

Islam globalized: perspectives on politics, art and gender

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Let us begin with the challenge of a definition. What is globalization? It consists of processes which lead towards global interdependence and increasing rapidity of exchange across vast distances. The word globalization is itself quite new, but the actual processes towards global interdependence and exchange started centuries ago. Four forces have been major engines behind globalization across time. These have been religion, technology, economy and empire. These have not necessarily acted separately, but have often reinforced each other. For example, the globalization of Christianity started with the conversion of Emperor Constantine I of Rome in 313 C.E. The religious conversion of the head of an empire started the process under which Christianity became the dominant religion not only of Europe but also of many other societies thousands of miles from where the religion started.

The globalization of Islam began not with converting a ready-made empire, but with building an empire almost from scratch. The Umayyads and Abbasides put together bits of other people's empires (former Byzantine Egypt and former Zoroastrian Persia, for example) and created a whole new civilization.

Our lecture today is not about globalization as such. It is about Islam as a global force.

Like Christianity, Islam regards the whole human race as its potential constituency. For the first fourteen centuries of the existence of their religion, Muslims have aspired to Islamize the world. Their religion has spread from its origins in the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula to encompass a fifth of the human race –

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from Senegal to Samarkand, from Cairo to Karachi, from Jakarta to Chicago.

The question which has arisen in the twenty-first century is whether, instead of the world getting Islamized, we have been witnessing the phenomenon of Islam getting globalized. Is Islam becoming subject to the forces of globalization which are a fusion of the industrial and the information revolutions? Is Islam changing with globalization?

This paper is addressing both themes – the story of a force which historically has (like Christianity) sought to re-create the world in its own image. The message of the Prophet Muhammad has tried to Islamize the world. But we also need to address the other momentous story of the twenty-first century – the extent to which this great world religion has become subject to the forces of globalization in the aftermath of industrialization and the information explosion.

The Political Economy of Globalization

What are the forces of globalization? They include, first, the global use of vital resources – among which the Muslim world is pre-eminently important as a major supplier of petroleum. What has petroleum done to the globalization of Islam? The range is from the Westernism of the Shah of Iran to the redirection of the succeeding Islamic Republic.

Secondly, the forces of globalization include the international use of labour and its migration. This includes the heavy infiltration of non-Muslim labour into the oil rich Muslim world – ranging from Filipinos to Westerners pouring into Saudi Arabia and other gulf states. On the other hand, there is the counter penetration of Muslims into the Western world – ranging from unskilled Turks in Germany, semi-skilled Algerians in France to highly skilled Pakistanis in the United States.

Thirdly, globalization may also involve an expanding role for the market forces. Islam may be the only major religion which was founded by a businessman. The Prophet Muhammad was a trader and a businessman before he became a prophet. His first

wife, Khadija, was a businesswoman – as well as being Muhammad's first convert.

For fourteen centuries Islam has been pro-profit motive. However, Islam has been against interest, regarding it as usury. This dichotomy between pro-profit and anti-interest has come to a head in the 21st century. There have been experiments in Islamic banking – avoiding interest but promoting profit. Are the forces of globalization forcing Muslims to re-examine that dichotomy – among businessmen in Malaysia, among Arab princes on the Gulf, among farmers in Egypt, among fishermen in Senegal, among investors in Uzbekistan and Istanbul.

Democracy, Gender and Race

The fourth force of globalization is democratization – expanding political participation, institutionalizing political accountability, protecting minorities, and consolidating social justice. Is Islam inherently incapable of separating “church” (mosque) from state? Is such an underlying theocracy incompatible with democracy? We need to raise the question of whether the fear of politicized Islam today is so excessive that it does not give Islam a chance to demonstrate whether it is compatible with modern precepts of democracy. In most parts of the Muslim world overtly Islamic parties are given such hard time by the authorities that the Islamists are radicalized almost against their will. We need to examine both the emerging Muslim democracies (Bangladesh, Senegal, Malaysia, as well as Turkey) and the countries where Islamists have been increasingly radicalized by confrontation (Algeria and Egypt).

The fifth force of globalization is the emerging global gender revolution. Outside the Western world this is still very tentative. But has it already affected the Muslim world? As the 20th century comes to a close, the Muslim world has produced five women national chief executives long before the United States has produced a woman president. The Muslim countries which have produced female prime ministers are Pakistan (Benazir Bhutto), Bangladesh (Hassina Wajed and Khaleda Zia), Indonesia (Megawati Sukarnoputri) and Turkey (Tansu Ciller). We may have to distinguish between the liberation of women and the

empowerment of women. The United States has gone further in the liberation of women than Bangladesh, but Bangladesh has in some aspects gone further in the empowerment of women than the United States. What is Islam's starting point on the issue of gender and the status of women? Have Islamic precepts been affected by the forces of globalization?

