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Ibn Khaldun's Understanding of Civilizations and the Dilemmas of Islam and the West Today

Akbar Ahmed

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, new attention is being paid to both sides of the debate over the competing ideas of a "clash of civilizations" and that of a "dialogue of civilizations;" in this article, Ibn Khaldun's analysis of civilizations is examined in the context of the dilemmas faced by Islam and the West today.

ISLAM VERSUS THE WEST?

In the century just begun, how we organize our lives, view our own cultures and interact with others will be shaped by the outcome of a struggle between two diametrically opposed ideas. These ideas are further separated, and the differences between them sharpened, by the process which has come to be called globalization.¹ The first of

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1. For different perspectives on globalization see the work of Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (London: Routledge, 1992); Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); Ralph Braibanti, "Islam and the West: Common Cause or Clash?" (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, Occasional Paper Series, The Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, 1999); Richard Falk, *Predatory Globalization: A Critique* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); Alija Ali Izetbegovic, *Islam between East and West* (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 1993); Muhammad Khatami, "Dialogue of Civilizations" (New York: United Nations General Assembly, September 24, 1998); John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *A Future Perfect: The Challenge and Hidden Promise of Globalization* (New York: Times Books, 2000); M. Patricia Mische and Melissa Merklung (eds.), *Towards a Global Civilization? The Contribution of Religions* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2001). Lewis approaches the same subject from a historical perspective: Bernard Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*,

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these opposed ideas is the so-called “Clash of Civilizations” in which Muslims are invariably seen as the main opponents of the West. This Muslim-Western opposition is not a new idea² and is, in fact, a continuation of older ideas about Islam as a predatory civilization threatening the West.³

The second and opposed idea is the “Dialogue of Civilizations,” introduced by President Muhammad Khatami of Iran in the United Nations⁴ and supported by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. President Khatami’s statement made a dramatic impact because his country is associated in Western minds with “terrorism” and “extremism”

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(New York: Schocken Books, 1998); Friedman from that of a journalist: Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000); Mittelman that of a political economist: James Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Giddens from that of a sociologist: Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization is reshaping our lives*, (London: Routledge, 2000); and Kottak that of an anthropologist: Conrad Phillip Kottak, *Cultural Anthropology*, (University of Michigan and New York: McGraw-Hill, Higher Education, 2000). For a more apocalyptic interpretation see Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1986) and Grace Halsell, *Forcing God’s Hand – Why Millions Pray for a Quick Rapture – and destruction of Planet Earth* (Washington, DC: Crossroads Int. Publishing, 1999); Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized violence in a Global era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); Robert Kaplan, *The End of the Earth: From Togo to Turkmenistan, from Iran to Cambodia, a Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

2. The idea is contained in the simplistic division of the world into *dar al-Islam* – the land of Islam — and *dar al-harb* – the land of war. The concept can be traced to the origins of Islam. After the Prophet’s migration to Medina, the town was declared *dar al-Islam* while Mecca, from where he fled, remained *dar-al-harb*. Ira G. Zepp Jr., *A Muslim Primer: Beginner’s Guide to Islam*, (Westminster, Maryland: Wakefield Editions, 1992), p.30. Also see AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Methodology and Thought*, (Herndon, Virginia: International Institute for Islamic Thought, 1993); and Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

3. Professor Richard Falk points out: “To a large extent, this human rights discourse is unavoidably perceived, with varying degrees of justification and opportunism, as tainted by false universalism and is an expression of Western hegemony, one feature of which has been, and continues to be, the suppression of civilizational identity and difference – particularly Islam, which has historically been perceived as a threat by the West.” Richard Falk, *Human Rights Horizons: the Pursuit of Justice in a Globalizing World*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 150; Also see Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, (New York: Times Books, 1995); John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or a Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996); Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, *A Sense of Siege*, (Boulder, CO: Westview/RAND, 1995); Izetbegovic, *Islam between East and West*.

4. President Muhammad Khatami of Iran, in his text to the United Nations General Assembly in New York on the 24th of September 1998, strongly and clearly advocated a “Dialogue of Civilizations” (Muhammad Khatami, “Dialogue of Civilizations”; see especially pages 12 and 13). The two doves on the text of the statement symbolized its content. For a detailed discussion of the concept see *Dialogue of Civilization: An Introductory Civilizational Analysis* by Victor Segesvary (Lanham, Maryland: United Press of America, 2000); also see Giandomenico Picco, “A Dialogue Among Civilizations,” in *Seton Hall Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter/Spring, 2001), pp. 5-10.

although this idea too is not entirely new. World figures like Pope John Paul II,⁵ the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Prince Charles of Great Britain, and Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, on one level, and many others,⁶ on another level, have been involved in their own ways in precisely this kind of dialogue for many years. For people of good will or faith the idea of dialogue lies at the heart of the human condition and the need to reach out.

The idea of dialogue was struck a deadly blow in America on September 11, 2001, when the four hijacked planes killed thousands of innocent people and destroyed the lives of many more. Other global ideas lay buried in the rubble of the World Trade Center in New York and in the smoking ruin of the Pentagon in Washington: that of triumphant globalization as an irresistible, irreversible process and the idea of America as an impregnable fortress.

On that extraordinary day, the President of the United States was on the run, zigzagging across America in Air Force One, escorted by F-16s and F-15s, until he returned to the capital late in the day to take charge. Stocks tumbled, the Stock Exchange closed, all flights were suspended, emergency was declared in several states and false alarms sent people scurrying for their lives. The scenes of panic on television would have seemed farfetched and unreal in a Hollywood film.

America began to recover quickly from the unprecedented carnage and mayhem; its native optimism began to reassert itself. The stars and stripes appeared everywhere and interfaith dialogue was heard across the land. President George W. Bush made a welcome visit to the Islamic Center in Washington, DC. Dramatically, imperceptibly, the miasmic pall of uncertainty, of our lives being vulnerable and out of control, that hangs over much of the world now descended on Americans. People were aware that something had changed fundamentally.

A sense of urgency, panic and even hysteria was created by the media. Anthrax cases, fires in the subway, even a tremor in California – everything was instinctively being blamed on the “terrorists.” The news and discussions in the media were broadcast under the heading “America Under Attack,” “Why do they hate us?” asked Americans. War was declared on “terrorists” and in early October the bombing of Afghanistan began. Muslim demonstrators protested in many parts of the world.

Wars are usually a consequence of the breakdown of communication between the protagonists. In this case it was a totally asymmetrical war in the most profound ways possible: the two different societies, one highly industrialized and world-dominating, the other still pre-industrial, impoverished and tribal spoke different languages and lived in different cultures. The only thing in common was the mutual incomprehension with which they viewed each other.

American commentators pointed to Iraq, Syria, and Iran as other “terrorist” states and potential targets. Pakistan, which had nurtured and supported the Taliban in Afghanistan, escaped the wrath of the Americans by hastily ditching the Taliban and

5. See John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

6. Most scholars referred to in this article have been actively involved in a dialogue of civilizations through their contribution to human knowledge.

siding with the Americans. Usama bin Ladin in an extraordinary interview broadcast on American television⁷ argued that this was a war between Islam and the West. The main grievances he listed were the plight of the Palestinians and the people of Iraq; foreign, non-Muslim troops stationed in Saudi Arabia and the oppression of Muslims by repressive Muslim regimes. The list struck a nerve in the mosques, shantytowns, and bazaars of the Muslim world. The idea of Islam as an enemy was gaining ground in the West in spite of Western leaders insisting this was not true.

Commentators had associated Muslims with the September 11 attacks from the moment the news broke. Usama bin Ladin, who had threatened the United States with mass terror on several occasions, was widely believed to be the mastermind. If a Peruvian or a Japanese cult had stepped forward and claimed that they had organized the attacks it would not have mattered. In the public mind Islam was to blame. Reports of the harassment of Muslims and attacks on mosques began to circulate. Girls wearing the *hijab* were attacked and abused. Arabs and Pakistanis were killed; so was a Sikh, mistaken, because of his beard and turban, for a Muslim. The years of negative press, news of hijacking or hostage taking or honor killings, reinforced by big budget, mainstream Hollywood films like *True Lies*, *Executive Decision* and *The Siege*, had conditioned the public to expect the worst from a civilization widely viewed as “terrorist,” “fundamentalist,” and “fanatic.” Immediately, unthinkingly, the explosions in Oklahoma City in 1995 were at first blamed on the Muslims. It was hard for the media to accept that a white Anglo-Saxon American man was behind it.

