

**MIRRORS AND WINDOWS:
REDEFINING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE MIND¹**

¹ See Ismail Serageldin, "Mirrors and Windows: Redefining the Boundaries of the Mind." In *The American Journal of Islamic Social Studies*, vol. II(1) (Spring 1994): 79–107. "Mirrors and Windows" was also published in two parts in *Litterae* (The Review of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts), Part I in 3(2–3) (11 October 1993): 4–15 and Part II in 4(1) (1994): 8–26.

Contents

1. On Boundaries	1
2. The West and the Muslims	3
3. The Muslim Predicament	4
4. For a Critical Process	8
5. Conceptual and Practical Problems	10
6. A Model of Social Behavior	12
7. The Task for the Intelligentsia	18
8. On Method	20
9. Human Rights	24
10. On Democracy	26
11. The Role of Women	32
12. Criticism of Cultural Output	39
13. Concluding Remarks	41

1. On Boundaries

Frontiers are an invention of the mind. We set boundaries for ourselves and others by what we choose to see as reality and by what we choose to value.

But men and women are social creatures, and individual behavior is subjected to the control of widely shared social values. These boundaries that define the limits of acceptable behavior also tend to reflect and reinforce limits on acceptable thinking.

How are such social values developed? How do they change over time? The intelligentsia artists and intellectuals create *mirrors* through which we see ourselves and *windows* through which we perceive reality. It is these mirrors and windows that define the boundaries of the mind. The intelligentsia's role both as makers of a cultural outlook and product of the milieu is central to my view of what is happening in the world generally and the Muslim societies of the Middle East particularly. *These important questions will appear throughout this essay like a leitmotif.* The intelligentsia needs a *space of freedom* in which it can perform its dual role and shape the boundaries by which we define ourselves.

Are such boundaries important? They certainly are. Shared values reflected in predictable behavior not only are the basis of all social organization but are at the core of "cultural identity" a hackneyed expression that nevertheless remains essential to anyone who lives in a group.²

Yet individuals within a group are not clones, interchangeable units within a collectivity. Each and every person interacts with others in an expanding series of circles starting with high intensity *vis à vis* the immediate family circle and with decreasing intensity to the limit of the group(s) with which the individual identifies.

Clearly, however, social values do not have the same impact on all members of a society or cultural group. Obvious cleavages are by sex, by age, and by wealth. Race, creed, and national origin are additional lines of cleavage that permeate any large group. Opinions mostly concerning social values, and whether and how they should or should not change, further divide and subdivide the shifting mass of humanity within the large group.

²The issue of culture and society remains a complex one. For a survey of recent debates see Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman, eds., *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Culture is also central to the process of development. See Ismail Serageldin, "Culture, Empowerment, and the Development Paradigm," *Development: Journal of the Society for International Development* (Issue on "Reflections on Global Solidarity: One World or Several"), 1991, no. 1: 88-90.

What keeps the large group from exploding along one or more of these many lines of cleavage is the sense of shared cultural identity on the one hand, and the human need to organize social groupings around the family unit still essential for reproducing the species and still the basic building block of all social organization.

Boundaries are multiple. Each individual identifies to varying degrees with different sets of individuals: immediate family, extended family, ethnic group, nationality group, regional group, religious group, ideological group, and professional or other groups. At no time is a single boundary the sole definer of an identity. Yet at different times and for different issues there is a most relevant boundary that becomes prominent and defines the us/them divide. This boundary tends to reject the "other" and frequently reinforces itself by defining the "us," not by the specific positive attributes of the members of the "us" group but by the elements in opposition to the "other." This mode of definition emphasizes the negative and expands the elements that separate groupings, thus making it more difficult to emphasize the broader groupings that always exist, albeit in weaker form. Ultimately, we all belong to one group: the human race.

However, notwithstanding this common humanity, other boundaries tend to prevail. Thus, when the "Yugoslav identity" weakened, it was unable to provide the glue to keep Serbs and Croats *voluntarily* in the same Yugoslav group so the relevant boundaries were redefined inward to a smaller group. On the other hand the strength of the "Swiss identity" is sufficient to hold together a population speaking several languages (German, French, Italian, and even Romanche), several religious affiliations, and multiple local identities.³ Further along, we see the gradual emergence of a European identity, by which Germans, French, Italians, British, and others are gradually expanding the most important boundary outward from the nation-state to the pan-European one.

