian National Council, also known as the Syrian National Transitional Council, based in Istanbul, Turkey, aiming at ending the rule of al-Assad regime, is seeking to be recognized as government in exile through links with the FSA. Syria crisis also brings about the worst humanitarian crisis in years which puts nearly half of the country’s population in despair with Syrian refugees mounting to nearly three million escaping torture, imprisonment, and persecution in their homeland to find safe have in neighboring countries including Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt in the order of largest number of refugees hosted and with more than six and half million internally displaced people within Syria of 22 million.  

It is not within the scope of this paper to address the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul, Turkey leaving eight young people dead and many severely injured. Sufficient amount of time is essential to analyze the major and immediate causes of the protests and to make solid arguments. However, it would be noteworthy mentioning with a few remarks given the fact that Turkey is not immune to the global impacts of the transformation process that the entire region of North Africa and the Middle East has been going through. Began as a protest movement on May 28, 2013 to counter the ruling Justice and Welfare Party’s decision to remove nearly a century-old trees in Gezi Park area located in the celebrated Taksim Square of Istanbul to rebuild the Ottoman military barracks of the late eighteenth century to serve as a shopping mall and a luxury hotel, Gezi Park protests soon crossed the city and spread in big cities, including the capital city of Ankara and Izmir throughout the country. Demonstrations soon have attracted thousands of people from a wide spectrum of backgrounds of age, gender, occupation, social status, and political view while youth dominated the protests with the active use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook in spite of the speculations about the occasional attempts of the state to intercept the internet access in the Square. Arap Revolutions broke out for economic hardships and higher unemployment rate as well as for the lack of political rights and the Gezi Park Protests seemed at the time to harbor no substantial common ground with the “Arap Spring” in those respects, yet these protests surfaced and underlined the growing discontent, especially among those who did not vote for the ruling party in the past, for its enduring “interventions” and “restrictions” to their lifestyles and way of lives which most blatantly came to surface with the ban on alcohol usage in public spaces. Soon after the protests began, various state and governmental officials, including President Abdullah Gül and Deputy Premier Bülent Arınç admitted that disproportionate and excessive force was employed in the first days of the protests and that they understood the environmental concerns over the Gezi Park projects while Mayor of Istanbul announced that neither a shopping mall nor a luxury hotel would be built in the disputed area and,

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28  Bülent Arınç was serving as the Deputy Premier since Premier Erdoğan was on an official visit to Morocco at the time that the Gezi Park Protests started.
subsequently, Premier Erdogan, upon his return from an official visit to North Africa, emphasized that they would respect the court decision on the Gezi Park and that they would go to referendum concerning the Gezi Park project even if the court would rule in favor of the project. Gezi Park protests soon turned into “Occupy Istanbul” movement, echoing the “Occupy the Wall Street” movement in New York City, with sit-ins, used book sellings, and building tents, while protests and demonstrations in Brazil, concurrently taking place and spreading to eighty cities, showed solidarity through various supportive slogans with the Gezi Park protesters and while denouncements and statements rose from the European Parliament and from various capitals in Europe as well as from the United States. Therefore, domino effect of Arab revolutions over Turkey in terms of universal demands such as consultation with public concerning urban spaces is evident whilst their destabilizing impacts transcending ethnic and geographic boundaries are currently not manifest.

3. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A UNIVERSAL CULTURE

Overall, looking at the developments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria, similarities among them are apparent. First, all these protests and demonstrations started modestly, but soon spread throughout the country while becoming more organized and intense. Second, social media including Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube as well as mobile phone and blogging was widely and competently used in organization and spread of the events despite the sporadic and unsuccessful attempts of the governments to intercept the public access to internet and the media activities. Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube were broadly and efficiently used to plan, coordinate, and to publicize the protests. Third, protestors and demonstrators came from all walks of life regardless of age, gender, occupation, social strata and political standing with parallel and universal demands, namely, bread, freedom, equality, social justice, human dignity, and political representation since economic hardships and socio-economic inequalities were the main immediate causes of those uprisings. However, youth occupied the largest and, along with the effective use of the social media, the most dynamic segment of the protestors, while serving as the agents of radical transformation in the entire region to the much dismay of Huntington. Huntington argues that universal civilization necessitates a global culture based on a global language or religion. However, reading the public demands in recent Arab revolutions may lead us to the promising possibility for a universal civilization based on components different than religion or language since people in those countries as ordinary citizens were demanding very fundamentals such as democracy, human rights and freedom that could be sought by any for only being a member of the international community. Therefore, it would be more refreshing and serene to focus on the common elements that unite people than those that divide people which may deemphasize conflict as opposed to cooperation.

Next, civil resistance and revolts in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya as well as in Yemen brought about the

29 Premier Erdoğan made his initial remarks during his official visit to Morocco dismissing the protestors as a few “looters” (chapulcu), a word promptly coined as “chapulling” meaning fighting for one’s rights.

overthrow of the long-standing autocratic leaders, namely, Ben Ali, Gaddafi, Mubarak, and Ali Abdullah Saleh while civil war aiming at the ousting of the al-Assad reign in Syria still goes on. In those protests and demonstrations, even though there might be some exceptions, not only anti-Israel, anti-America, and anti-West slogans were not present, but also neither Islam nor Islamism nor Arab nationalism was on the agenda. For Huntington, whilst culture and civilization can be used interchangeably and cultural identity is one of the core elements of a civilization, human dignity and the right to live one’s life as an ordinary citizen and human being without being humiliated, stands at the heart of the Arab revolutions as the rebels were already fighting against the regime with which they share the same cultural identity, yet by which they were suppressed the most. However, this does not mean that they dismissed, ignored or despised their culture. As the parliamentary results above in Tunisia and Egypt indicate that they wanted to live within their culture with their demands for social reforms and political rights met by the political system. Huntington, as well as Lewis thinks the inevitability of clash among civilizations not only for treating the Muslim world through an essentialist outlook as an uniform entity while ignoring the internal dynamics and organic nature of every society, but also for taking the extreme or rather unwelcomed samples such as Islamic Republic of Iran or Libya as a model for a Muslim country and Khomeini or Gaddafi as such for a Muslim leader.

However, countries like Turkey especially under the rule of Premier Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Justice and Welfare Party stands as a paradigm for a liberal, democratic, and secular, yet mostly Muslim populated country. It is not coincidence that Erdoğan along with Premier José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero of Spain started the Alliance of Civilizations under the United Nations in 2005. Last, but not least, since the transnational aspects of the revolutionary process in North Africa and the Middle East crossing the region from Tunisia to Bahrain and the universal demands of these protests and demonstrations from Yemen to Brazil transcending the geographic and ethnic boundaries are evident, one of the most defective sides of Huntington’s argument remains that he narrows down the notion of civilization to religion and language whilst dismissing the fact of acculturation of cultures in an era of globalization and digital technology outdoing the lines among the societies with universal demands as the motto of the Alliance of Civilizations, “many cultures, one humanity,” points to.

Bibliography