Muslims were not helping their case after September 11. Muslim guilt seemed to be confirmed for Americans long before any concrete evidence came in, as they saw the jubilation in parts of the Muslim world where people distributed sweets and chanted slogans against America. Although these were small groups, the insensitivity of the Muslim reaction rubbed salt into American wounds. Any doubts about taking a savage revenge were removed. Few recognized the humiliation, terror, and neurosis in Muslim society from the decades of emotional and physical violence that they had been subjected to; and fewer understood that many Muslims blamed America for their plight. The idea of Islam set on a collision course with America triumphed over any other ideas of global peace and dialogue.

Yet the actions of the hijackers had nothing to do with Islamic theology. The killing of innocent civilians is specifically forbidden in the Qur’an. Killing a single innocent individual is like killing all of humanity, warns the Holy Book.⁸ The actions of the hijackers may have had nothing to do with Islam; the consequences and causes of their action will have everything to do with how and where Islam will be going in the 21st century.

What we will increasingly face in the century is the possibility of a few determined men hijacking the engine of a global religion and by their actions involving

7. Interview with Al-Jazeera television (Qatar), broadcast October 7, 2001, and rebroadcast regularly on CNN in the United States.

8. Holy Qur’an, Sura V (*Al-Ma’ida*), 32; English translation as here from *The Meaning of the Glorious Quran*, translated by Marmaduke Pickthall (Hyderabad-Deccan, India: Government Central Press, 1938).

millions of people. What September 11 illustrated was the ability of a few determined individuals to pull in their entire civilization, whether it agrees or does not agree with their thinking or actions, into a confrontation with other civilizations. If a group of Hindus demolishes a mosque in Ayodhya in India, or Muslims blow up Buddhist statues at Bamiyan in Afghanistan, their religions are associated in the world media with these acts of extremism.

Now imagine the ultimate nightmare terrorist scenario: the destruction of the al-Aqsa mosque or the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, the holy city for all three faiths and the one city where the three faiths live side by side and which has the potential to create positive and serious interfaith interaction. The mosque is one of the holiest in Islam and the site associated with the origins of the faith.

If some trained and determined individuals were to blow up the mosque – as many have threatened to do for political and religious reasons – the action would have the potential to trigger immediate world conflict. Islam could be set on a collision course with Judaism and Christianity. The “war” may not have military battles because governments do not respond in apocalyptic terms, but Muslims, whether living in the West or their own homelands, might be determined to take revenge by acts of violence. If it came to Jerusalem, few Muslims – however keen on dialogue – would want to be involved in attempting to explain what happened. Emotions would be too powerful for rational thought. Dialogue and understanding would simply be ignored.

Yet the idea of a dialogue of civilizations is central to the Muslim perception of self. By knowing God as Compassionate and Merciful – the two most frequently repeated names of God of the 99 names – Muslims know they must embrace others even those who may not belong to their community, religion or nation. God tells us in the holy Qur’an to appreciate the variety He has created in human society: “And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colors.”⁹ The examination of language and color or race is the stock-in-trade of the social scientist and this I believe is a good point to introduce Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406).

IBN KHALDUN AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF CIVILIZATIONS

Unfortunately the names of Muslim scholars are not as well known in the West today as I believe they should be. When I talk of Ibn Khaldun people usually ask: Who is he? Another “terrorist”? Any links to Usama bin Ladin? Or is he an oil shaykh or an Arab minister? Even the scholars who have heard of Ibn Khaldun may well ask: How is Ibn Khaldun, the Arab in question, relevant to our problems in the 21st century?

However, I am confident that there will be others (particularly among readers of *The Middle East Journal*) who will recognize the relevance of my theme – Ibn Khaldun and the understanding of civilizations. The noted historian Arnold Toynbee, recognizing the scope and scale of Ibn Khaldun’s work, called it “undoubtedly the greatest

9. Holy Qur’an, Sura XXX (*Al-Rum*), verse 22.

work of its kind that has ever yet been created by any mind in any time or place.”¹⁰ Not only is Ibn Khaldun generally recognized as the “father, or one of the fathers, of modern cultural history and social science”¹¹ influencing and shaping these disciplines into our time, but his work provides the intellectual point at which other world scholars connect in genuine appreciation.¹²

Ibn Khaldun’s ideas foreshadow those of our own time. “Some of the central formulae of the modern age,” I noted with an element of awe while attempting to discover the relationship of Muslim history to society over a decade ago, “are reflected in Ibn Khaldun’s theories: Karl Marx’s stages of human history which provide the dynamics for the dialectics of conflict between groups; Max Weber’s typology of leadership; Vilfredo Pareto’s circulation of elites; and Ernest Gellner’s pendulum swing theory of Islam, oscillating from an urban, formal literal tradition to a rural, informal and mystical one.”¹³

Indeed Emile Durkheim’s concept of “mechanical” and “organic solidarity” reflects Ibn Khaldun’s notion of ‘*asabiyya*’ or “social cohesion”. It is ‘*asabiyya*’ that is at the core of the Khaldunian understanding of society and we shall return to it. Durkheim, himself one of the founding fathers of modern social science, showed us how the collapse of solidarity led to abnormal behavior. He called this anomie. I will argue below that a kind of global anomie is what Muslim society is experiencing as a result of the breakdown of ‘*asabiyya*’.

There is a fundamental difference however between the modern Western sociologists and Ibn Khaldun. For all his “scientific” objectivity – and for many Muslims it is excessive – Ibn Khaldun still writes as a believer. There is a moral imperative in his interpretation of ‘*asabiyya*’ as the organizing principle of society. Muslims see human beings as having been created to implement the vision of God on earth through their behavior and organization of society. The human being is a Vice-regent of God according to the Qur’an (Sura II, *Al-Baqara*, verse 30.) So ‘*asabiyya*’ as an organizing principle is not “value-free.”

“Social organization,” Ibn Khaldun wrote, “is necessary to the human species. Without it, the existence of human beings would be incomplete. God’s desire to settle

10. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, translated by Franz Rosenthal in three volumes, one volume abridgement by N.J. Dawood (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. xiv, citing an original review by Toynbee in *The Observer*.

11. Muhsin Mahdi, “Ibn Khaldun” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Edited by David L. Sills (New York, The MacMillan Co., 1968), Vol. 7, pp. 56.

12. I know of few international scholars who attract the range and quality of scholars from such different backgrounds as does Ibn Khaldun. Among them, to name a few, almost at random, are Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Lawrence Rosen, *Bargaining for Reality: The Construction of Social Relations in a Muslim Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984); Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (Cambridge, UK, The Islamic Texts Society, 1995); and Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun’s Philosophy of History: A Study in the Foundation of the Science of Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957).

13. Akbar S. Ahmed, *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*, (London: Routledge, 1988), pp 101.

the world with human beings and to leave them as His representatives on earth would not materialize. This is the meaning of civilization, the object of the science under discussion.”¹⁴ The social order thus reflects the moral order; the former cannot be in a state of collapse without suggesting a moral crisis.

Ibn Khaldun’s methodological approach demonstrates intellectual confidence. Although based in sociology, Ibn Khaldun discussed in his analysis the impact of Greek philosophy on society¹⁵ the interpretation of dreams¹⁶ the influence of climate and food¹⁷ and the effect of the personality of the leader in the rise and fall of dynasties¹⁸ In using cross-cultural comparison, Arab, Berber, Turk and Mongol groups would provide him the data for his theories. Besides, he was not writing as an isolated scholar in an ivory tower but from the vantage point of a political actor in the history of his time. The rich material he gathered was the basis for his *‘Ilm al-‘umran* or “the science of culture or society.”

“Ibn Khaldun’s life,” I wrote, “forms a bridge, a transition, between the distinct phases of Muslim history which we are examining: the Arab dynasties in the tail-end of which – as in Umayyad Spain – he lived, and the great Muslim empires which would develop by the end of the century in which he died. His life also teaches us many things, confirming them for us in our own period: the uncertainty of politics; the fickleness of rulers; the abrupt changes of fortune, in jail one day, honored the next; and finally, the supremacy of the ideal in the constant, unceasing, search for *‘ilm*, knowledge, and therefore the ultimate triumph of the human will and intellect against all odds.”¹⁹

All of us in the 21st century need to be grateful to Ibn Khaldun for reminding us of the lesson of “the human will and intellect.” We need to acknowledge the American University in Washington DC for keeping the memory of Ibn Khaldun alive by naming a Chair after him. I held the Fellowship (Chair) named in honor of ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal at Cambridge University for five years. For me now to write as the Ibn Khaldun Chair at another Western University is a singular honor because I believe that though the two, Iqbal the poet-philosopher and Ibn Khaldun the sociologist, represent different zones, different disciplines and different approaches together they provide a rich mine for contemporary scholarship and an authentic basis for the dialogue of civilizations. Let us examine some current global theories about society.