2. The West and the Muslims

But against this backdrop of shifting allegiances and identities, there is a reaffirmation of an old divide: "the West" versus "the World of Islam." It is an odd confrontation. "The West," as a precise concept, is less meaningful today than it ever was.⁴ Is Japan part of the "West"? Is

³See J. M. Gabriel, *How Switzerland Is Governed* (Zurich: Schweizer Spiegel Verlag, 1983); and Carol L. Schmid, *Conflict and Consensus in Switzerland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

⁴The West has long been used by "Western" scholars as well as politicians, preceding the East-West Cold War confrontation. See among others Oswald Spengler's influential work, *The Decline of the West* (New York: The Modern Library, 1962); and for a rebuttal of Spengler's theses see J. G. de Beus, *The Future of the West* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953). Of most relevance to the *cultural* aspects of this discussion, see J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, *The Western Intellectual Tradition* (New York: Dorset Press, Harper & Row Publishing, 1986).

the West synonymous with the OECD? The Group of 7? Where does "Eastern Europe" fit *vis-à-vis* "the West"? How about the erstwhile members of the USSR? How about Turkey?⁵

Hazy as it may be, "the West," in very broad cultural terms, has some validity. Conceptually, it is used today as shorthand for rich industrial societies that organized their economies on a market basis and their politics on a multiparty democratic basis. Individualism, secularism, and consumerism are hallmarks of values and behavior. The differences among nation-statesocieties within the group, large as they are, are still smaller or less significant than among the group and others. It is not just wealth that defines the divide because "the West" does not include the wealthy oil states such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Brunei.

Leaving aside the question of whether it includes Japan, "the West," however defined, clearly includes the most dominant sociopolitical group on the planet today. Willy-nilly, aspects of its "culture" tend to invade the cultural space of other societies.⁶ Sometimes such cultural transfers are enriching; sometimes they are destructive of a people's heritage and identity.

On the other hand, it is equally difficult to talk of the "World of Islam," or the "Muslim World." Not only are there incredible differences among communities as diverse as Niger, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia, but the spread of Islam includes almost a billion people, mostly in Africa and Asia but increasingly as discernible communities in the industrialized West itself. In France the fact that Muslims now account for over 5 percent of the population is as deeply felt and resented as the fact that 11 percent of French citizens are foreign-born. This Muslim "diaspora" creates issues unique to its own special position while sharing some of the general issues, with which the majority of Muslims everywhere are grappling.

3. The Muslim Predicament

What are these general issues? Some are of historical origin, others are more recent. Historically, the first issue is the distinction between "Arab" and "Muslim" identities. Not all Arabs are Muslims nor are all Muslims Arabs. It is clear, however, that when Islam as a faith, a social movement, and a system of governance exploded out of Arabia onto the world scene in the 7th century A.D., it implanted itself by varying degrees of voluntarism and coercion in many

⁵These types of definitional issues were recently grappled with in "Game of the Name," *The Economist*, April 4-10, 1992, 50.

⁶See the concerns expressed by one contemporary Muslim thinker in Muhammad 'Imara, *Al-Ghazw Al-Fikri: Wahm am Haqiqa?* (Intellectual Invasion: Myth or Reality?) (Cairo: Dar Al-Shuruq, 1989).

lands. All became thoroughly "Islamized," remaining Muslim for centuries, even through colonial conquest and rule by non-Muslims. With the exception of the Iberian Peninsula, where Islam was forcibly eradicated by 1492, once they became Muslim, most societies tended to stay Muslim. But from the start some countries, such as Egypt, became both "Arabized" and "Islamized" while others, for example, Iran, were Islamized but not Arabized. The processes of cultural development that accompanied these transformations are a worthy topic of study. They must, regrettably, stay beyond the scope of this brief essay. Suffice it to say that there is a profound problem between the overlapping, but incomplete, concordance of the Arab and Muslim identities that continues to make non-Muslim Arabs and non-Arab Muslims uncomfortable and that remains one dimension of the present Muslim cultural predicament.⁷ It is a predicament shared by thoughtful Arab Muslims concerned about the definition of their own identities.⁸

