Lesson 1: Civilization and culture: a conceptualization.

Introduction:

The world today is both unified and divided by civilization, since people who belong to the same civilization come together despite their geographical or whatever difference, while people who live in the same geographical area are divided by belonging to different civilizations. According to Huntington, Muslims around the world feel indebted by belonging to the same Islamic Civilization that was built originally around Islamic religion. It is obvious that the majority of civilizations are wrapped up around a language or a religion. Consequently, one may ask what a Civilization is and what is culture? What are their components? Are there different meanings of the word Civilization?

What is Civilization?

To start with, let’s look for this term in a dictionary. In Oxford and other dictionaries, a Civilization stands for, first, a state of human society that is very developed and organized. Second, Civilization is a society’s culture and its way of life during a particular period of time or in a particular part of the world. The third definition is more generalized where it links the word Civilization to all people in the world and the societies they live in considered as a whole. As we can notice, Culture is at the heart of a civilization.

According to Historians, “Civilization is often a Historico-cultural entity or congeries of people sharing common geographical locus, common values and social institutions” (Wei, 2011). When we talk about human development, the term Civilization refers to a group of people larger than a **society** that shares the same **culture** and **locus** and who enjoys a developing way of life in terms of military, agriculture, laws, economy, including architecture and industry. These elements do not only make up a civilization itself but are exactly what distinguishes one civilization from another. For instance, it is easy for us to know a monument that belongs to the Egyptian Civilization and another that belongs to the Roman or the Greek civilizations because of certain cultural aspects like art and language that is specific to one Civilization and not another.

(Photos )

Back in history, the term civilization used to have a different usage. French historian Ferdinand Braudel mentioned that the moderm sense of “Civilization” was first used in 1752 by the French scholar Anne Robert Jaques Turgot, who was writing at that time “A History of Mankind”. Before that, the word “Civilized” was used during the Renaissance borrowed from French “civilizer” which means to achieve refined manners, urbanization and improvement. So, according to this sense a civilized man stands as the opposite of a savage. This is why the French used to call their conquests as “la mission civilatrice” where it was supposed to spread civilized action by putting an end to Savagery.

Although we must pinpoint that civilization nowadays is used to refer to a super social, economic, historical and political congeries of people sharing common geographic scope, common beliefs and social institutions thus founding the largest geo-political and geo-cultural entities and interactions of human societies.

Civilizations in the plural could mean the specific way of life of a specific nation or nations at a specific period of time. It is this usage that forms a key concept in the civilizational studies nowadays.

When can we use the Term Civilization?

-Civilization is the product of human evolution where cities emerge and urbanization started seeing light.

- A civilization has a large population, larger than a society or tribe

-It should have a large and considerable geographical scope.

-It incorporates huge number of ethnic groups who may have different cultures.

-It processes a particular set of values, Religion most of the time.

-A civilization should have a developed economy with wide trade.

-A civilization should have a developed sciences, technology or astronomy.

-It should have a sophisticated writing system, literature, art and music.

-It usually has a developed legal system.

-It generally enjoys a highly established and organized societies, military and politics.

Old developed societies that lack a sophisticated writing system or architecture are called **Neolithic Garden Cultures** according to Carroll Quigley who made this distinction in his book the Evolution of Civilizations.

What is Culture?

As we have seen in the previous definition and description, culture goes hand in hand with Civilization. So one may ask: what is culture? In order to have a clear understanding of what a culture is, we are going to check the dictionaries again. We find that culture is defined first as the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively. Second, it is defined as the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society. Semantically, culture and civilization tend to shade into each other; it means that sometimes they are used to mean the same thing. Although, civilization is more general than culture; i.e. Civilization encompasses culture, since culture is a component or an aspect of a Civilization.

Culture is an extremely difficult term to define. In 1952, the American anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn, reviewed concepts and definitions of culture, and compiled a list of 164 different definitions. Apte (1994: 2001), writing in the ten-volume Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics, summarized the problem as follows: “Despite a century of efforts to define culture adequately, there was in the early 1990s no agreement among anthropologists regarding its nature.”

-‘... the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next.’ Matsumoto 1996: 16

-‘Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour.’ Spencer-Oatey 2008: 3

Term use throughout History:

The word culture was used interchangeably with civilization. However, culture dated to the Roman Empire where it was originally used by philosopher and politician Ciero “cultura animi” which means the culture of the soul. Culture is linked to art, music and literature but not political or economic achievements.

As almost everyone belongs to a number of different groups and categories of people at the same time, people unavoidably carry several layers of mental programming within themselves, corresponding to different levels of culture. For example:

• a national level according to one’s country (or countries for people who migrated during their lifetime);

• a regional and/or ethnic and/or religious and/or linguistic affiliation, as most nations are composed of culturally different regions and/or ethnic and/or religious and/or language groups;

• a gender level, according to whether a person was born as a girl or as a boy;

• a generation level, which separates grandparents from parents from children;

• a role category, e.g. parent, son/daughter, teacher, student;

• a social class level, associated with educational opportunities and with a person’s occupation or profession;

• for those who are employed, an organizational or corporate level according to the way employees have been socialized by their work organization.

 Hofstede 1991: 10

Components of Civilization: there are **SVEN** key elements or components of a Civilization

1. Centralized government. (Politics and Law)
2. Organized Religion.
3. Economy (agriculture/ trade/ Industry)
4. Job specialization and Social class
5. Architecture and infrastructure
6. Culture (Art/ literature/ customs/ education)
7. Writing. (sophisticated script)