GLOBAL THEORIES

We must not consider this discussion as merely an academic exercise or one motivated by a woolly if well-intentioned effort at interfaith dialogue. The events of September 11 have made it clear how urgent it is to understand Islam in our world. Just

14. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, pp. 46.

15. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, pp. 373-375.

16. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, pp. 70-87.

17. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, pp. 58-69.

18. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, pp. 238-261.

19. Ahmed, *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*, p. 106.

the span and scale of Muslim society warrant understanding. There are 55 Muslim states – of which at least one is a nuclear power — and Islam has over one billion followers with abundant vitality and passion whose spread is now truly global. The urgency demands a two way process: for Muslims to explain Islam to non-Muslims and for non-Muslims to be responsive and make an effort to understand.

Yet Muslims appear to be reluctant to participate in dialogue. They appear to be challenged by certain cultural and intellectual aspects of globalization because many appear to equate globalization with Westernization. In this, they echo many Western analysts who also equate the two. Indeed Anthony Giddens argues modernity itself, the very engine driving globalization, is a “Western project.”²⁰ Thomas Friedman narrows globalization down further to “Americanization”.²¹

Although Muslims appear to be uncomfortable with globalization, the idea and practice of globalization are familiar to Muslim history. Islam’s vision of the world is by definition global. There is neither East nor West for God.²² Islamic history has had long periods in which we recognize elements from what we today call globalization: societies living within different ethnic, geographic and political boundaries, but speaking a language understood throughout, enjoying a common cultural sensibility and recognizing the same over-arching ethos in the world-view (see Albert Hourani²³ and Marshall Hodgson²⁴ for just how much globalization there once was in Islamic civilization). A man could travel from Granada in Europe to the Maghreb in North Africa, on to Cairo, then to the Arabian peninsula and from there to Baghdad across three continents, and still be in one familiar culture. Ibn Khaldun in the 14th century AD is just one such example.

Another aspect of that time can provide inspiration for those of us searching the past for examples of the dialogue of civilizations. The Jews, Christians and Muslims living in Spain until late in the 15th century AD created a rich cultural synthesis, each culture enriching the other, which resulted in literature, art and architecture of high quality. The library in Cordoba in Spain (al-Andalus) had more books than all the other libraries of Europe put together. There were long periods of religious and cultural harmony.²⁵ The influence of Muslim ideas, culture, art and architecture on Europe was wide and deep. Key figures like Thomas Aquinas were influenced by Islamic thought. The Greeks were introduced to Europe via Muslim Spain and through the

20. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1990), p. 174.

21. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, p. xix.

22. *Holy Qur’an*, Sura II (*Al-Baqara*), Verse 115.

23. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991).

24. M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 3 Volumes.

25. Some scholars see America as having the potential to create a genuinely harmonious multi-religious and multi-cultural society. See Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How A “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, (San Francisco: Harper, 2001). As Muslims become more visible incidents against the community appear to be on the rise. Anti-Muslim incidents rose by 15% in the year 2000-2001 according to a report, “Accommodating Diver-

filter of Arabic.

Most people in the West are unaware of Europe's cultural and intellectual debt to Islam. Muslims take this indifference as a deliberate slight. It provides the background to why they view with suspicion developments in our time. It allows them to simplify global issues and interpret a series of recent developments, on the surface unconnected, as a well-laid plan by the West to humiliate and even subjugate them: Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* controversy, the collapse of the Bank of Commerce and Credit International (BCCI), the Gulf War, the rape and death camps of Bosnia, Kosova and Chechnya and the continuing plight of the Palestinians and Kashmiris. In turn, critics accuse Muslims of human rights abuse in many countries including Sudan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Pakistan, in an extreme act of desperation, a Bishop shot himself in protest at the treatment of his community.

In this milieu of suspicion even scholarly exercises such as Samuel Huntington's essay, "The Clash of Civilizations?"²⁶ and later book,²⁷ Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*,²⁸ and Felipe Fernandez Armesto's *Millennium*²⁹ are seen by Muslims as part of a global conspiracy against Islam, part of a bludgeon-Islam-out-of-existence school of thought.

However, what cannot be denied is that these theorists made an unexpected contribution to the discussion of Islam by underlining the role of religion in contemporary global society. It is no longer possible to talk of globalization in terms of world trade and high finance only. However these theories have allowed deeply rooted historical prejudices to resurface. In discussion, at times, lamentably, even giving them a degree of respectability.

In his influential essay "The Clash of Civilizations?" Huntington argued that future conflicts will be based on religious culture, not on ideology or economic interests. Islam was singled out as a potential enemy civilization in an argument that was as deterministic as it was simplistic. "Islam has bloody borders," concluded Huntington

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sity", issued by the Council for American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) in August 2001. See also Paul Findley, *Silent No More: Confronting America's False Images of Islam*, (Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 2001). "These incidents, many of which involved denial of religious accommodation in the workplace (48 percent) or schools (15 percent)," notes the CAIR report, "included thirty Muslim employees in Minnesota who walked off the job because they were denied the right to pray, a correctional officer in New York who was denied the right to wear a beard, a woman in Illinois who was fired for wearing a religiously-mandated head scarf, Muslim students in Virginia who were told they could no longer hold obligatory Friday prayers in school, and even a shotgun attack on a mosque in Tennessee that left one worshiper wounded." More committed and vigorous work needs to be done in this area especially after the backlash against Muslims as a result of the events of September 11.

26. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer 1993).

27. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

28. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Bard, 1998).

29. Felipe Fernandez Armesto, *Millennium: A History of the Last Thousand Years*, (New York: Scribner, 1995).

(p. 35). But if the Bosnians and Chechens, the Palestinians and the Kashmiris are asked about their borders they would say the same of, respectively, Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism. This dangerously deterministic argument takes us directly to a clash of civilizations. It carries the danger of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. Yet we will see below the real clash, the cause of the turmoil, is to be located *within* Islam.

Besides, the global strategic and security interests of the West are directly related to Muslim lands and many Muslim nations are seen as important allies: of the nine "pivotal states" identified in a recent article by Western experts around which America forms its foreign policy five were Muslim: Algeria, Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan and Indonesia.³⁰ In addition over 20 million Muslims are permanently settled in the West and ignored by the "Clash" writers like Huntington. The events of September 11 underlined their role as a bridge between the two civilizations. They carried the potential to challenge the "Islam versus the West" dichotomy.

Then there are the serious efforts, at a global level, perhaps for the first time on this scale and frequency, of influential individuals advocating mutual understanding. The Pope's statements are one example.³¹ The Prince of Wales' initiative to bring better understanding between Islam and Western civilization, which began with his celebrated lecture at Oxford in 1993 on "Islam and the West,"³² is another example. The speech was widely reported in the Muslim world and struck a chord. The King of Saudi Arabia, one of the most powerful and inaccessible monarchs on earth, broke all protocol and drove to the Prince's hotel late at night to congratulate him when the Prince visited his country shortly after the lecture.

Although provocative and widely discussed, theories like Huntington's are inadequate. Let us look elsewhere for explanations as to what is happening in the Muslim world.

THE BREAKDOWN OF IBN KHALDUN'S CYCLE

Ibn Khaldun highlighted the importance of the ruler and his duties to the ruled in this world so that both might aspire to and secure the next. The leader embodies both political and moral authority.³³ Ibn Khaldun's science of culture ultimately functions to illuminate the science of good governance. In our time, one of the major crises that faces Muslim society is that of leadership. Yet even influential contemporary Western thinkers commenting on Islam, like Huntington and Fukuyama, have failed to discuss the importance of Muslim leadership.

30. Robert Chase et al., "Pivotal States and US Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 1, (January/February, 1996).

31. His Holiness John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* .

32. "Islam and the West," speech by the Prince of Wales, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, October 27, 1993.

33. See Akbar S. Ahmed, *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin*, (London: Routledge, 1997) and Akbar S. Ahmed, *The Quaid: Jinnah and the Story of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Abdal Majid al Najjar, *The Viceregency of Man: Between Revelation and Reason* (Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2000).

On the surface there is a bewildering range of Muslim leadership: kings, military dictators, democrats and, as in Afghanistan at least until recently, young and inexperienced tribal men or religious scholars (the meaning of *Taliban*) running a country. The Taliban and their guest from Saudi Arabia, Usama bin Ladin, who is accused of masterminding the attacks on America on September 11, 2001, and before that the bombing of the American embassies in Africa in 1998 and the USS *Cole* in Aden harbor in his war against “Jews and Crusaders,” symbolize a certain Muslim response to our time. In other countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Pakistan and Indonesia, Muslim leaders akin to the Taliban in thought and behavior actively challenge government. The Iranians, themselves considered fanatics by some in the West, complain that the Taliban are so extreme that they are giving Islam a bad name. Clearly, ideas and styles of Muslim leadership are varied and hotly contested.