Another problematic thread in the tapestry of the contemporary Muslim identity is the historic "rupture" that characterized the cultural evolution of most Muslim societies.⁹ Although it overlaps the colonial experience, it is not synonymous with it since much of what Muslims did to themselves in terms of intellectual sclerosis preceded the experience of being colonized by the West (here is that term, "the West," popping up again!). Indeed it is arguable that the intellectual sclerosis not only facilitated the ultimate colonization of most of the Muslim world but also laid bare the inability of the Muslim intelligentsia to rise to the intellectual challenge represented by the Western invaders, any more than the ruling elites were able to address the military challenge. I submit that the latter is partially a result of the former. At any rate, this intellectual failure, exacerbated by the colonial experience, tends to dog the efforts of all would-be reformers in Muslim societies by confronting them with two alternative approaches, both of which are riddled with problems, albeit quite different problems.

The first option considers that the intellectual legacy we have to work with is so completely "out of sync" with the contemporary world that it is better to completely ignore it and start from the present, defined largely by Western institutions, standards, and concepts.

⁷See, for example, Muhammad 'Imara, *Al-Islam wal 'Uruba wal 'Almaniya* (Islam, Arabism, and Secularism) (Beirut: Dar Al-Wahda, 1984).

⁸See Ismail Serageldin, "Ta'qib" (Rejoinder), 605-10, and "Comments," 100-101, 348, 475-76, in Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS), *Al-Qawmiyya Al-Arabiyya wal Islam* (Arab Nationalism and Islam) (Proceedings of a conference held in Beirut, December, 1980) (Beirut: CAUS, 1981).

⁹For a discussion of this issue of rupture, see Mohammed Arkoun in the proceedings of "Architectural Education in the Islamic World," Seminar Ten in *Architectural Transformations in the Islamic World*, (Seminar series held in Granada, Spain, April 21-25, 1986) (Singapore: Concept Media for The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1986), 15-21, and subsequent discussion, 22-25.

Internalizing this new reality as quickly as possible would then enable local Muslim cultures to be "reborn" in a new and more effective form. Extreme adherents to this view would go further and assert that we are all part of a global village, that there is only one (technologically driven?) world culture, and that those who seek to keep alive anachronistic manifestations of the "heritage" are hopeless romantics who are bound to fail. The world, it is asserted, is converging rapidly towards a single mode of thinking. Fukuyama's "End of History" is upon us so why fight it?¹⁰

This apparently bold approach is, in fact, the path of least resistance. Upon closer scrutiny it can be seen as simply abdicating to "the West" the responsibility of shaping not just world affairs but also the mechanisms of identity formation in Muslim societies wherever they may be. This is a path that not only eschews the arduous task of struggling with a complex and frustrating reality but also reinforces the very dependence that is so troubling to many Muslims today. Far from being the bold stroke that cleaves the Gordian knot, it is a pathetic attempt to deny the reality of both the heritage and actual circumstances that collectively define the frame of reference for each individual.

The second extreme approach is equally fraught with dangers. It asserts that a new reality cannot make a *tabula rasa* of the past but must build upon it. A viable identity can only be created by a patient reconstruction of the intellectual edifice that is built concept by concept, conclusion by conclusion, upon the solid foundation of "pure, true Islam."¹¹ This, of course, is *one* of the many problems one encounters. What is "pure" unadulterated and uncontaminated Islam? Who decides what to keep and what to throw out? How and by what criteria can one select which mental constructs to keep and which to throw out? Indeed, even if one were able to erect such an edifice, what relationship would it have to the "faulty" Western or hybrid concepts that are in fact embedded in the minds of hundreds of millions of Muslims today? How could one replace these faulty concepts, themselves the product of generations of slow evolution or non-evolution, in one fell swoop with the new construct? The history of cultural revolutions leaves much to be desired.¹²

Militant Muslim fundamentalism is a term that I use only because it has acquired such currency that it would be foolish not to use it is a variant of that approach. It seeks to define the contemporary Muslim identity by returning to the "roots," by rejecting the impositions,

¹⁰Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

¹¹An outstanding exemplar of this school of thought is the distinguished scholar Fazlur Rahman.

