

SHARED SPACE

From A Common Word to Common Good

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Introduction

Shared space is originally an urban design concept dealing with how to design a space, a limited space, to be sufficient for all. Shared space is not just a concept, it is a foundation as well as imperative on how we the people of the world need to design our living system on this planet earth. Shared space is indeed the law of nature, that no single entity is isolated from one another, but they are all interconnected and integrated. Within this interdependent relation, it requires our common senses, understanding and consciousness on realities that space need to be shared.

The share of space among human species to other creatures, life environment, and the nature. So there is a degree of necessity and responsibility to share space in many aspects of life, from urban design, social or public space to the spatial justice. Our willingness to extend shared space will help to create peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and harmony. In a contrary, our unwillingness to share space for others will only indicate egoism, monopolism, and exclusivism, and tendency to domination and hegemony.

The world is a common heritage and place for human being to perform his or her very mission as God's vicegerent on earth, through establishing the perfect human civilization. Therefore, the idea of shared space necessitates

collective consciousness of one humanity, one destiny, and on responsibility. Consequently, shared space necessitates human being to avoid anti-social behavior, greediness to exploit the non-renewable resources, and to exploit the other human being and life environment. The fact that there is always limitation of space, shared ethical values and needed in order to develop shared security, and shared prosperity. The idea of shared space is indeed a perennial issue on how we continuously design our architecture of living for common good and common well being.

Yet, realization of this noble idea in this globalized shrinking world is not an easy task. There are challenges and threats, but also opportunities. Interfaith dialogue and cooperation are the strategic ways, but need a new paradigm. This relates to certain principles and approaches.

Religion and Multiculturalism

We are now living in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. No single society that is monolithic. All great cultural and religious traditions have to deal with plurality and diversity of cultures and religions. These pluralities are both given and generation. As mentioned in many verses of the Qur'an, God created mankind into races, nationalities, and ethnicities with different skin colors and languages. Plurality of religions is also a part of God's Will. Indeed, plurality is observable signs or evidence of God The Almighty on His creation.

Cultural and religious plurality becomes more complex in line with development and interactions between people from different faiths and cultures. Plurality is resulted from creativity and adaptation of people to cope with realities, changes and challenges. A plausible consequence of these creativity and adaptation is the birth of ideologies across human history. Now, variety of multiculturalism, pluralism and other ideologies have become major studies of modern social sciences especially sociology and anthropology.

In line with this principle, Islam views religious and cultural plurality not simple as a co-existence. It entails a world view and code of conducts on how to see plurality and to deal with accordingly. Historically, there was an example of *umma* on the ground, that is the Medinan Community. This community is based on the Medina Charter (*mitsaq al madinah*) as a consensus among people. There are three characteristic of Medina Charter. The first, Medina Charter is not based a particular religion (Islam) but universal teaching and values of existing religions especially Christinity and Judaism. Second, every single community, ethnic and religion is entitled as *umma*. Therefore none of them are excluded or alienated. The third, the Charter did not abandon the existence and identity of religions, ethnics and tribes but they are highly respected and well-protected. As could be seen from history, under Medina Chapter every religion, tribe and ethnic lived in conformity, harmony and unity.

Islam has a positive view of plurality. Islam outlines three basic principles of plurality. Firstly, Muslim has to accept plurality and all consequences as part of social, cultural and religious realities. Secondly, Muslim has to respond to these realities in positive ways. Thirdly, plurality has to lead to peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and mutual protection.

The challenge we are now facing is how to continue emphasizing the value of reconciliation through interfaith dialogues and cooperation as an instrument to bridge civilizational divides and conflicts at both global level and regional or local level. Various initiatives in this area remind us that religion and religious leaders do have a positive role to play in international relations. Religion does

serve as a source of values and norms that could provide guidance for a healthy inter-state relations based on mutual understanding, mutual respects, and equality. Those dialogues also serve as a venue for religious leaders to articulate their aspiration for a peaceful and just world. At grass-root level, inter-faith dialogues and cooperation can provide the basis for peace among people of different faiths. Dialogues could remove mutual suspicions, which often result from ignorance, lack of knowledge about each other, and the absence of mutual respect.

What Need to be Done?

Some broad agenda to be developed in order to realize the idea of shared space and to develop cooperation among religions are to bring about collective consciousness on the importance of exercising of shared security, shared ethical values, and effective interfaith dialogues.