What then is going on in Muslim society? Who are the emerging leaders? Defining these leaders is no longer a simple question of taxonomy but of examining what factors are responsible for their emergence and the changes taking place in society. The collapse of leadership is thus a symptom of the breakdown of society and is also a cause of the breakdown.

It is time to turn for assistance to Ibn Khaldun’s most widely known theory, that of *‘asabiyya* or social cohesion, which is at the core of social organization. *‘Asabiyya* binds groups together through a common language, culture, and code of behavior and when there is conscious approximation of behavior to an idea of the ideal, at different levels, family, clan, tribe, and kingdom or nation, society is whole. With *‘asabiyya*, society fulfills its primary purpose to function with integrity and transmits its values and ideas to the next generation. *‘Asabiyya* is what traditional societies possess (the Arabic root has to do with the cohesiveness of the tribe), but which is broken down in urbanized society over a period of time. Of course, Ibn Khaldun pointed out that certain civilized societies based in cities with developed social organization, arts and crafts, may take a long time to break down.

Ibn Khaldun famously suggested that rural and tribal peoples come down from the mountains to urban areas and dominate them, and four generations on, as they absorb the manners and values of urban life, they lose their special quality of social cohesion and become effete and therefore vulnerable to fresher invasions from the hills.³⁴ This cyclical, if over-simplified, pattern of rise and fall held for centuries and up to the advent of European colonialism.³⁵ Even the disruptive force of European imperialism over the 19th and 20th centuries did not fully break the cycle.

Paradoxically, it is only after independence from the European colonial powers in the middle of the 20th century, when Muslim societies should have become stronger and more cohesive, that Ibn Khaldun’s cycle began to be seriously affected. It is now

34. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, pp. 123-142.

35. Ibn Khaldun was studying society in the western part of the Muslim world. But the Khaldunian cyclical pattern of rise and fall of dynasties held in Central and South Asia as well. Tribes from Central Asia invaded India and gave it seven dynasties, which ruled from Delhi each one in turn becoming effete over the generations and giving way to those with stronger *‘asabiyya* from the north.

drying up at the source. Tribal and rural groups can no longer provide *'asabiyya*; urban areas in any case are inimical to it: the result is loss of vigor and cohesion. Muslims everywhere will voice their alarm at the breakdown of society. They know that something is going fundamentally wrong but are not sure why.

Some Americans thought they had the answer. It came in response to the question Americans asked after September 11, "Why do they hate us?" And because psychiatrists play such an important role in interpreting behavior in American society the answers were couched in terms of "envy," "jealousy," and "hatred." We will look elsewhere for the answers. We will examine the reasons why *'asabiyya* is collapsing and the consequences of the collapse.

'Asabiyya is breaking down in the Muslim world because of the following reasons: massive urbanization, dramatic demographic changes, a population explosion, large-scale migrations to the West, the gap between rich and poor which is growing ominously wide, the widespread corruption and mismanagement of rulers, the rampant materialism coupled with the low premium on scholarship, the crisis of identity and, perhaps most significantly, new and often alien ideas and images, at once seductive and repellent, instantly communicated from the West which challenge traditional values and customs. This process of breakdown is taking place when a large percentage of the population in the Muslim world is young, dangerously illiterate, mostly jobless and therefore easily mobilized for radical change.³⁶

Globalization is the easy target when looking around for something to blame for the problems of our world. But *'asabiyya* was damaged from the mid-twentieth century onwards as a direct result of political developments: the creation of Pakistan and Israel, the full-blown revolution in Iran, the civil war situation in Algeria, Afghanistan and parts of Central Asia displaced and killed millions, split communities and shattered families.

JAHANNUM (HELL) OR JAIL: THE DILEMMA OF THE MUSLIM SCHOLAR

Following Khaldunian logic, with *'asabiyya* breaking down, society can no longer implement God's vision for human civilization. The crisis is compounded as the scholars of Islam who can offer balanced advice and guidance are in disarray. Muslims believe that those who possess *'ilm*, or knowledge, best explain the idea of what God desires from us on earth. So central is *'ilm* to understanding Islam that it is the second most used word in the Koran. The Prophet's *hadith*, saying, "The death of a scholar, is the death of knowledge" emphasizes the importance of scholarship.³⁷

36. See *Human Development Report* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, United Nations Development Program, 1995). Also see Shahid Javed Burki, "Population as an Asset," *Pakistan Link* (California), August 10, 2001. Burki makes the telling point through a comparison between Pakistan with a population of 140 million, and one of the largest Muslim nations, and the United States: Pakistan has 72 million people under the age of 19, America 70 million, although the population of Pakistan is half of that of the United States.

37. This *hadith* is found, for example, in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Number 6763, and *Sunan Darami*, number 242.

Unfortunately, the reality in the Muslim world is that scholars are silenced, humiliated or chased out of their homes.³⁸ The implications for society are enormous. In the place of scholars advising, guiding, and criticizing the rulers of the day, we have the sycophants and the secret services. The wisdom, compassion and learning of the former risk the danger of being replaced by the paranoia and neurosis of the latter. And where do the scholars escape? To America or Europe. Yet it is popular to blame the West, to blame others, for conspiracies.

With the scholars driven out or under pressure to remain silent it is not surprising that the Muslim world's statistics in education are among the lowest in the world. The literacy figures are far from satisfactory, and for women they are alarming. As a result women in the Muslim world are deprived of their inheritance and their rights, and the men in their families tell them that this is Islam.

With those scholars silenced who can provide objectivity within the Islamic tradition and resilience in times of change, other kinds of religious scholars – like the Taliban –working in a different tradition interpret Islam narrowly. Islam for them has become a tool of repression. Its brunt is felt by women and the minorities. Political tyranny also grows unchecked, as the scholars are not at hand to comment and criticize.

Professor AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, the President of the International Institute for Islamic Thought and based in America, summed up the crisis to me in personal conversation: “The Muslim scholar is either caught between the ignorant Mullahs threatening him with *Jahannum* (hell) or the corrupt rulers threatening him with jail.”³⁹ *Jahannum* or jail was the choice. This was the direct consequence of the collapse of ‘*asabiyya*’.

38. The picture of Professor Saad Eddin Ibrahim [Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim], the noted Egyptian scholar and Director of the Ibn Khaldun Center in Cairo, on the cover of *The New York Times Magazine* (June 17, 2001) behind bars and in a cage was a powerful metaphor for Muslim scholarship in the world today. Professor Saad Eddin Ibrahim in Egypt, like Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia, is in jail charged with embezzlement and spying for the West – standard charges across the two continents; Anwar Ibrahim was also charged with homosexuality. Both are critical thinkers actively involved in their societies. They are not alone in being persecuted. An entire generation of scholars has been eliminated in countries like Algeria and Afghanistan. For a detailed analysis of persecuted scholars see Deina Abdelkader, *Social Justice in Islam* (Herndon, Virginia, International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2000). A Muslim scholar puts the case forcefully: “It is not an easy task for any conscientious Muslim intellectual in the Muslim world or in the West to undertake this critical task without endangering his or her life.” Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, pp. 149, fn 38. Also see Akbar S. Ahmed and Lawrence Rosen, “Islam, Academe, and Freedom of the Mind,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 2, 2001. There is another category of scholars on the run. Writers like Salman Rushdie of *Satanic Verses* fame and Khalid Duran, author of *Children of Abraham: An Introduction to Islam for Jews* (Hoboken, NJ: The American Jewish Committee, Distributed by Ktav Publishing House, 2001), both in hiding for fear of their lives, form a distinct category for Muslims because they have a Muslim background. They are seen as beyond the pale by most Muslims and therefore evoke extreme hostility.

39. Also see AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind* (Herndon, Virginia: International Institute for Islamic Thought, 1993).

THE CHALLENGE TO IDENTITY

The scale of the collapse of *'asabiyya* and the power and speed of globalization – and the two appear to be related – have challenged ideas of identity which define and shape Muslim society. Primary identities in society are based in blood, place or religion.⁴⁰ Language is sometimes shared as reinforcing identity in all three categories. In Iran, the Persian language is a source of pride for each and every category. In other countries, language expresses the barriers between the categories. In Pakistan, Urdu is the declared national language, Punjabi the language of the ethnic majority, and Arabic the language of religion. Invariably linguistic tensions translate into ethnic and political clashes. Sometimes the divisions within religion into sects result in conflict and violence. The clashes between Shi'is and Sunnis in Islam have formed a major historical theme in the Middle East. In South Asia the annual clashes still cost lives.