¹²See Dareyush Shayegan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une révolution religieuse?* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991).

corruptions, and distortions of "the West."¹³ Fundamentalists tend to define themselves as much by "anti-Western" as by "pro-Muslim" views.¹⁴ The adversarial character of this dichotomy leads to the pursuit of "Islamic science" and "Islamic medicine"¹⁵ without regard to the vast areas of inevitable overlap between such constructs and "Western science" and "Western medicine." Such attempts miss the fact that science and culture operate at different levels.¹⁶

4. For a Critical Process

The reader will doubtless feel that this is the standard game of setting up two extreme positions and criticizing each with a view to defend the middle ground as the only sensible position. That is close but not quite true. There is no real middle ground between these two approaches. There is, however, a third, different approach that I would like to advance. Doubtless there are many others, but I will limit myself to presenting and defending this third approach that of adopting the *critical process*.

The approach is *critical* insofar as it starts from a position of healthy skepticism, and subjects all suggested positions and/or approaches to the discriminating scrutiny of critical analysis. This, incidentally, is not a purely "Western" doctrine; it is found among the best of Muslim scholarship from Al-Farabi¹⁷ to Ibn Khaldun¹⁸ to Muhammad Abduh.¹⁹ All these

¹³Thus, no elements of Western culture may be incorporated into a truly Islamic society. Maududi warns that in choosing the path of Islam people will [. . .] have to give up all desire for material gains and sensual pleasures that has been created by the fascinations of the Western civilization; they will have to cleanse their mind of all those concepts and ideas that they have borrowed from Europe; and they will have to cast off all those principles and ideals that they have imbibed from the Western culture and way of life." Justin Leites, "Modernist Jurisprudence as a Vehicle for Gender Role Reform in the Islamic World," *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 22 (2) (Spring 1991): 323, quoting A. Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1972), 17.

¹⁴For an interesting and thoughtful insider's critique, see Abdallah Al-Nafisi, ed., *Al-Haraka Al-Islamiyya: Ru'ya Mustaqbaliya Awwaq fil Naqd Al-Dhati* (The Islamic Movement: A View to the Future Papers in Self-Criticism) (Kuwait, 1989); and Muhammad 'Imara, *Al-Sahwa Al-Islamiyya wal Tahadi Al-Hadari* (Islamic Revival and the Cultural Challenge) (Beirut: Dar Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi, 1985).

¹⁵See, for example, Robert Walgate, "Science in Islam and the West: Synthesis by Dialogue," in *The Touch of Midas: Science, Values, and Environment in Islam and the West*, ed. Ziauddin Sardar (Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 1984), 240-53.

¹⁶This notion of a hierarchy of theories or constructs is ably presented by one of the leading scientists in the world. See Stephen Jay Gould, *An Urchin in the Storm: Essays about Books and Ideas* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988), 68-69.

¹⁷See among others Muhsin Mahdi, *Al-Farabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (New York: The Free Press, 1962).

¹⁸See Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Mujallad Al-Awal: Al-Muqadima*, (The First Volume: The Prolegomena) (Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, 1962).

luminaries applied a discriminating critical analysis to all the topics they addressed from the social to the theological. Contemporary critical analysis, however, must use the tools of contemporary criticism. That point will be expanded on later.

The approach is a *process* insofar as there is no ultimate conclusion or product: the perfect edifice is never built, never completed. We cannot get from here to there because there is no final "there" to get to.

Is this a cop-out? Not at all. The French identity was described in a felicitous choice of words as the result of a long labor of self on self: "La France est devenue la France par un lent (long?) travail de soi sur soi." Yet even the vaunted French identity has to constantly reinvent itself.²⁰ The three million North African Arab Muslims living in France are as much a cultural challenge as a sociological one, whether one chooses assimilation, acculturation, or any other of myriad possibilities including the formation of a Swiss-like two-tier identity.

Thus a process it must be. The pursuit of a conclusive solution to the definition of an identity is the pursuit of a mirage.

5. Conceptual and Practical Problems

How can such a process of critical inquiry be launched? Here we run into two sets of problems, one conceptual and one practical.

