

colonial entity, whose emasculated institutions, starting with the nation-state itself, were predominantly manned by westernized and pseudo-westernized and westernizing elements. The latter were the beneficiaries as well as the victims of the colonial rupture. (See below). Alienated from the mass culture, and themselves caught in the twilight zone of a post-traditional, pre-modern culture, they would seek the instruments of the modern age, the legacy of the colonial era, to model their societies on the Western metropole. It was not surprising therefore for the idiom of Middle Eastern politics to be a secularizing one. However, the political, social, and cultural realities of the region could hardly be contained within this idiom, and beneath a surface gloss, there was a far more complex core conditioned by the multiple facets of the living Islamic heritage.

3. Islam as Civilization: Form and Essence *The Equidynamics of Culture*

This is one of the multiple facets which could be briefly considered here in view of its implications for the modern setting. While an elaboration on the theme of Islam as the wellspring of civilization in the region is beyond our present scope, yet it is useful to point to the sources of its dynamic thrust in this direction and to indicate some of the attendant consequences. One of the more conspicuous traits about Islamic civilization was its ability not simply to contain diversity, but to positively thrive on it. This was not a matter of imperial expediency, nor was it the outcome of a maturing historical context. To be able to accommodate diversity, it was necessary to have a legitimating principle to this end. To be able to profit from it, it was necessary to have an *ethos* which favoured interaction. In both the one prerequisite and the other Islam played a decisive role. What could have been the sources of its impact?

To begin with, one could cite its attitude to adherents of other religions.²² In view of the paramountcy of the religious bond in the very foundation of its own community, including its political community one would expect an element of exclusiveness that would contest the right of other religious/ideological communities to share its political space. The lessons drawn from Catholic Spain after the *reconquista*, or those

22. A relevant and succinct overview in English is found in C. G. Weeramantry, *Islamic Jurisprudence: An International Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), pp. 85-93.

from the Bolsheviks nearer to our times would surely provide the expedient analogies in this domain. Yet, this was hardly the case here. Acknowledging *dīn* as bond of community, it consistently admitted the legitimacy of other groups founded on this bond. The designation of Christians and Jews in principle, as *ahl al kitāb*, for this privileged status of recognition, pointed to the essentials qualifying as *dīn*. (Idolatry and apostasies, for example, do not qualify as such). In practice this principle of tolerance and recognition was extended to other communities and was sanctified in a systemic and enduring "pact of protection" accorded the *ahl al dhimmah*.²³ Significantly, this acknowledgement went beyond the normative ideal to its institutional expression. By including them within the pale of the legitimate and legal system through their integration within a nexus of mutual rights and obligations, Islam established the institutional setting for a principled unity that accommodated differences and diversity. It was this which led a perceptive and honest commentator to observe that one of the most remarkable contributions of Islam to the formation of a modern universal conception lay in a tolerance which was a *religious obligation* and a *juridical imperative*.²⁴

Another example of the formative impact and the conditioning dynamic of Islam was in its life-affirming values, notably in its positive attitude to knowledge.²⁵ As with any civilization, learning is as much an index as a pillar, yet the dialectics of the process that promotes learning are usually so deeply encrusted in the growth of a civilization that it is impossible to disengage its principles or to single out an impetus or a motivating force for identification. In Islamic civilization this is not necessarily so. The lines are much shorter between the kind of lear-

23. This constituted a basic chapter in any work on Islamic jurisprudence, past or present. In the tradition entire volumes were given to defining the rights of non-Muslims and distinguishing categories, e.g., Ibn Qayyim al Jawziyyah, *huqūq ahl al dhimmah*; for a flavor of the classical Muslim approach, cf. Dr. Muhammad Fazlur Rahman Ansari, *The Qur'anic Foundations and Structures of Muslim Society* (Karachi: Trade and Industry Publications, 1973, 1977), vol. II, pp. 263-279; for a sensitive and informed discussion in the context of contemporary international order, see Marcel Boisard, *L'Humanisme de l'Islam* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979). References here are to the English translation (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1988), pp. 65-72 and 124-141.

24. Ibid., p. 125; cf. M. Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 144.

25. Weeramantry, op. cit., pp. 14-29, aptly discusses this point in a context which links knowledge to jurisprudence: cognition to the bedrock of socio-legal/ethical organization.

ning it fostered as a matrix for its civilization. The impetus to the learning process was extrinsic to the civilization that was built upon it and that came to interact with it, nourish and modulate it, but not to originate it.²⁶ This question is relevant for its implications for Muslims today as they seek to restructure their societies in the context of a global modulate. The fact that Islamic civilization was founded on a viable self-standing matrix of learning that was recognizably molded in its ethos is one thing. The realization that this matrix thrived on an episteme that was not contingent on the civilization in which it thrived is quite another thing.

In principle, Islam upheld the value of learning as intrinsic to the Faith, and in practice it fostered an ethic of perseverance in its active pursuit as a measure of devotion, *ibādah*. To this end too, it urged on Muslims the duty of unsparing expenditure in time, effort, and wealth.²⁷ In this way, Islam paved the way for an open outward looking interactive and dynamic setting which was conducive to a cultural florescence and in which everyone living within its parameters, Muslim and non-Muslim, could contribute.