In the last century, of the three main sources of identity which defined an individual, race or ethnicity, nationalism and religion, it was nationalism which was the dominant source of identity. The two world wars were fought on the basis of nationalism. With the emergence of Communism as a world force in the middle of the century and its aggressive hostility to religion, it appeared that religion, as a source of identity would soon be irrelevant to most people.

With the processes of globalization accelerating at the end of the last century, the situation has changed. Ethnicity fused with religion, as in the Balkans. In other places ethnicity re-emerged with virulence, as in the war between Hutus and Tutsis in central Africa. Nationalism changed too, as national borders have melted for business people, specialists and experts who cross the globe pursuing their economic, cultural or political interests. Hundreds of thousands of Asian workers in information technology, for example, have recently been welcomed by the USA and Europe. The poor, however, find borders as impenetrable as ever; even the border between Mexico and the USA is no exception.

With migration, nationalism and ethnicity are weakened, despite usually being associated with a particular region. Religion on the other hand can be transported and can flourish anywhere in the world given the right circumstances. We have the example of Islam, which began to make an impact in America at the turn of this century. Muslim political commentators feel that, although the Muslim vote is still small in terms of voter strength, it made a contribution to the election in 2000 by supporting George Bush against Al Gore in their tightly contested election battle.

Muslim leaders confirm these trends. The leaders of the first part of the 20th century would be cast in nationalist terms leading “national” movements – for examples, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, Mohammad 'Ali Jinnah in Pakistan, Sukarno of Indonesia and Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir in Egypt. Later in the century, other kinds of leaders would be at the head of movements with a religious message not restricted to national borders; Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini is an example for one tradition in Is-

40. See Kottak, *Cultural Anthropology*; and Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*.

lam; the Taliban are another. The opponents of the former would be national opponents – the Greeks for the Turks and the Indians for the Pakistanis. The opponents of the latter would be moral opponents – the Great Satan or America for Iran and Afghanistan.

The tidal wave of religion which engulfed national and ethnic identities, has yet to crest in the Muslim world. It has translated into political power in countries such as Iran and Afghanistan. The tensions between the three sources of identity are acute. In some countries the old fashioned nationalism left over from the past means a ruthless suppression of other forms of identity. Iraq and Syria provide us examples of this. Countries like Pakistan exhibit severe tension between an emerging religious identity and a battered nationalist one. Ethnicity also remains an unresolved factor in Pakistan. The tensions are expressed through the violence and political instability in the country.

With the inherited colonial structures of administration, politics and education disintegrating and new ones yet to supplant them or even consolidate, with old identities being challenged, Muslim society is in flux. *'Asabiyya* is at its weakest in these societies. Central and South Asian states provide us with examples.

Paradoxically, it is in those parts of the Muslim world where there is the unifying factor of dynastic rule or language, as, for example, in the states on the Arabian peninsula, there is comparative stability; we say “paradoxically” because these states are seen as reactionary by Muslims who want genuine democracy and stagnant by those who want an Islamic state based on the pristine principles of the early egalitarian Islamic order. Nonetheless the unifying factors of dynasty and language sustain *'asabiyya*, which ensures continuity and stability in times of global change. Let us examine two case studies of different Muslim responses to the challenges of our world.

MUSLIM RESPONSES TO THE KHALDUNIAN BREAKDOWN

CASE STUDY ONE: THE SCHOLARSHIP OF INCLUSION, A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

Scholars like Richard Falk have argued that there is a deliberate attempt to “exclude” Islam from the community of world civilizations, to make it a pariah, a non-person. The Muslim response has been varied and includes mysticism, fatalism, activism and rejection.⁴¹ Perhaps the greatest model for dialogue still relevant is provided by the mystic figures that joined the traditions of all the great faiths. Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, whose work is so popular in America today, and Ibn al-‘Arabi, are two examples from different ends of the Muslim world. Their thought and verses explicitly reflect the essential unity of the divine vision in synagogue, church and mosque.

41. Western academics like Professor Richard Falk at Princeton University argue that there is a deliberate attempt to exclude Islam from the community of nations: see his chapter “The Geo-Politics of Exclusion: The Case of Islam” (Falk, *Human Rights Horizons: the Pursuit of Justice in a Globalizing World*, already cited).

We can discern two political patterns in the midst of many and we will discuss them as they affect other civilizations: one is to advocate a policy of inclusion, in the hope of generating dialogue and understanding, or, alternatively, to encourage activities promoting exclusion, confrontation and rejection.

Muslims, wherever they live, are aware of the crisis in society, if not of the Khaldunian explanation of its breakdown. They react according to their ideas and capabilities. My own personal case can serve as an example. In my case, from the vantage point of Cambridge University, I set myself the ambitious task of recording and attempting to repair the breakdown. I spent over a decade writing scholarly books on the subject, appearing on the media to explain it, making films about it and organizing people to help me repair it. Projects such as the six-part BBC television series *Living Islam*⁴² and the “Jinnah Quartet”⁴³ were initiated and completed. Seen as landmark events, these projects helped to change the negative climate around Islam, and they assisted in the start of serious interfaith dialogue.

Great debate, controversy, and passion were aroused by the projects. This was understandable: they were not just changing images in the media, in itself a major challenge, but touching on central issues in society such as leadership, the nature of the state, and the status of women and minorities. Above all they emphasized the compassionate and tolerant nature of Islam. Religious, ethnic, and national boundaries were being crossed and people were as ready to dismiss and debunk as they were to support.

But defending such positions comes at a cost. Hurdles were put in the path of these projects, even from inside. Bogus and absurd accusations were spread in the steady disinformation campaign.⁴⁴ Salman Rushdie, for instance, was alleged to have

42. *Living Islam*, broadcast in 1993, was based on my book *Discovering Islam* (1988), and seen as a landmark event in the UK. It has been shown thrice on TV, the last time as recently as August 2001 as part of the BBC’s “Islam Week,” and in many countries of the world. The accompanying book, *Living Islam: From Samarkand to Stornoway*, that I wrote was translated into many languages (London, BBC Books, 1993).

43. The “Jinnah Quartet” based on the life of M.A. Jinnah the founder of Pakistan, took me a decade to complete. It included a feature film, *Jinnah*; a documentary, *Mr. Jinnah: The Making of Pakistan*; an academic book, *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin*; and a graphic novel, *The Quaid: Jinnah and the Story of Pakistan*. The Quartet attempted to answer the question: Do Muslims have leaders who care for human rights, women’s rights, minority rights and the sanctity of the Constitution and who can lead their nations to the community of world civilizations? I believed Jinnah was one such leader and provided a relevant model. The Quartet provided the answer both on global and national levels but raised worldwide debate as not everyone agreed. It is well to keep in mind that for most people their information on Jinnah would be his negative portrayal in Richard Attenborough’s film *Gandhi* or books like *Freedom at Midnight* by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre (New Delhi, Vikas, 1994. Originally published in 1976). The Jinnah Quartet was challenging established images and ideas of the last days of the British Raj.

44. See the documentary *Dare to Dream*, Montage Productions, UK, on the making of the *Jinnah* film.

written the script for the film *Jinnah*;⁴⁵ some saw it as part of a Hindu conspiracy, others as a Zionist one.⁴⁶ The latter suspicion was no doubt confirmed in some minds when I became the first Muslim to be invited to deliver the annual Rabbi Goldstein Memorial Lecture for 1999 by the Liberal and Progressive Synagogues of the UK in the central synagogue in St. John's Wood, London.

Earlier I had been invited to talk at Evensong in Selwyn College Chapel, Cambridge, the first Muslim Don to be given the honor. The events were widely covered in the British media and seen as significant steps in interfaith dialogue. While most Muslims supported the initiatives, some were unhappy. A few argued that Jews and Christians were "enemies" and to visit their places of worship was akin to blasphemy for a Muslim. I was walking perilously close to *fatwa* territory.

Some not so influenced by notions of idealism, and more interested in keeping ledgers may ask was it worth it? They will point to the physical dangers, the lies and slander, the financial sacrifices and the emotional exhaustion. My answer may be different from that of those who love me — especially the women in my life, my mother, my daughters and my wife who was with me every step of the way standing shoulder to shoulder and without whom the projects would have been unmanageable if not impossible. They were concerned that I had taken on a global challenge unnecessarily and was being exposed to danger in a turbulent society and time. The answer therefore is difficult and complex but I believe contained in the following paragraph.