On the *conceptual* side, we are confronted with the hegemonic Western constructs, methods, instruments, and discourse. Our concepts of *geography* reflect this hegemony. The West, in this case its North Atlantic and primarily European pole, has even defined the nomenclature of the regions of the world: Near East, Middle East, Far East. "Near" in relation to what? "Far" in relation to what? From Australia's vantage point the Far East could be termed the Near North.

¹⁹See Mohammed 'Imara, ed., *Al-A'mal Al-Kamila Lil Imam Muhammad 'Abduh* (The Complete Works of Muhammad 'Abduh), 6 vols. (Beirut, 1972).

²⁰Much has been written about the identity of France. Perhaps the most noted is Fernand Braudel, *L'Identité de la France* (Paris: Les éditions Arthaud, 1986). The French identity, however, subsumes many regional identities. An excellent recent survey of the twenty-six regions of France is "La France dans ses régions: Vingt-six enquêtes sur le pays d'aujourd'hui," *Le Monde*, April 1992.

Our concepts of *history* are determined from an ethnocentric European perspective. The "Dark Ages" of the medieval period were dark only in Europe. They were an age of splendor in the Muslim world.²¹

Our concepts of *nationality* are largely the result of Western deeds or misdeeds. The boundaries of almost all African and Arab countries are the result of lines drawn on maps by the colonizing European powers leaving a legacy that remains troublesome to this day of ethnic groups that fall across several states, such as the Kurds among Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia. The attempt to work within these political frontiers in creating a sense of national identity is an additional burden with which contemporary people have to cope, whether they consider themselves Muslims, Arabs, or Kurds.

The critical *methods* to be used are largely those that were developed by Western scholars in Western institutions. This does create a frustrating asymmetry, made all the more frustrating by the largely hostile and distorted view held by the West of Muslims and most things pertaining to Islam.²² But that issue is not relevant to this discussion. Whatever their origin, these critical methods are excellent tools of analysis within a given frame of reference. For scholars in the Muslim World who wish to use them, they are a double burden. They are forced to convince their Muslim colleagues that use of these critical methods does not imply the adoption of an implicit frame of reference that is "not acceptable" in Muslim terms, and they must build a bridge to the orthodox Muslim (*'usuli*) framework²³ of the Muslim religious scholars (*ulama'*) to be understood. This daunting enterprise not only requires double work but frequently results in a double rejection by both camps. Western scholars may scorn such efforts as inappropriate and unconvincing while and Muslim orthodox scholars may dismiss them as disguised orientalism.²⁴ Thus it would seem that the schism between "the Muslim World" and "the West" manifests itself again in the systematic way in which those who would follow a different path are forced to "choose a camp." Boundaries of the mind, again.

On the *practical* side, there is an evolving social reality in Muslim societies from Morocco to Indonesia. Scholars of whatever variety cannot ignore such an evolving reality and

²¹See among others W. Montgomery Watt, *The Majesty That Was Islam* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1974), and D. M. Dunlop, *Arab Civilization to A.D. 1500* (New York: Praeger, 1971).

²²See Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

²³See, for example, Abdel-Wahab Khallaf, *Ilm Usul Al-Fiqh* (The Science of Principles of Jurisprudence), 9th ed. (Kuwait: Dar Al-Qalam, 1970).

²⁴See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

expect their work to be relevant. The essence of this evolving reality, I believe, is that communications, technology, mobility, and the demographic transition that many societies are undergoing all contribute not just to change the way societies function but also to accelerate the rate of change. Individuals confronted by these changed circumstances adapt. In doing so, they tend to "unbundle" the attributes they possess, protecting some, discarding others without the scholar's concern for coherence or consistency. This constant adaptation and readaptation is