The sixth force of globalization is the quest for ecological balance and the concern for population growth. What does Islam have to say about the environment? This is a religion which started in the desert and values oases and the preciousness of water and fertility. Islam's concepts of paradise is a place where rivers flow in abundance – rivers of milk as well as water. The fast of Ramadhan (one month out of twelve) is supposed to drive home the message of restraint in consumption. Ramadhan was intended to be an environmentally friendly month. Has 20th century petroleum played havoc with that goal of environmental friendliness? What did Desert Storm in 1991 do to the gulf environment? When oil replaced dates as the basis of Saudi Arabia's economy, was the environment a casualty? Is Islam against contraception? Muslims differ. Population growth is at stake.

The seventh force of globalization is the deracialization of the world. Islam has a better record than Christianity on the issue of race and racism. The mosque was racially integrated during the Prophet's own time. The first great muezzin of Islam was an Ethiopian, Bilal. Free racial intermarriage has been a feature of Muslim history with a distinctive lineage system.

Of the first four Presidents of Egypt since 1952, two have had so-called "Negro" blood – Nuguib and Sadat. Egyptians have had many grievances against their rulers since 1952 – but not because of their racial origins.

The issue of race has also been important in African-American Islam – from Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X to Louis Farrakhan. In this case Islam and racial nationalism have intermingled. In what ways has slavery in Muslim history been different from slavery in the history of the West? Researchers need to explore the complex relationships between religion, race and the institution of slavery in history. Both the slave trade and its abolition were globalizing.

The Political Culture of Globalization

The eighth force of globalization is indeed the information explosion. No civilization is an island entire unto itself – not even such a far-flung civilization as Islam. In the age of satellites, computers and internet, such civilizational isolationism is even more remote. The flow of messages, data, images, and news has been subject to less and less control.

We should examine both the opportunities and the dangers of this loss of cultural privacy. Muslim governments, in alliance with other developing countries, have attempted to resist these forces through such devices as the search for "a New International Information Order", one of the major battles of which finally convinced the United States under the Reagan administration to withdraw from UNESCO completely. Britain followed suit. Britain has since returned to UNESCO.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, alarmed at the cultural invasion, has attempted to control the number of satellite dishes in Iranian cities through licensing devices. The Saudi authorities have attempted an even more elaborate control of the importation and circulation of videos.

In fairness to Muslim governments, this concern about loss of cultural autonomy is not peculiar to Muslim societies. France is worried about the Americanization of its television and cinema screens. And Canada is constantly trying to retain more semblance of Canadian cultural distinctiveness in its media, against the massive cultural invasion from across the border.

From an Islamic point of view, how has the information explosion affected such issues as gender relations, dress codes for both men and women, consumerism and materialism? What about the disco in Jakarta or Kuala Lumpur? Is liberal democracy in the West causing a revolution of rising democratic expectations in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates?

On the other hand, the publication of Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses in London in 1988 could cause riots in Karachi and

Bombay. Has the information revolution created a new global pulse?

The ninth issue of globalization concerns the arts. Has globalization eroded what is distinctive about the arts in Islam? Or has it stimulated new areas of artistic creativity which were previously taboo in some schools of Islam – such as the painting of people and animals? Islamic architecture might have suffered as a result of globalization and Westernization, but painting and sculpture have gained. The expanding markets for carpets and rugs from the Muslim world have had artistic implications among carper-makers in the villages of Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan. Calligraphy as an art-form is alive and well – the big difference is the enlargement of the market for such works. What is the role of Western museums for Muslim art? Should this TV series also address the issue of literature in the Muslim world – including the issue of how far a writer should be free to "blaspheme"? (e.g. Taslimah Nasrin in Bangladesh, Neguib Mahfuz in Egypt, and the explosive debate concerning Salan Rushdie's Satanic Verses.)

The tenth force of globalization is, quite unabashedly, Westernization. In fact three processes are inter-related – globalization, modernization and Westernization. But the processes are not identical. For example, de-racialization is not really Westernization but quite the contrary. The Western record has been disproportionately racist historically.

Westernization includes the triumph of the Western suit and Western dress code worldwide, the prestige of Western schooling traditions, the hegemony of Western languages and Western ideologies, the glories of Western philosophy, literature and the arts.