These projects and their theme of dialogue and understanding were not only changing British royalty⁴⁷ and creating understanding for Islam⁴⁸ but were also mak-

45. Salman Rushdie was alleged to have written the script for the film *Jinnah*, according to the headlines in the Pakistani press. An editor started this mischievous lie during the shoot in 1997. He had auditioned for the role of Jinnah and failed to get it. The story, with footage of the audition, is in *Dare to Dream*. The lie, repeated in the press, was initially accepted as the truth. It was most irresponsible as in Pakistan Rushdie is considered in the same light as the devil himself; it is well to recall that Ayatollah Khomeini issued the *fatwa* against the author after being told that Pakistanis had been shot to death protesting against *The Satanic Verses*. Although I kept my fears to myself I was terrified that some fanatic believing that he had found a shortcut to paradise would knife or shoot one of the British cast in the hotel lobby in Karachi. I discreetly arranged armed escorts for the stars especially Christopher Lee who was playing Jinnah. The rumor about Rushdie was not laid to rest even when he wrote a letter to *The Guardian* stating that he had nothing to do with the film (May 7, 1997). It was only when Rushdie himself denied it on radio that the story died. We had appeared on the BBC show "Start the Week" hosted by Melvyn Bragg (now elevated to the House of Lords) on June 16, 1997. But the show generated another round of accusations against me by some Muslims. I was taken to task for being a lax Muslim because I failed to implement the *fatwa* by not leaping across the studio table and doing Rushdie in.

46. See "Iranian Counsel on 'Jinnah,'" *The Friday Times* (Lahore, Pakistan), May 16-22, 1997; and "Jews and Jinnah," *The Friday Times*, March 28-April 3, 1977. Also see the documentary *Dare to Dream*.

47. Prince Charles saw *Living Islam* and the accompanying book when I presented them to him in 1993, and used them for his celebrated lecture on Islam and the West at Oxford later in the year.

48. Many British journalists gave me the title "Ambassador for Islam" (Ian Hawkey, "Ambassador for Islam" in *CAM: The University of Cambridge Alumni Magazine*, Cambridge, UK, Easter Term, 1995). Also see editorial on the Jinnah Quartet: "Akbar Ahmed's Achievements" (London, *The News*, November 30, 1998).

ing an impact on ordinary Muslims.⁴⁹ Even religious leaders of all shades responded to my work both positively⁵⁰ and negatively.⁵¹ Most important, the young were being influenced by the projects. After a seminar at Princeton in March 2001 a student introduced himself as a Pakistani from Lahore. He said he had an eight-year-old nephew who would tell him that he wished to grow up to join the Pakistan army in order to kill Hindus. After seeing the *Jinnah* film, he now says he wants to grow up to be another Jinnah, and a man of justice and peace. The change in the world-view of the little boy in Lahore would justify the sacrifices and the tribulations in the battle for ideas; he owns this century.

When the various projects were completed I was acutely aware that the road was littered with aborted projects of a similar nature and the cemetery full of scholars less intellectually and culturally ambitious than we were. Take the example of *Atatürk*, the proposed film project about the founder of modern Turkey, which was abandoned due to the opposition to it about the time we were battling for *Jinnah*. Antonio Banderas who was to play Atatürk received so many death threats that he backed out.

At the end of the road I made a choice to sever my links with the bureaucracy of Pakistan.⁵² It had been a long and tiring decade with what seemed to be non-stop action. I had helped to change the image of Islam and I had taken initiatives in inter-faith dialogue. But I had changed too. I was exhausted and needed to withdraw from the world for a while.⁵³ I headed for Princeton University.

The rhythm of campus life, the enthusiasm of my students, the affection and generosity of my host and friend Professor Lawrence Rosen, and the excitement of being at one of the finest universities in the world – Princeton was considered in the very top rank in the US when I arrived – helped to revivify my spirit. The discussions on campus encouraged me to think of the last decade and try to extract theoretical and

49 The general release of *Jinnah* in Urdu and English in Pakistan in June was selected as the main event of the month in the annual review of the premier English newspaper of Pakistan, *Dawn* (December 27, 2000). The *Dawn* report concluded: "That the film is still highly viewable and outright uplifting is a testimony to the will power of the man behind it, Akbar S. Ahmed."

50. Professor Khurshid Ahmad, a leading scholar of the Muslim world and senior figure of the Jama'at-i-Islami, in *The News* (London), June 2, 2000, called me the "Ambassador of Islam."

51. See the comments of Shaykh 'Umar Bakri who had declared himself the chief representative of Usama bin Ladin in Europe. He disliked intensely my attempts at interfaith dialogue in the UK. Bakri attacked me in Adam Lebor's book on Muslims in the West. See Adam Lebor, *A Heart Turned East: Among the Muslims of Europe and America*, (London: Little, Brown and Co., 1997). Bakri called me a "chocolate Muslim" and "an Uncle Tom" because "he [Akbar Ahmed] admires Western civilization more than Islamic civilization ... He is a sincere Muslim but sincere is not enough." Lebor, pp. 142-145.

52 . Shagufta Yaqub, "Profile: Ambassador of Dialogue," *Pakistan Link*, July 13, 2001; Courtesy of *QNews*, London, July, 2001.

53. Looking at the breakdown of society for a Muslim scholar was like staring into the face of despair. In an interview I recounted the experiences of working on the Jinnah Quartet: "Completing the Jinnah project really opened my eyes ... Journalists openly demanded money; bureaucrats vented their hatred for the success of new ideas and indulged in ethnic politics; politicians wanted 'commis-

intellectual conclusions from the experiences.

I have given the reader a personal glimpse of what it is like to engage in the current debate about civilizations and the price that may come with it, so that the reader may also, perhaps, appreciate more fully why the life of Ibn Khaldun has a resonance for me.

Other Muslims have taken different routes to respond to the Khaldunian breakdown, their endeavors also raising controversy and debate. One such group is the Taliban who are criticized by many, and not only in the West, for their treatment of women and the minorities. They remain a mystery to the world and it is to them that we now turn.

CASE STUDY TWO: THE SCHOLARSHIP OF EXCLUSION

Because so little is known of the Taliban in Afghanistan, now seemingly on the wane, several false assumptions are made about them: that they are a political party; that they are defined and contained by Afghanistan; that they are a passing phenomenon and quite marginal to the Muslim world and that by ignoring them or bombing them they will fade into oblivion.⁵⁴

While commentators saw the Taliban as an “Islamic” body, few knew that as much as Islamic fervor the Taliban were driven by *Pukhtunwali* or the code of the Pukhtuns,⁵⁵ also known in the Afghan context as Pashtun. The Taliban in Afghanistan were Pukhtun/Pashtun. Their treatment of women and minorities has more to do with *Pukhtunwali* than Islam. The laws of hospitality and revenge dominate the code. *Pukhtunwali* explains why the Taliban would not surrender their guest Usama bin Ladin even though they faced death and destruction. It also suggests that the laws of revenge will be activated and individuals or groups will extract vengeance for what they have suffered as a result of the war in 2001. The Americans, the British and their allies the Pakistanis would be the likely targets. It is well to remember that their victims have included a Viceroy of India killed at the high noon of empire (Lord Mayo, killed in 1872) and a popular prime minister of Pakistan (Liaquat ‘Ali Khan in 1951). There is no limitation of space or time in the implementation of *Pukhtunwali*: “I took revenge after a hundred years and I took it quickly” is a well-known Pukhtun proverb.⁵⁶

Continued from Previous Page

-ons’; people on the project took full advantage because I was committed to completing it; Government reneged on their commitment and pulled out one million pounds after written agreements in the middle of the shoot. Everyone could apply pressure on me because I was determined to maintain my integrity.” (Yaqub, “Profile: Ambassador of Dialogue”).

54. For a case study illustrating the complex interplay of Pukhtun tribalism, Islamic leadership and political opportunism of the state see Akbar S. Ahmed, *Resistance and Control in Pakistan* (London, Routledge, 1991).

55. Akbar Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society: Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) and Ahmed, *Resistance and Control in Pakistan*.

56. Akbar S. Ahmed, *Mataloona: Pukhto Proverbs* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.11.

The tribal interpretation of Islam explains why there is a sympathy for the Taliban in those parts of Muslim society where tribalism is strong, as in some parts of Saudi Arabia; it also explains the aversion to them where it is not, as in the middle class sections of society in Cairo or Karachi. The Taliban also have some sympathy among Muslims who look for alternative answers to Western modernity.