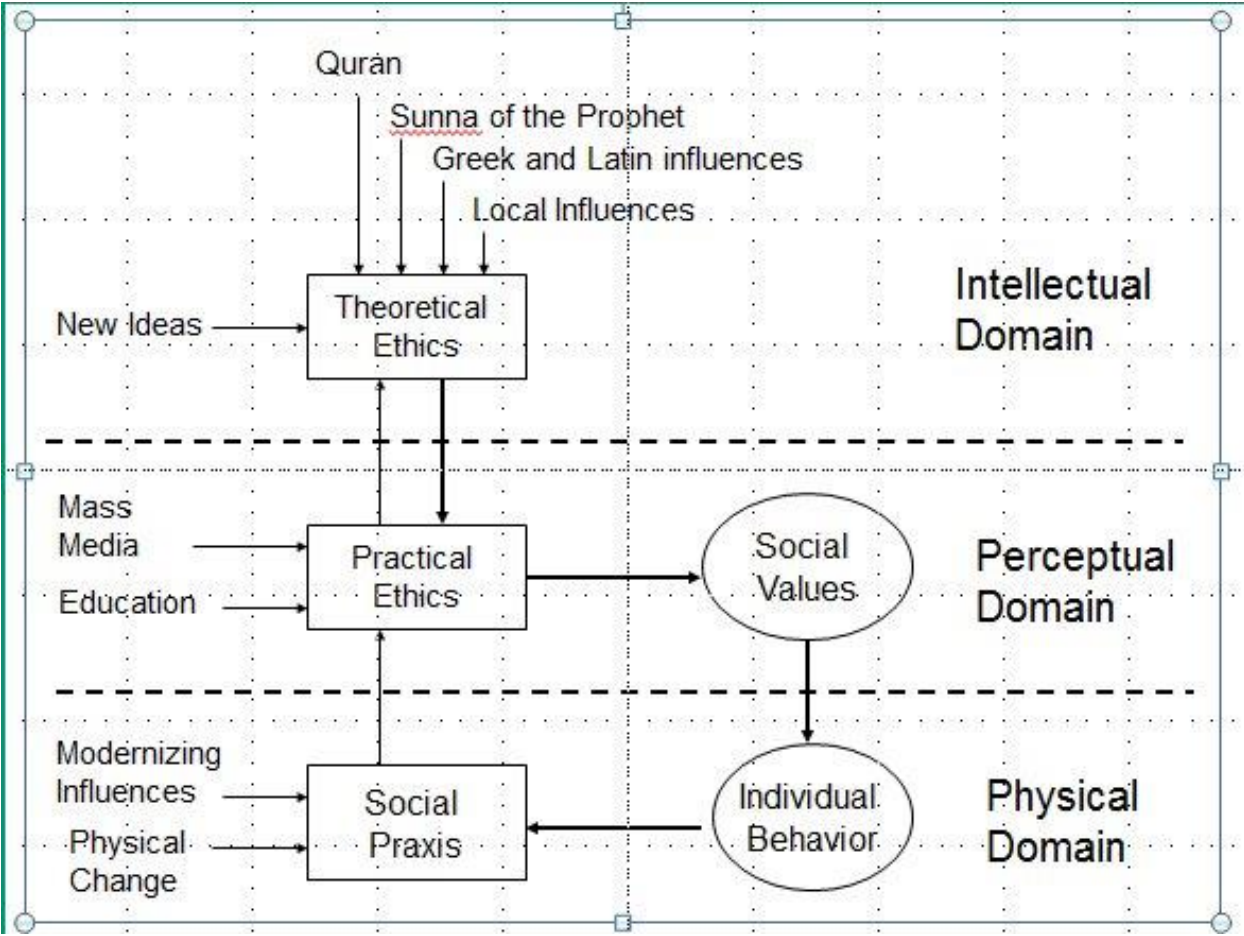
what we see in rapidly changing societies. This process is at the core of any explanation of changing social values, for social values do not exist in a vacuum, and they would not be social values if they did not govern individual behavior for the vast majority of the population.

In clarifying the link between the work of the scholars and the evolving social reality of which the scholars are part, we come to the heart of the interactive two-way relationship between the process of defining the mental boundaries and the existence and operation of these boundaries in real life.

6. A Model of Social Behavior

Elsewhere²⁵ I have presented my views of a three-tiered model of social behavior, but it is pertinent to summarize it here since it is central to my argument that serious change is required in Muslim-Arab societies and in Muslim thinking today and also to how such change, radical or modest, operates. The conceptual model is graphically presented in *Figure 1*.

²⁵For a discussion of how this process and its dynamics are affecting the self-image of Muslims, see among others Ismail Serageldin, "Individual Identity, Group Dynamics and Islamic Resurgence," in *Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World*, ed. Ali E. H. Dessouki (New York: Praeger, 1982), 54-66.