In 1993 Samuel Huntington, the distinguished professor of political science at Harvard University, published a particularly seminal article in the influential American journal, Foreign Affairs. The article was entitled "A Clash of Civilizations?". It triggered off both a national and international debate.

The central thesis of the article was to the affect that now that the Cold War was over, future conflicts in the world were

likely to be less between states and ideological blocs and more between civilizations and cultural coalitions. One clash of civilizations which Huntington envisaged was between the world of Islam and the Western world. Is such a clash inevitable?

Since then there have been other articles which have speculated about whether the West is moving in the direction of targeting Islam as an alternative adversary to communism. Such speculation started long before George W. Bush's war on terrorism. This kind of literature includes the article by Elaine Sciolino entitled "The Red Menace is Gone. But Here's Islam". It was published in The New York Times (Week in Review) on Sunday, January 21, 1996.

In 1995 I attended a conference at Princeton intended to explore the article by Huntington about the thesis concerning the clash of civilizations. It was important to confront the issue of whether Islam and the West were indeed destined to be adversaries. Since September 11, 2001, are we now moving towards a modernized version of the Crusades?

As of now the great majority of Muslim governments are friends of the West – from the largest Muslim country in population (Indonesia) to the richest in oil (Saudi Arabia); from the most populous Arab country (Egypt) to the emerging Muslim democracies of the Middle East and South Asia (Turkey and Bangladesh). Every Muslim monarch to a man is a friend of the West – the monarchs of Jordan, Morocco, United Arab Emirates, Brunei, Malaysia, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, etc.

If Muslim governments are so overwhelmingly pro-Western, what has created the image that Islam is anti-Western? Yes, there are anti-Western groups in every Muslim country. But then there are anti-Western groups in every Asian country, every African country, every Latin American country, every European country! Why are anti-Western groups in the Muslim world taken more seriously than most? Scholars and analysts need to explore those contradictions?

Islam shares with the West much of the Old Testament, much of the New Testament, and much of the heritage of ancient

Greece. English words which come from Arabic include tariff, algebra, admiral, zero, cipher, and many others. Spanish has been even more extensively influenced by Arabic. Perhaps the most ironic of all Arabic loan words to Western languages is the word alcohol, in view of Islam's prohibition of the drinking of alcoholic drinks.

In the concluding years of the twentieth century the issue of "Islam and the West" is at last once again accomplished by the issue of "Islam in the West". There are 18 million Muslims in Europe, 6 to 7 million Muslims in the United States – Muslims are destined to outnumber Jews in almost every major western country fairly early in the twenty first century. They already outnumber Jews in France, and are probably already outnumbering Jews in the United States. What are the implications of this demographic Islamization of the West for globalization and for the cultural diversity of the Western world in the coming decades?

Dialectic of Scale and Diversity

How has Islam contributed to the search for a global culture? Partly through its own spread and expansion. The expansion has given us the scale of the Muslim world and the diversity of the Muslim world. The population of Muslims today is already over 1 billion (i.e. already over one thousand two hundred million). Rate of increase of Muslims per year is, at a minimum, 25 to 30 million more per annum. The expectation later in the 21st century is that one out of every four human beings will be a Muslim. President Bill Clinton's estimate was that Muslims were already a quarter of the global population.

Over 50 countries of the world are Muslim. In size they range from Indonesia the largest in population (which also happens to be the fourth largest country in the world after China, India and the United States) to some of the smallest Muslim countries such as Qatar and the Gambia. What has Islam to say about population?

In income the range is from some of the richest Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Brunei Sultanate to some of the poorest like Somalia, Bangladesh and Mauritania. What has Islam itself to say about income differences?

On issues of war and peace they range from some of the most peaceful countries in the world such as Senegal or Niger in West Africa to some of the most-war-torn, such as Afghanistan, Kashmir and Iraq. What has Islam to say about such issues of war and peace? And where did Islam feature in the war in Kosovo when the United States and Britain were defending ethnic Muslim Albanians?

In relation to Western culture the range in the Muslim world is from Turkey (which is almost European and sometimes fanatically secular) to the new Iran and Sudan which are militantly non-Western and militantly Islamic. What does Islam have to say between the sacred and the secular? What about such former Muslim Republics of the former Soviet Union? Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan?

In terms of know-how and the skill-divide, the Muslim world is divided between the simple stateless Bedouins of the Arab world and the much more highly skilled Pakistani engineers and Egyptian scholars. Some Muslim states, like Pakistan, have de facto entered the nuclear age; other parts of the Ummah have never left the age of the camel and date palm.