(1). Shared Security

The notion of “shared security” implies that security is a collective public good. The Kyoto Declaration highlights “the collective responsibility of all people to meet our common need for security.” The notion of “shared security” emphasises that the security of the people, of human being, should be at the centre of attention. Similar to the notion of human security, “shared security”

also requires a comprehensive understanding of security in terms of the matrix of human rights and needs. More importantly, “shared security” requires the involvement of all stake-holders to defend and advance human dignity. In this regard, religious traditions clearly provide the foundation for such undertaking.

Shared security can be achieved only if we agree on the importance of understanding security as an attempt to “acknowledge our common vulnerabilities and our shared responsibility to address them.” Shared security cannot be achieved unless we understand each other’s (in) security concerns. Most dialogues among civilizations, or between different faiths, often ignore or avoid the importance of this point. Focusing such dialogues on issues of commonalities is certainly useful to promote greater mutual understanding. However, it does not provide a complete understanding on the sources of tension between communities or between civilizations. It is equally important to understand each other’s insecurity. This should be an agenda in inter-faith dialogues, both at local, national, and global levels.

(2). Shared Ethical Values

Another agenda needs to be undertaken is to develop shared ethical values among people of different faiths. Religions may differ from each other, especially in theology, but at the same time they share the same ethical

values, especially with regard to human dignity, human liberty, and betterment of human's life. The Abrahamic religions, for example, maintain the notion of man's very mission as vicegerent of God on earth, and therefore he or she needs to achieve the highest status of human being that is to become the perfect man.

Emphasizing the ethical dimension of religion will lead believers to have a meeting of mind, a common ground for coexistence, cohabitation, and cooperation. A believer in this perspective comes out with an ethical value that religion is from God but for human being and humanity. By so doing believers will capitalize similarities, rather than differences between religions. It is the time for believers to find a common word in order to face common enemies. The enemies are not the people of different religions, but rather the problems of human being and humanity, such as poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, injustice, environmental destruction, etc.

(3). Interfaith dialogue

The third agenda is certainly interfaith dialogue. The proliferation of interfaith and intercultural dialogues, both of state-driven and society-driven, both in local or regional level and global level has relatively on the one hand brought about positive results, such as in conflict resolution in many part of the world, and in the emergence of interfaith dialogue fora between religions and

nations. Yet, on the other hand those dialogues have not completely removed the danger. Those dialogues seem generated little success in removing the prejudices, misconceptions, and misunderstanding, hate, and hatred among religious groups, as appear, for instance, in the emergence of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Christianophobia, etc. .

The challenge we are now facing is how to continue emphasizing the value of reconciliation through interfaith dialogues and cooperation as an instrument to bridge civilizational divides and conflicts at both global level and regional or local level. Various initiatives in this area remind us that religion and religious leaders do have a positive role to play in international relations. Religion does serve as a source of values and norms that could provide guidance for a healthy inter-state relations based on mutual understanding, mutual respects, and equality. Those dialogues also serve as a venue for religious leaders to articulate their aspiration for a peaceful and just world. At grass-root level, inter-faith dialogues and cooperation can provide the basis for peace among people of different faiths. Dialogues could remove mutual suspicions, which often result from ignorance, lack of knowledge about each other, and the absence of mutual respect.

In this regard, religions clearly speak the language of peace. We should never surrender even though the challenges to our efforts to spread the message of

peace are increasingly becoming more and more difficult. Indeed, proliferation of dialogues Furthermore, there have been efforts to enhance peace among the followers of different religions through interfaith programs and activities. There have been even interfaith dialogues and cooperation intended to address social problems, such as poverty, human rights abuse, corruption and environmental degradation. Interfaith partnership for the common good has been on the rise in the last decade, involving more and more religious leaders and activists.

This reality clearly points to the imperative of not only doing more, but also doing it right. So much has been done to address the problem. But, progresses have not been entirely satisfactory. However, it would be misleading also to claim that the ongoing initiatives on inter-faith dialogues or dialogues among civilizations are no more than pointless exercises. These dialogues could create a greater space for mutual learning process. They expand the boundary of mutual understanding among people from different religious and civilizational background. They create the imperative of enhanced interaction among people from different faith. Dialogues have also opened up more opportunities for closer cooperations and communities to address problems of humanity and for the betterment of the society.