The three tiers define the intellectual, the perceptual, and the physical domains. At the level of the intellectual domain, "theoretical ethics" (what should be: the normative ideal) are debated by scholars, philosophers, and intellectuals. Here in addition to the *Quran*,²⁶ the *Sunna*²⁷ and the body of Muslim scholarship, many other tributaries come into play, including Pre-Islamic local traditions, Greek philosophy, and Western contemporary thought.

The vast majority of the population, however, does not perceive this "ideal order" of the theoretical ethics. Their perception of ethics is a distorted one that I have termed "practical ethics."²⁸

Practical ethics is one that allows a Muslim to show prejudice, to feel free with the blood of others in the name being a good Muslim in spite of the categorical injunction, "There shall be no coercion in religion" (*Quran* 2:256). Less dramatically, it condones the visitation of "saintly" shrines and demanding intercession by "saints," many of whom, incidentally, historically were unsavory characters. Such practices are categorically rejected by Islamic

²⁶The *Quran*, which is held by all Muslims to be the word of God, is in Arabic. There are many translations of the meanings of the *Holy Quran*, but for this essay I have used the authoritative translation of Yusuf Ali, [*The Meaning of] The Glorious Quran* (Cairo: Dar al Kitab Al-Arabi; Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, n.d). This is the work that (in its two-volume edition) is distributed by the Rabitat Al-'Alam al-Islami of Saudi Arabia.

²⁷The *Sunna* is the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. His life is inextricably intertwined with the establishment of both Islam as a religion and Muslim society as a new social order. Scholars study his life, in word and deed, both for inspiration and for detailed instructions on matters of religious, social, and legal import. Of the many biographies, the best, in my judgment, remains Mohamed Husain Haikal's *Hayat Muhammad* (Life of Muhammad), 6th ed. (Cairo: Dar Al-Nahda Al-Misriya, 1956), but the topic of the Sunna and its meaning continues to be actively debated to this day. See Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna Al-Nabawiya bayn Ahl Al-Fiqh wa Ahl Al-Hadith* (The Tradition of the Prophet between the Jurists and the Hadith Specialists) (Cairo: Dar Al-Shuruq, 1989).

²⁸Others have made a slightly different usage of these terms. See Marcus G. Singer, ed., *Morals and Values: Readings in Theoretical and Practical Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), 1, 2, 4, 8, 18.

theology of all schools.²⁹ Nevertheless, they are widespread practices, and they are considered by the practitioners to be manifestations of being a good Muslim. Thus does practical ethics become the relevant framework for the overwhelming majority of Muslims.

Practical ethics shapes social values. These are the primary guides to individual behavior in the real (physical) world. Many rituals as well as people's sense of "what will others think" are dominated by the prevalent social values. Hence individual behavior, by and large, conforms to the prevalent social values.

Individual behavior, when collectivized, becomes "social praxis," or what we observe society doing every day.

Change can enter the schema in several ways. First, and most commonly, it enters at the level of social praxis due either to strong "modernizing forces" or to major physical changes. An example of the former is the impact that the massive increase in oil revenues in Saudi Arabia in the mid-1970s had on northern Yemen. Not only did massive migration to the north bring money and new consumption patterns, but it also changed practically all aspects of life in Yemen including architectural expression.³⁰ More importantly, villages depopulated of all able-bodied men meant that women assumed different roles. Such changes became "acceptable" in terms of practical ethics and social values. A change in the social praxis moved up to practical ethics.

Likewise, when fourteen years of drought destroyed nomadism as a way of life in Mauritania, new patterns of behavior were acquired by the former nomads in a very painful transition to living in quasi-permanent refugee settlements around cities such as Nouakchott and Rosso. Again, changes in social praxis found their way to practical ethics and social values, to support and reinforce necessary changes in individual behavior (and social praxis).

If some things persist long enough in the domain of social praxis and start being widely accepted in the domain of practical ethics, the *ulama'* (religious scholars and philosophers) and the intelligentsia generally start changing (or reaffirming) the theoretical ethics to respond to that

²⁹See Mohammed 'Imara, ed., *Al-A'mal Al-Kamila Lil Imam Muhammad 'Abduh* (The Complete Works of Muhammad 'Abduh), vol. 2 (Beirut, 1972), 205.