Then there is the theological divide between Shi'ite Islam and Sunni Islam. Shi'ite Islam is clearly led by the state of Iran, indisputably the most populous Shi'ite country. Unfortunately it is far less clear-cut who leads Sunni Islam since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Which country is the leader of Sunni Islam? Egypt is not the most populous Sunni country, but it is the most populous Arab country. Does its Al-Azhar University give it the edge to speak for Sunni Islam? Many have bowed to that authority.

Is Islam really part of global culture? Or is it just another name for Arab civilization? What is the difference between an Arab and a Muslim? An Arab is defined by language. An Arab is a person whose mother tongue is Arabic. What is a Muslim? A Muslim is a person whose religion is Islam. While the majority of Arabs are Muslim, only a minority of Muslims are Arabs. Nearly a third of Muslim states (majority Muslims) are Arab states, but only one out of every 6 or 7 Muslim individuals is an Arab.

There is a minority of Arabs who are in fact Christians. On the other hand, the great majority of Muslims in the world are not Arabs at all - they are Indonesians, Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis, Iranians, Turks, Africans, Malaysians, Bosnians, Albanians, Afghans, and increasingly African Americans. While Arabs and Muslims are brothers and sisters, it is of the utmost importance that the rest of the world should learn to distinguish between Islam and Arabism.

Largest Muslim countries in population are Indonesia (well over 200 million people), Bangladesh (about 140 million), Pakistan (145 million), and (although a minority) India (which has over 130 million Muslims). None of these countries are Arab countries. There are more Muslims in Nigeria than in any single Arab country.

How is the Ummah or Muslim world represented? One representative intergovernmental body is the Organization of the Islamic Conference - established in Jeddah in May 1971, following Muslim summits in 1969 and meeting of Muslim foreign ministers in 1970.

I-Headquarters: Jeddah, Saudi Arabia;

II-Membership: now about 50 countries;

III-Aims: Solidarity and coordination-culturally economically, and in science and technology;

IV-Projects: Islamic News Agency, Islamic Development Bank, Islamic Solidarity Fund, Support for Palestinian cause, Struggle against racism, support for Bosnian Muslims, Disagreements on so-called Islamic fundamentalism. Some members are very small. On the other hand, countries like India (with over 130 million Muslims) and the old USSR (with 65 million) and China (with 80 million) are not represented in OIC.

The Dialectic Between Men and Women

A central issue in Islam concerns concerning the role and status of women. What is the link between gender and politics of dignity? Throughout history men in all societies have linked issues of honour with the dignity of mothers. Men have killed or been killed because their mothers were insulted. By extension issues of

honour were then extended not just to one's own mother but also to the mother of one's own children.

Over the centuries the honour and dignity of womanhood became an issue not just of personal commitment, but an elaborate social, legal and moral code. In the history of Islam a single incident became a defining moment of the paramountcy of female dignity. Let us first set the stage.

Women are in the first instance themselves. But they are also mothers, wives, daughters and citizens. The most important woman in Christianity is primarily a Mother; the most important woman in the Sunni Islam is probably a Wife.

The mother of the Founder of Christianity was of course the Virgin Mary. The wife of the Founder of Islam who has been the most revered was Aisha, daughter of Abu Bakar al Siddiq. [Shiite Islam regard Fatma, daughter of the Prophet and mother of Hassan and Hussein, as the most important woman in Islam.]

Some Muslim societies themselves had assumed that there were two different doors of knowledge - one for men and one for women. Many Muslim societies had assumed that there were branches of knowledge which were not fit for women and children under 15. Partly for reasons of modesty women were spared from certain areas of know-how. Today the Taliban in Afghanistan have carried this theory of two tiers of gender knowledge to the extreme.

The new internet information technology is going to blow that distinction totally out of social existence. U.S. Muslims may be leading the global ummah in the new technology. More and more information may refuse to be susceptible to gender-discrimination. What men know about sex, pornography, politics and corruption may also be accessible to women through the World Wide Web, Internet and the emerging information superhighway.

In time the veil as the modesty of the face is bound to be destroyed by the new technology. Women may cover other aspects of their personality, but increasingly they will be available facially to the viewer through the Internet and the approaching image telephone system. The new technology will pass a death sentence

on the tradition of the harem as we have known it since the Abbasid dynasty in many Muslim societies. Will U.S. Muslim women lead the way?

