I would like to talk about the four papers that were presented this morning, and I have two main points. We heard from Professor Claval about multiculturalism as a new ideology; Professor Naito presented a study of the awakening of Muslim communities in Europe; Dr. Khadalie gave us a case study of the use of stereotypes in a multi-cultural society; and Dr. Belkeziz spoke about the view of the Islamic world and Islamic civilization.

The first point, and this is a point for discussion: how does the idea of multi-cultural society relate to the dialogue of civilizations? In a certain sense, multi-cultural society is a microcosm; it is at the micro level what the dialogue of civilizations is at the macro level. This was already pointed out in the report that the International Leadership Academy made for a preparatory workshop for this conference, in which they spoke of “the micro-level of inner-city life” and the “macro level of global tectonics”.

So, the question I ask myself is: when we talk about the dialogue of civilizations, when we talk about those vast civilizational entities that were spoken about yesterday, we also find that a similar dialogue occurs on a micro level in multi-cultural societies. As soon as I step out of my door, I can talk to somebody from Iran, from Morocco, or from South America; and this is the direction our societies are moving in. I think we could say that the USA (and Canada to a certain extent) are already multi-cultural societies; many European countries, such as the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Germany, Holland, are at least on some level multi-cultural. If you look at their football teams, you would think these countries are already much more multi-cultural than they really are, because of the acceptance and the representation of so-called “minorities” on these teams.

It’s not just a question of societies being multi-cultural; I think that I would characterize a country such as Brazil as a multi-ethnic country, not with a completely singular but definitely a homogeneous culture, although the ethnicity of the people in that culture is very varied. And I wonder how we would classify South Africa.

It does not matter very much how we classify these countries; the point I wanted to bring out is that the dialogue of civilizations, and these kind of larger questions are important because this is the reality that we live in; this is the way our societies are moving forward, and this is the way we are forging new identities in European countries and in other countries all over the world.

The other point I want to make is about the demonization of the Other – turning the Other into your enemy. I take my clue from Dr. Belkeziz’s paper, where he quotes the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who said that the challenge is to live, somehow, without making an enemy of somebody, an enemy that we can demonize and persecute, and that we sometimes seek to obliterate.

I was rather surprised when I thought back over the history of the twentieth century; some conflicts indeed were about race, or ethnicity, or religion, or different political ideologies. But many conflicts, and many of the enduring conflicts that we see today, are not primarily about race, ethnicity, or religion. The wars we see today are mostly civil wars, which sometimes include the purging of one’s own people. The conclusion that I draw from this is that it is not necessary to have religion as a divisive factor in order to demonize somebody else or to make an enemy out of a certain group. And so perhaps we should look for this human tendency to demonize at a deeper level, as a projection of a deeper fear, a human fear that we all have. Perhaps it is a natural, or an ingrained, or an inborn characteristic to project this fear onto
whomever we have in front of us, whatever group we can get, and it need not be a religious or ethnic group at all. Strangely, in many of the conflicts that we see today, the enemy is in fact a brother or sister, the enemy is in fact very close, in race, in religion, and in ethnic origin. This is the case in the Balkans, in the Middle East; it is certainly the case in Algeria where we have a civil war that is not really about religion or really about ethnicity.

In this sense I think we ought to be careful when we read the newspaper today; there is a general tendency of the media to report every conflict as being about race, or ethnicity, or religion, as being caused by old grievances or antagonisms stemming from a hundred or two hundred years ago. Instead, there are power plays at work, power plays that can be political or economic, and these power plays are somehow hidden by this insistence that these are religious or ethnic struggles.

And so to combine these points and to propose my suggestions for this discussion: We have dialogues both at the micro-level in our multi-cultural societies through our intercultural dialogue, and at the macro-level, in our study of the intercivilizational dialogue between different civilizations, different histories, and different mythologies. These dialogues make us realize, first, how much of being human we in fact have in common, that there is so much that is shared by all of us. They also show us on how much we can agree, and on how much more we can agree to disagree peacefully – for example, that in religion it is a matter of choice in which God you believe, and how you believe in that God. And, also, after that discussion, after the study on what unites us and what separates us, we will have unmasked the power plays which are left over after we have looked at all these differences, which may seem to be differences but often turn out not to be differences.

These were the two points that were suggested to me by the four papers this morning, and my two suggestions for discussion. Thank you.