To make matters worse the social and political factors that explain the emergence of the *madrasas* (usually *madrasa* in Pakistan) or religious schools, which produced the Taliban, remain largely unstudied.⁵⁷ The emergence of the prototype *madrasas* of Pakistan needs to be viewed in the context of the decline of Western-style education and administration and their loss of credibility for ordinary people. *Madrasas* stand for a system, which is the cheaper, more accessible and more “Islamic” alternative.

The syllabus of a typical *madrasa* is exclusively Islamic in content. Its basis is the Qur’an and the Sharia. That is how it should be for an Islamic school. But the Qur’an – and the Sunna of the Prophet – (together, the *Shari’a*) – repeatedly ask Muslims to acquire knowledge. One proverbial instance is “Seek knowledge, even unto China.”⁵⁸ China then, in the seventh century, symbolized the farthest non-Muslim civilization. It was a challenge to the imagination to even think of the journey.

Yet after numerous discussions with teachers and an examination of *madrasa* syllabi I noted that there are no non-Muslim philosophers or historians, on those syllabi – not even modern ones like Karl Marx or Max Weber. Worse: even the Muslim ones, like Ibn Khaldun, who are thought to be too “scientific” are missing. The philosophy of the typical syllabus is reduced to what commentators call “political Islam”: Islam as a vehicle for all-encompassing change; Islam as a challenge not only to the corrupt local elite but also to the world order.

While the often Westernized nationalist leaders of the post-independence period sought to hold on to the state and consolidate it, the new leaders hope to destroy it as a legacy of the West and then re-create it in an Islamic mold. The former sought survival in a transitional world; the latter demand purity in an impure one.

After an initial period after independence when prestige was attached to Westernized schools, *madrasas* began to flourish from the 1970s onwards, most notably in

57. The trickle of books and articles on the Taliban — Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) and articles such as Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Education of a Holy Warrior,” *New York Times Magazine*, June 25, 2000; Jessica Stern “Pakistan’s Jihad Culture,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 6 (November/December, 2000); William T. Vollmann, “Across the Divide: What do the Afghan People Think of the Taliban?” *The New Yorker*, May 15, 2000 — though containing useful information, are usually sensationalist in nature. They simply confirm the negative media images of Islam by pegging their ideas to clichés such as “terrorist Islam” “jihad” and “fundamentalist.” Take Rashid’s title, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, or Stern’s sub-headings: “Schools of Hate,” “Jihad International Inc.,” “Addicted to Jihad,” “Bad Boys” and “Exporting Holy War.” The problem of representation is compounded for the Taliban, as they appear to be practicing the scholarship of exclusion. We are left with few insights into what is happening and why in their society.

58. The commentators on hadith consider this a “weak” and unreliable hadith, but it has become proverbial.

South Asia (there are estimated to be 50,000 in Pakistan alone).⁵⁹ Remittances from the Middle East provided funding and allowed central government channels to be bypassed. The war in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s provided a global stage and a global cause to the young and the zealous.

These *madrāsas* laid the foundations for the populist and militant Islamic leadership that would emerge in the 1990s. Mostly from poor, rural backgrounds, speaking only the local language, dressed traditionally with beards that assert their Islamic identity, these students would become the warriors who formed the Taliban and go on to conquer Afghanistan. The word Taliban – from *talib* or student, the product of the *madrāsa* – entered the global vocabulary.

The battle of Afghanistan against the Soviets was won not on the playing fields of the Etons of the Muslim world but in the humble classrooms and courtyards of the *madrāsa*. Its outcome challenged and changed the already shaky educational and political structures in the entire region and not just in Afghanistan. The impact of the Taliban kind of thinking, the frame of mind, the style of behavior, and logic of argument, can be seen in different measure in Muslim groups from Los Angeles to Lahore. Living in the West is no guarantee of freedom from Taliban thinking.⁶⁰

The war in late 2001 against the Taliban may have hammered them in Afghanistan but did little to counter the influence of the Taliban kind of thinking elsewhere in the Muslim world. On the contrary, the sympathy helped to throw a blanket over their misdeeds in the cry of anger that spread throughout the Muslim world.

Wherever they live, Muslims are aware of the injustices of their rulers and the fact that some enjoy support in the West, the cultural invasion from the West, and the stereotypes of Muslims in the Western media including the Hollywood films in which Muslims are shown as terrorists and fanatics. These are not marginal or art films but big star, big budget, mainstream “blockbusters” seen by millions. They influence public opinion. Such negative propaganda coupled with what is seen as the indifference of the West to the outstanding political problems in the Muslim world combine to create a focus on the West as the root cause of Muslim problems. We have lost our honor, the honor of our faith and traditions and have no power to correct the wrongs of our own world, Muslims lament, blaming the West for this loss. From this perception to actively opposing the West as a form of *jihad*, or religious war, is one short step for

59. Stern, “Pakistan’s Jihad Culture.”

60. I encountered the influence of Taliban thinking first hand when I was invited to deliver a Keynote Address to a major Muslim conference in Chicago in July 2001. The Chairman of the organizing committee informed me that when my name was announced some people objected. We respect his scholarship, they said, but complained that he is the same person who advocates the Jinnah model of leadership over that of Usama [bin Ladin]. I felt these Muslims were failing to appreciate their situation as Americans and as good Muslims who must live with other civilizations in the 21st century. The Muslim responses to the tragic deaths of September 11 were also revealing. While they expressed sorrow they also pointed out that this is how Muslims like the Palestinians and Kashmiris live their normal lives. It was time, they expressed with bitterness, that Americans also experienced the pain and suffering. The war in Afghanistan and the expression of crude anger against Muslims in the US and UK did little to win hearts and minds on either side.

groups like the Taliban.

The bitter anti-Western edge to the Taliban comes partly from their feeling that while they sacrificed their lives and land in fighting the Soviets as allies of the Americans, when it was over the Americans left them and their devastated land in the lurch. They will remind you that those being called “crazies” and “extremists” were once hailed as “freedom fighters” by the West. Their actions, such as the destruction of the priceless Buddhist statues, are partly motivated by a psychological compulsion to enrage and defy their critics.⁶¹

Although the Taliban-style leadership is “new” in the sense that it emerged in opposition to the more Westernized leaders in power after the Second World War, in fact the division in Muslim leadership goes back to the 19th century. In 1857, after the great uprisings in India against British rule (“the Indian Mutiny”), two rival models of leadership began to emerge. Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan, who created the Aligarh University on the model of Oxbridge, was a loyal servant of the Raj and wished to synthesize Islam and modernity.⁶² Iqbal, Jinnah, and the leaders of the Pakistan movement would be inspired by Sir Sayyed. In contrast, the founders of the *madrasa* at Deoband near Delhi fought the British during the uprisings, and their influential schools created networks throughout India and now influence groups like the Taliban. The schism in Muslim leadership, Usama at one end and Jinnah at the other of the spectrum, is thus rooted in the indigenous response to modernity and the threatening presence of Western imperialism.

We saw the interconnectedness of our world even before September 11. In the aftermath of the attack on the USS *Cole* in Aden in October, 2000, President Bill Clinton in Washington threatened Usama; the head of the Islamic party, the JUI, in Pakistan in turn threatened all Americans in Pakistan, including the Ambassador, if Usama were harmed; Afghanistan was on high alert and Americans throughout the world were warned to be on guard. Once again Islam had been pushed in a certain direction by those of its leaders wanting confrontation with the West.

Clinton and his Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, had correctly predicted that such events were a foretaste of things to come; that this is the way that the wars of the future will be fought. They may be right. But the response of the Muslim world will depend on the nature of Muslim leadership; whether the Usama model prevails, or that of Jinnah. The relationship between Islam and the West will play a major part in influencing the course of events in the 21st century.

We have established through the case studies above that there is an ongoing,

61. Destruction, not defacement, was on the minds of the Taliban. Blowing up the Buddhist statues in 2001, especially the marvelous Buddhas in Bamiyan, which had survived the ravages of past rulers, even Jinhiz Khan, enraged people who cared for the cultural legacy of civilization. But for Buddhists there was a religious dimension also. Although Buddha is not worshipped as a god he is the fountainhead of Buddhism. That is why, along with the Dalai Lama, some of the most important figures of the Buddhist world attempted to dissuade the Taliban. The refusal of the Taliban once again created an unmitigated PR disaster for Islam on a global level. The events of September 11 and the war that followed next month in Afghanistan cast a negative pall over Muslims wherever they lived.

62. Ahmed, *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin*.

sometimes simmering, sometimes explosive, conflict of civilizations; but we have also illustrated that there is a serious and committed movement towards dialogue. Let us now explore possible directions for the future.