A woman's freedom and a woman's dignity: Is there a trade-off between them? The Muslim world has higher standards of dignity for women than the West - but most of the Muslim world has lower standards of liberty for women than the West.

Has dignity in the Muslim world been bought at too high a price of liberty for the woman? Or has liberty in the West been bought at too high a price of dignity for the woman? Can Muslims in America make a difference and evolve a new calculus of gender, a new code of balance between dignity and liberty?

Sons in the Muslim world are probably more respectful and loyal to their mothers than sons in the West are to their mothers. On the other hand, husbands in the West may be more respectful (though not necessarily more loyal) to their wives than husbands are in the Muslim world to their spouse.

Perhaps in the United States Muslims can restore the balance and produce a new model of gender relationships which is at once more dignity-friendly than that of mainstream America and more liberty-friendly than that of mainstream Muslim world. Perhaps also in America there can evolve a code of conduct where husbands respect their wives more than ever, and where sons respect their mothers to new levels of loyalty.

On the gender question, the historical distance between the West and Islam may be in terms of decades rather than centuries. In almost all Western countries apart from New Zealand women did not get the vote until the twentieth century. Great Britain extended the vote to women in two stages - 1918 and 1928. The United States enfranchised women with a constitutional amendment in 1920. Switzerland did not give women the vote at the national level until 1971 - long after Muslim women had been

voting in Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan¹. France gave the vote to women as recently as 1944.

British wives earned the right to own independent property in 1870. Muslim wives had always done so from a millennium earlier. Indeed, Islam is probably the only major religion which was founded by a businessman who was in commercial partnership with his wife, Khadija.²

As we said earlier, the United States, the largest and most influential Western nation, has never had a female president or head of government. On the other hand, both the second and third largest Muslim societies in population (Pakistan and Bangladesh) have had women Prime Ministers more than once each. We have noted that Pakistan has had Benazir Bhutto twice as Prime Minister and Bangladesh has had Khaleda Zia and Hasina Wajed consecutively in power. Such Muslim countries are ahead in female empowerment though still behind in female liberation. In Bangladesh the leader of the opposition as well as the Leader of the governing party have been women at the same time.

Turkey, another Muslim country, has also had a woman Prime Minister - Tansu Ciller. Turkey is a Muslim society which inaugurated a secular state as recently as 1923, but it has already produced a woman chief executive. The United States has been a secular state for two hundred years - and has still not produced a woman president. Neither has France or Russia. Nor has Germany produced a female Chancellor. As for the most populous Muslim country, Indonesia, this has currently a woman president - Megawati Sukarnoputri.

Between Art and Idolatry³

¹ A chronological list of women's suffrage dates may be found in Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (eds.) Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives (New York: NYU Press, 1994), pp. 349-352.

² See M. Rodinson, Mohammed (trans. By Anne Carter) (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), pp. 49-50.

³ Cambridge Encyclopedia of Africa, General Editors: Michael Crowder and Roland Oliver. (Cambridge, London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Pre-Islamic Arabia had worshipped idols in the very places where Muslims today circumambulate the Ka'aba in Mecca. According to Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad himself later destroyed some of those idols with his own hands. They were the Islamic equivalent of the graven images. In order to discourage the return of idolatry, art-forms such as sculpture and painting became circumscribed to all Muslims in terms of what they could represent on canvas or in other plastic forms. In time, according to some schools of Islam, to paint an animal was regarded as an attempt to imitate God. So organic art, in the sense of making art recreate living natural organisms, became increasingly taboo to at least some leading schools of Islam. Mosques were decorated with letters of the Qur'an rather than with creatures from nature. The culture of letters was sacralized. Islam was a stimulus to creative calligraphy, but a stumbling block to portraiture.

Islam and the Arabic language have created whole new indigenous languages in the Muslim world, or profoundly enriched indigenous tongues. Great poetry has been coming out of Islamic languages for centuries. In South Asia Urdu is highly Islamized and highly poetic. Such Islamic languages include Kiswahili and Hausa, arguably the two most successful indigenous tongues of the African continent. The Malay languages are deeply Islamized. In the verbal arts of the Ummah, Islam has been a great creative stimulus.

Celebrating Sacred Illiteracy.

The very first verse of the Qur'an which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad was the divine imperative Igra - meaning "Read!" Muslim artists have responded by creating the readable aesthetics of calligraphy. It is an art-form which communicates both visually and through literacy simultaneously.

Islamic calligraphy is, paradoxically, a celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's illiteracy. Muslims believe that the Prophet could neither read nor write. The powerful verses of the Qur'an were revealed to him by the Angel Gabriel, and the Prophet then articulated them orally. It was the Prophet's disciples who wrote the verses down verbatim.