In the context of an expanding dominion and sustained by a coherent and systemic nucleus of its own, Islam assimilated and synthesized a welter of diverse elements. It brought them together in what became a new heritage for humanity. It was this legacy which kept the torch burning through the ten centuries during which Europe was shrouded in its medieval slumber. Significantly, the assimilation and synthesis were produced in the framework of a distinctive code and environment imparted by the ethos of the Muslim Faith and by the character of its com-

26. This is because of the organic and dynamic link with the spirit of Qur'anic revelation as any acquaintance with the *turāth* literature will demonstrate, quite apart from the logic of conceptual inquiry. Cf. Z. Sardar, "Arguments for Islamic Science" in R. Ahmad and S. Naseem Ahmad, eds., *Quest for New Science* (Aligarh: Center for Studies on Science, 1984), pp. 31-75. For a useful state-of-the-art review of Muslim thinking and prospects, see M. Z. Kirmani, "Islamic Science: moving towards a new paradigm" in *An Early Crescent: The Future of Knowledge and the Environment in Islam* (London: Mansell, 1989), pp. 140-162.

27. It was the practice of this precept which virtually maintained a millenium of learning in the Muslim world. Al Maqrīzī, historian of the late Mamluk period in Egypt, tells how the lords of wealth sought out this mosque with different kinds of pious gifts such as gold, silver and money, in order to help the students to serve Allah" and the system of *riwāq* (colleges) relied on these endowments. See Bayard Dodge, *Al Azhar*, Memorial Edition, (Baltimore, MD: The Middle East Institute, 1974), pp. 69-70. Until the late nineteenth century education continued to be mainly a function of the community rather than of the state by virtue of the institution of *waqf* (charitable endowments). W. R. Polk, *The Arab World* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965, 1980), p. 289.

munity. In the civilization so nurtured, there was thus more than a juxtaposition of diversity, or a collision of incongruities - held together by systemic tensions, as some analysts would propose.²⁸ Nor was the emerging complex stamped with the genius and caprice of a racial breed or a peculiar generation, as advocates of variations of "The Genius of Arab Civilization" might contend.²⁹ There was indeed, nothing monolithic about this structure.

For all the diversity it embraced and the "individuality" it enhanced, Islamic civilization bore the unmistakable imprint of the "ideational cosmos" in which it evolved. This is a notion used here to refer to an essential socio-cultural consonance which reflects and mediates elements of an ecological, as well as a *communological* balance.³⁰ This essential consonance yielded a pervasive equidynamic which characterized the Muslim city and lent it a dynamic which went beyond the dialectics of constraint and defiance. It was this dynamic which might be seen to underlie the various cultural accomplishments in the arts and the sciences as they developed under the aegis of an Islamic commonwealth. It also lent the historical Muslim city, the *madīnah*, an element of

28. Eg. Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), p. 10. This is a good example of how an orientalist reading is projected into the social sciences to the detriment of interpreting the Islamic dimension in contemporary politics and society. See esp. chapters I, 2, and 11.

29. Title of a volume edited by J. R. Hayes (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1983), 2nd ed. Cf. Rom Landau, *The Arab Heritage of Western Civilization* (New York: The League of Arab States, 1962, 1975), which is written in a similar vein, and this may be contrasted with the approach in Roger Garaudy's *L'Islam habite notre Avenir* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1981).

30. "The city as an ecosystem of human groups" can best be understood, analyzed, deconstructed and reconstructed in terms of the values and belief-system of a culture and of a people. For a diagnosis of decline and decay in the modern Muslim city see Gulzar Haidar, "The City Never Lies," *Inquiry*, June 1985; changing metaphors from the obsolete "City" of history/utopia to the post-civilizational compatible of a Universal Moral Order is argued by Parvez Manzoor, (inquiry, March 1987) who has contoured the fundamentals of a Muslim perspective on "Environment and Values" (*The Touch of Midas*); the most recent critical statement on the future Muslim city (or "UMO") in the context of issues of "Urbanization and the Environment" comes from Hussein Mehmet Ateshün (*An Early Crescent*). From the ongoing debate it is possible to infer that the *tawhīdī* episteme comprises principles for ordering inter-human or inter-communal relations in the context of a global ecosystem: these have imprinted Islamic civilization in the past and must reflect on its reconstruction in the future: not just out of necessity but out of an inherent responsiveness to the needs of the universal global order.

coherence within and across the various local communities throughout the urban cultural centers of Islam.

This civilization went into eclipse with the steady degeneration of society. More particularly, its fate was bonded to the polity in more ways than one. It suffered its decline before the dramatic oscillation in fortune that overtook the successive dynastic states and the imperial mentors who had sustained its edifice through various points in time. Yet, Islamic civilization retains an essential validity that survives its historicity. To the extent that we encounter in it a model where a dominant order came to accommodate in principle the differences among its constituents and where in practice it protected the autonomy of its communities, there is something to be learned from it in any future attempt to restructure the contemporary regional order.

4. The State: Power and Polity ***Marginalizing the Center***

This is another facet of the Muslim historical reality which needs to be seen within its socio-cultural context. It carries direct implications for the contemporary political setting in the region. By now it is clear that Islam prescribes more than an ethical code for individuals to observe in their daily conduct. It is incumbent on a Muslim to strive to set up an equitable order where justice and goodness may be practiced. At the same time, Islam requires a public order that can assure the community the conditions necessary to fulfilling its religious obligations. The understanding of political obligation in the community is a function of the legitimacy of this order.

The basis of the legitimately conceived public order is the shar'i'ah, which constitutes the constitutional framework for a Muslim polity and provides the criteria for legitimacy in the system.³¹ The fundamental relationship between the ruler and the ruled is essentially of the contractual variety, embodied in an oath of allegiance, or a *bay'ah*,

31. For an overview of current scholarship and future prospects in Islamic political theory see the introduction by Mumtaz Ahmad in his edited volume on *State, Politics and Islam* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986). The authors discuss different concepts and aspects of conventional political thought in a comparative context and attempt to relate them to issues facing modern Muslim polities.