*SEARCHING FOR A POST-KHALDUNIAN PARADIGM:
GLOBAL SOCIETY IN THE 21ST CENTURY*

With Ibn Khaldun's cycle broken down – with the interpenetration of global religious cultures, with the emergence of the audio-visual media penetrating even the most remote areas, with the mounting clamor of those who see the signs of the apocalyptic end of time, with the scholars silenced, with the growing sense of despair at the poverty and inequality in many parts of the world that challenges the notion of a just God in heaven who maintains a balance in human society based on justice and order – we need to develop a post-Khaldunian paradigm; a new theoretical and methodological framework to study global society in the 21st century; to discover a General Theory.

The unexpected and unpredictable expressions of religious revivalism today would have surprised the philosophers and sociologists of the modern age. Certainly Nietzsche, who declared God dead⁶³, and even Max Weber who saw the Protestant Ethic as laying the foundations for a stable, safe, capitalist, and bureaucratic world, would have been surprised. For the former, God was back and it seemed with a vengeance; for the latter He was busy challenging and upsetting the very order that He was supposed to champion. Perhaps Marx would be the most surprised. Religion is no longer an “opiate” numbing people into docility; if one needs a drug metaphor, it is more like “speed.”

Studying the main global religions in interplay, sometimes clashing, sometimes in alliance, can provide a clue.⁶⁴ Of these, Islam remains the most misunderstood. All the religions are in need of understanding, as they are usually viewed through the lens of stereotype and caricature, perhaps none more so than Islam. Islam continues to get a bad press and evoke hostility globally.

The thesis about the clash of civilizations, which remains influential in some circles, rests on the assumption that the wars of this new century will be fought along religious lines. It is therefore logical and urgent to understand what factors are responsible for the emergence of religion, and how religion will be playing a role in deciding

63. When Nietzsche declared God was dead, dubbed himself the Anti-Christ, preached the nobility of barbarism and cruelty, he underestimated the power of ideas to direct political events: the Nazis were inspired by this poisonous philosophy. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage, 1966) and Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols: The Anti-Christ*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale, (Middlesex, England: Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972). Nietzsche's philosophic successor Martin Heidegger continued the tradition, becoming and remaining an enthusiastic Nazi to the end.

64. As an indication of the interest in religion in 2001 alone, several of the most popular journals like *Newsweek*, *Time* and *US News and World Report* have featured cover stories on religion (see their April issues). Also see Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (London: HarperCollins, 2000); Eck, *A New Religious America: How A “Christian Country” Has Become the World's most Religiously Diverse Nation*; Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey

political developments in this century. However, we need to penetrate beneath the sensationalist nature of these theories and discover alternative ways of understanding society. We do not suggest that we accept each other's, or all, religions uncritically but that we understand them in order to make sense of what is happening in global society.

In this connection certain important questions need to be asked which are of immediate and urgent relevance to the world civilizations. Different civilizations look differently at the idea of the divine. Muslims are often attacked in the media for what is called revivalism or the resurgence of Islam, but religious revivalism is taking place globally, in Judaism, Christianity, in Hindu, and in Buddhist societies. The "rediscovery" of the divine is noted even in Western scientific and intellectual circles once dismissive of religion.⁶⁵ We need to know how the different world civilizations view themselves and each other; we need to know what they see as their vision of the coming time; we need to view their ideas of "the end of time."

This raises our first set of questions: Why is there a revival of religions, and how are people negotiating the idea of God or the divine? Is the revival a consequence of the processes of and transformations resulting from globalization? Is the explanation to be found in the weakening of traditional structures – like the family and the nation state – as individuals look to religion to provide certainty in an uncertain world, continuity in a changing one. Is it an attempt to (re)create *'asabiyya* in order to (re)build "human civilization? But can we apply Khaldunian theories to non-Muslim civilizations? Indeed, can they be applied to Muslim societies when there are no significant cyclical – or even linear – movements of tribal or rural people taking place anymore in the way Khaldun described them?

A second set of questions to raise, which has a global resonance after September 11, is: why is the understanding of the divine often distorted through the prism of violence? Why are people killing and raping in the name of the divine? No religion encourages violence of this kind, and yet we see examples throughout the world today on our television sets and read about them in the news. Why are people not able to focus on the compassion and goodness in the idea of the divine? This failure has global implications for the so-called "clash of civilizations."

Third, we need to ask: what is to be done about it? Can there be genuine dialogue across religions and national boundaries that negates the idea of a clash of civilizations? How can this be implemented in a practical way, which will affect the thinking

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H. Mahan (eds.), *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (eds.), *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Mische and Merklung (eds.), *Towards a Global Civilization? The Contribution of Religions*, already cited; Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001); and Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

65. Patrick Glynn, *God: The Evidence – The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason in a Postsecular World* (Rocklin, CA: Forum: Prima Publishing, 1999).

and behavior of people?

These are questions which would not have occurred naturally to Ibn Khaldun. His was a Muslim world, admittedly disintegrating in one part but strong in other parts, and there was nothing but Islam on the horizon. For us, the dialogue of civilization is a necessary pre-condition to global harmony. But dialogue by itself is no solution. There has to be dialogue that leads to the understanding of other civilizations. For this, we have to move beyond, for example, Islam and understand the religions it interacts with: Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. Muslims are living as neighbors with these other civilizations, and are often isolated and don't understand them. The same is true of other faiths looking at Islam. Too many non-Muslims see Islam as caricature and as distorted images from press reporting. With understanding comes sympathy and compassion towards those who do not belong to our group or community or religion. This is where scholars and thinkers who can transcend religious and national positions and reach out become crucial to the global debate that is taking place.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion: What can be done to encourage dialogue? The first steps are to try to understand the world we live in and the way it is forming. In the short-term the prospects for a harmonious relationship between Islam and the West look uncertain, even pessimistic. In the longer-term a great deal will depend on whether those who encourage dialogue and understanding will succeed or not.

The common problems – which affect everyone regardless of race, nationality or religion – in this shrinking world need to be identified to strengthen the idea of dialogue: drug and alcohol abuse, divorce, teenage violence and crime, ethnic and racist prejudice, the problems of the aged and the poor; the challenge of the growing sense of anarchy and rampant materialism; the sexual debasement of women and children; the depletion of our natural resources and ecological concerns.⁶⁶ On all these issues many Muslims find support for taking a strong, enlightened position in Islam. This is the real Islamic *jihad* and, if it is properly harnessed and understood, it can provide fresh, sorely needed strength to these most crucial of global issues.

Muslims face an internal challenge. Reducing a sophisticated civilization to simple rituals encourages simple answers: reaching for guns and explosives, for instance. For Muslims to confront the world with poise and confidence is to re-discover and even begin to repair the mainsprings of Islamic civilization. They need to re-build an idea of Islam which includes justice, integrity, tolerance and the quest for knowledge - the classic Islamic civilization - not just the insistence on the rituals; not just the five pillars of Islam but the entire building.

66. For an articulate and scholarly book on just how serious the destruction of the planet is see Stuart L. Pimm, *The World According to Pimm: A Scientist Audits the Earth* (New York: Mc-Graw Hill, 2001).

The West must put pressure on Muslim governments – and it interacts with most of them overtly or covertly – to “get their act together,” to ensure justice and provide clean administration. It must send serious signals to the ordinary Muslim people – through its media, through seminars, conferences, meetings – that it does not consider Islam as the enemy, however much it may disagree with certain aspects of behavior carried out by Muslims.

This discussion is merely exploratory suggesting directions for research. Serious and urgent re-thinking is required by the scholars, policy planners and policy makers in the corridors of power – not only in Washington, London, Moscow and Paris, but also in Cairo, Kabul, and Tehran.

We need to be thinking in terms of what Ibn Khaldun called “human civilization” or, to use the contemporary phrase, globally. We may not like words such as postmodernism and globalization, but only with the compassionate understanding of other civilizations, through the development of the scholarship of inclusion, can we resolve some of the deleterious consequences of globalization such as the increasing gap between the rich and the poor and the growing sense of despair especially in the latter. The tragic confrontation among the great faiths taking place in the Balkans, the Middle East, and South Asia, the mindless cycle of violence, must be checked in this century through the dialogue of civilizations.

The events of September 11 appeared to push the world towards the idea of the clash of civilizations, but they also conveyed the urgency of the call for dialogue. The creative participation in the dialogue of civilizations, to find an internal balance between tradition and the world increasingly dominated by technological changes, the committed search for global solutions to the global problems confronting human society, and the quest for a just and peaceful order will be the challenge human civilization faces in the 21st century.