The Qur'an later became the most widely read book in its original language in human history (the Bible is the most widely read book in translation). The non-literate Prophet of Arabia is at the center of the most widely read book in human history. How else could artists celebrate this paradox but through the aesthetics of calligraphy?

When this paradox reached Africa it found a culture in which there was often no such thing as "art for art's sake". Aesthetics and utility were normally intertwined. And so calligraphy found its way into such practical items as adorned doors, a book of prayer and magic, a throwing knife, a special robe for a bridegroom, or the wall of a mosque.

The Bible proclaims. In the beginning was the Word. In reality the Qur'an proclaims, "In the beginning was the written word". And the Prophet of Islam who came to tell us this could neither read nor write. Muslim artists have continued to celebrate this sacred paradox ever since.

There are many stories in Islam which cry out for artistic treatment. Among them was the Prophet Muhammad's ascent to Heaven from the rock in Jerusalem on the night of Miraj. The details of his adventures in Heaven would make John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) retreat in embarrassment. In modern times one artistic solution for Islam is to deal with the Prophet's story though a radio play. North Africans have experimented with such sacred plays.

In sub-Saharan Africa the desire to turn to sculpture is often strong. Few African Muslims would "blaspheme" by attempting to sculpt an image of the Prophet Muhammad himself. But what about the horse-like creature on which he traversed the distance between Mecca and Jerusalem before he ascended to the heavens on the night of the Miraj? African artists have not always resisted the temptation of trying to capture Islam's ultimate "flying horse". Ottoman artists in earlier times portrayed the Prophet being prepared by Gabriel for the ascent. By the last quarter of the 20th century there are African Muslims who regard the Prophet's ascent to the heavens on the night of the Miraj as a prediction of space

exploration in our own times. The horse-like creature brought the Prophet back to ordinary life in Mecca. Was the horse a precursor of the space-shuttle in our own age? Some African Muslims believe that religion and science are once again struggling to find a common language.

The image of al-Buraq is a tempting artistic metaphor. Was Buraq a bridge between Mecca and Jerusalem or between heaven and earth? Is that image also encompassed in Ibrahim Noor's painting of horses "in the fourth dimension"? More daring Muslim artists in the past have painted Muhammad on Buraq, as some miniatures have shown.

Another Islamic paradox is the belief that the Prophet Muhammad had an easier time traveling to heaven and back than he had migrating from Mecca to Medina. And so the Islamic Calendar does not begin when Muhammad ascended to heaven, or indeed when he was born, or when he became a prophet at the age of 40, or when he died a couple of decades later. The Islamic Calendar in history begins with the Hijra - his flight from Mecca in search of asylum in Medina (He was being persecuted in Mecca).

Again this is a narrative which includes fascinating details on the way. Had Islam been less restrictive on representational art, the story would have been depicted in painting and sculpture more often. As matters now stand it is celebrated in two other main artistic media - theater and music, both of them mainly in North Africa.

The most famous musical formulation concerns the celebration of the Prophet's arrival in Medina. Umm Kulthum, the Arab world's greatest woman singer of the twentieth century, if not of all time, sings Tala'a Badru Alayna ("The crescent has risen among us"). Musically so far, it is the most moving celebration of the Hijra, the Prophet's quest for asylum in Medina.

The records of this Egyptian singer (now deceased) remain popular not only in the Arab world, but also in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Her religious songs especially may be heard as readily in Northern Nigeria and Dar es Salaam as in Alexandria, Egypt.

What about Islam as a stimulus in architecture? There is little doubt that Islam has affected not only the architecture of African mosques, but also household arrangements in Muslim Africa. These range from roof structures to organized gender space. Islamic architecture may also have assisted natural air conditioning in houses in Black areas near the Sahara.

The most controversial aspect of the architectural legacy may be the minaret. Is it Arabian or Persian? There may be evidence to suggest that Persia before Islamization had high towers where fire was worshipped under the Zoroastrian religion.

Is the word minaret derived from the Arabic word *minar* or fire? Did Islam adapt a Zoroastrian tower of fire and give it the new role of calling believers to prayer five times every day? For understandable reasons, one is more likely to hear this theory among intellectuals in Iran than among intellectuals in the Arab world.

But in Africa and the Black world there is at least one historical fact which is more important than whether the first minaret was Arab or Persian. What matters more is that the first great mazzin who called believers to prayer was Black. This was the great Ethiopian disciple of the Prophet Muhammad, Bilal, whose name is widely used today by African-American Muslims. In vocal power, Bilal was early Islam's Paul Robeson who used his voice for religion. African Muslim artists have not yet done justice to Bilal in their art. As for Salman Rushdie's treatment of Bilal in *The Satanic Verses* it is, to say the least, condescending.

One more thought about Islamic art. There have been Muslim artists who have broken out of the confines of doctrine - and painted people, or sculptured animals, or drew living forests. These artists have seen themselves not as imitators of God but as sparks of the Almighty. Human genius at its best is but a spark of the First Cause. Afro-Iranian Painter Ali Darwish, who once headed the School of Fine Art of Makerere University in Uganda, sometimes immerses himself in both living forests and dazzling calligraphy. Ibrahim Noor Shariff has painted galloping horses in a "fourth dimension". To him Islam is always a stimulus and human

genius is indeed a spark from the radiance of Allah. Are such aesthetic reformers a wave of the future for Muslim artists?

Secular Divergence and Religious Convergence.

The wider global context of Islam encompassed the world of international capitalism. The West has virtually controlled the world economy while the Muslim world has been vital either because of its location (like the value of the Suez Canal) or because of its resources (like petroleum from the twentieth century onwards). The West has used its power to exploit the Muslim world's assets and resources. This also contributed dramatically to the forces of divergence between the West and Islam.

Even on the issue of Western militarism, Muslims have become disproportionate victims from the last quarter of the twentieth century. When the West's war against communism was at its height, Koreans and Vietnamese paid a higher military price than Muslims. But since the end of the war in Vietnam, Muslim countries have been disproportionate targets of Western military power. Excluding Palestine, over a million Muslims have been killed by Western military might in the last quarter century. These include Iraqis, Iranis, Libyans, Lebanese, Sudanese as well as Afghans. The divergence between Islam and the West broadens.

George W. Bush's war on terrorism has already carpet-bombed parts of Afghanistan. The United States has also sent troops to help fight Muslim rebels in the Philippines and Muslim militants in former Soviet Republics. The United States is also considering military action against Iraq and potentially against Iran and Somalia. The divergence between the Muslim world and the West threatens to widen.

The United States has a list of several countries which it claims support terrorism. These include Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Sudan, North Korea and Cuba. As can be seen, most of the United States' choice of countries allegedly supporting terrorism are Muslim. The list is quite arbitrary, especially since the United States has itself supported terrorist movements from time to time – including movements in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation. But these recent American tendencies to "Islamize the face of

terrorism" have contributed to the divergence between the West and Islam.

But the West's contemporary historical role suffers from a deep schizophrenia. In its relations with Islam, Western secularism is increasingly a Mr. Hyde. On the other hand, mainstream Western churches are now a benign Dr. Jekyll towards Muslims. The pockets of Islamophobia are to be found in Evangelical Christian Rightwing groups and televangelists.

While Western militarism, imperialism, racism and capitalism have all helped to alienate the West from Islam, the main Christian churches and the main leaders of Islam have been moving closer together. For a long time mainstream Christian leadership preferred to have Jerusalem declared as an international city, rather than continue to be a bitterly contested battleground between Israelis and Palestinians. Mainstream Christian churches include Catholics, Methodists, Episcopalians and other Anglicans. All these are extending a friendly hand to Muslims.

Pope John Paul II has gone further than any previous Pope to foster good relations between Catholics and Muslims. In May 2002 the Pope visited Azerbaijan, a country with fewer Christians than those who were on his own plane. He was trying to be fair to the Muslim Azaris after visiting Christian Armenians the year before.

When Salman Rushdie published his notorious novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1988-1989, the book was declared blasphemous not only by Muslims but also by the Vatican and by the Archbishop of Canterbury in London.

Prince Charles, the Heir to the British Throne and potentially Head of the Church of England, is the patron of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies and author of a widely circulating Islam-friendly pamphlet entitled *Islam and the West*. Prince Charles has also proposed that at his Coronation he should swear to be "Defender of Faith" (meaning all faiths) rather than the traditional "Defender of the Faith" (meaning the Church of England).

However, within Third World countries the picture of relations between Muslims and Christians is more mixed. On the one hand, bloody conflicts have broken out in countries like Indonesia, Nigeria, Sudan and occasionally Egypt between Christians and Muslims. On the other hand, Muslim societies in the Third World have sometimes given Christians remarkable access to influence and power. Saddam Hussein's Iraq has had Tareq Aziz, a Chaldean Christian, as Deputy Prime Minister. Aziz was previously Foreign Minister of Iraq.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, a Coptic Christian, would never have become Secretary-General of the United Nations had he not previously risen high in the Foreign Service of Egypt. He had served as Minister of State. There is no Western nation which has permitted a Muslim to rise so high.

Senegal is over ninety percent Muslim. Yet it had a Roman Catholic Executive President for twenty years (1960 to 1980). Catholic President Leopold Senghor was succeeded by a Muslim Head of State, Abdou Diouf. Diouf's First Lady was Roman Catholic. A Muslim First Lady or President of a Western country is at the moment mind-boggling.

Muslims and Christians in Nigeria fight each other from time to time. But they also vote for each other at election time. Olusegun Obasanjo (a Christian) would never have become President of Nigeria had he not received more than half his support from the Muslims of Nigeria in 1998.

Muslims in general are more ecumenical towards other faiths than is often recognized. Westerners in their political behaviour are less tolerant of other faiths than Westerners themselves realize.

At the macro-level of the world as a whole, relations between mainstream Christianity and mainstream Islam are more cordial than they were before World War II. But relations between the secular West and the Muslim world are getting more polarized.

Outside the field of militarism the rising forces of secularism constitute shared threats between Islam and Christianity. Religious life generally has been threatened by the impact of such

influences as Western television, Hollywood and the cinema, the impact of the West's magazines, newspapers and radio, and the even more pervasive influence of Western models of secular education worldwide.

Islam and Christianity have also had to confront the shared threat of Western materialism. The triumph of market ideologies, acquisitive individualism, maximization of returns, capitalism and the rat-race of the market-place have all emphasized material satisfaction rather than spiritual salvation. Sacred values generally have been at risk as a result. This is a point of convergence between Christianity and Islam as they confront the rising tide of irreligious culture.

The two religions have also been struggling with the forces of Western hedonism. Christianity has been hit harder than Islam by such social difficulties as alcoholism, drugs and narcotics, prostitution and easy sex. But both religions are up against eroding moral restraints in the face of Western hedonism.

Conclusion

We have noted elsewhere that on September 11, 2001, it was American secular icons which were targeted by the terrorists, not religious symbols. The World Trade Center was a symbol of American economic might, the Pentagon a symbol of military power. The fourth plane, which crashed in Pennsylvania, was probably intended for either the White House or the Capitol building of Congress, symbols of American political pre-eminence.

What was obviously not targeted on September 11, 2001, was a major cathedral in either New York or Washington. We have argued that this religious omission was not accidental. The pre-eminent adversary of militant Islam is no longer Christianity, as it might have been in the days of the Crusades. The contemporary adversary to militant Islam is Western global hegemony. This is definitely true at the macro-level of the world arena. The West combines an aggressive secular Mr. Hyde towards Islam and a more benign Christian Dr. Jekyll.

But within religious plural societies in the Third World, there are two ambiguities which have affected relations between Christians and Muslims. Western exploitation creates a situation where ordinary folks are not always sure where Western hegemony ends and the power of Christendom begins. Secondly, although the Third World has had some of the worst clashes between Christians and Muslims, it has also witnessed the most remarkable instances of power-sharing in the political process, including a Christian President in an overwhelmingly Muslim country.

A third force in the Third World which can be destabilizing is globalization. While globalization is, on one side, the enlargement of economic scale, it is, on the other hand, a trigger for cultural revivalism and sectarian rivalries. Globalization has provoked re-tribalization and ethnic rivalries in countries as diverse as Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Republics, the Ivory Coast, India and Indonesia.

But globalization may itself be one of the forces which are contributing to divergence between the West and Islam. Globalization is currently deepening the trends towards cultural alienation in much of the Third World. The impact of the secular West on Islam's relations with other religions can also be alienating. The West helped to poison relations between Islam and Judaism. Will the West now poison relations between Islam and Hinduism?

But when all is said and done, history is moving in the direction of making mainstream Christianity and Islam cultural allies in an increasingly secular and often amoral world. But contemporary political and strategic issues have yet to stem the trend towards alienation between Islam and the secular West. In the Christian identity of the West there is hope for a new realignment of partnership. But the secular identity of the West is still in the shadows of militarism, imperialism capitalism and race. Christian-Muslim relations offer a beacon of optimism. Western-Muslim relations in the secular arena are in danger of vindicating Samuel Huntington's prophecy of "a clash of civilizations". As Muslims and Christians would say: "The Lord preserve us"!