³⁰See Ismail Serageldin, "Rural Architecture in the Yemen Arab Republic," in *The Changing Rural Habitat* (Proceedings of Seminar Six in the series *Architectural Transformations in the Islamic World*, held in Beijing, People's Republic of China, October 19-22, 1981), vol. 1, *Case Studies* (Singapore: Concept Media for The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1982), 1-10.

challenge. Thus, for example, the widespread availability of interest-bearing banking has triggered responses from various Muslim religious authorities.³¹

But change also can come directly into the intellectual domain when new ideas are confronted, analyzed, adapted, and incorporated as was the case with Greek philosophy at the time of Al-Farabi, and as it is today with a number of contemporary ideas (some of which we will discuss later).

Change also enters directly into the perceptual domain by two vectors: the mass media and the education system. Both of these have much to do with shaping the world view of most people, hence help define their concept of self and society, however imperfectly or inadequately.³²

To the extent that all these changes are entering or being addressed at the perceptual and intellectual domains (especially the latter), there is a possibility of maintaining the general framework of society's cultural identity. It would be an evolving framework, even a rapidly evolving framework but it would be both *integrated* and *integrating*. It would be integrated in that the internal coherence of the framework is maintained and people feel at ease with themselves and their society. It would be integrating in that it is capable of incorporating new and novel elements, thus constantly growing and adapting to new challenges, generating the capacity to respond to new challenges and to create new opportunities. This integrated and integrating framework is a healthy one in which artists and the intelligentsia can continuously

³¹Here it should be noted that a number of Western authorities are now looking at "Islamic banking" with less scorn than they did ten years ago. See *The Economist*, April 4-10, 1992, 49.

³²In French, the concept "Imaginaire Social" captures much of relevance to this issue. See Gilbert Durand, *Les Structures Anthropologiques de l'Imaginaire*, 10th ed. (Paris: Dunod, 1984.)

probe the challenges of nature, society, and the inner self opening windows and holding up mirrors for each of us, to help us expand the boundaries that limit our scope and define the wise constraints that make us free.

I submit that in the Muslim world today, most of the change is coming in from the level of social praxis, and a good part of it is entering the perceptual domain of practical ethics by the mass media, which have in this age of global communications expanded primarily the influence of the seductive and effective mass culture of "the West" generally and of the United States specifically.³³

Today, there is little, if any, integration being done at the level of the intellectual domain hence the power of the rejectionist argument advanced by the Muslim fundamentalist movements. Their framework is certainly *integrated*, but it is not *integrating*. Due to the weakness of its intellectual foundations, it fears modifying old solutions or designing novel ones in order to hold onto the coherence and logical integration of the old framework.

The relative weakness of the reformist or innovative current within the broad mainstream of Muslim thinking attests to the inadequacy of the volume and scope of the intellectual output produced thus far by the few active intellectuals among the reformers, although some of it is very, very good. It also attests to the despair of many would-be reformers who have opted for the easy (but in my judgment inadequate) option of equating "modernization" with "Westernization."³⁴

³³Edgar Morin, *L'Esprit du Temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1962).

³⁴This is an issue that touches all developing societies. See among others Alvin Y. So, *Social Change and Development: Modernization, Dependency, and World-System Theories* (Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage, 1990).

7. The Task for the Intelligentsia

Thus, the premise of this essay is that serious intellectual work is needed for Muslims to regain the feeling of being at ease with themselves that an integrated and integrating cultural framework provides. Furthermore, this work needs to clarify the overlap but (non-coincidence) of their national and ethnic identities (especially for Arabs) with their Muslim identities. Such work cannot be done without providing *a space of freedom* for the intelligentsia to struggle to redefine the meaning and content of cultural authenticity in a rapidly changing world in which isolationism or "de-linking" is no longer a viable option, if it ever was. The intelligentsia, *both artists and intellectuals*, have a major responsibility. They are the ones who fashion the *mirrors* in which we see ourselves and the *windows* through which we see the world. Through their work the boundaries defining our identities are being reshaped.

I also believe that the Muslim intelligentsia presently is imperfectly equipped to handle such a task.

For the Muslim intelligentsia to move to a new level of critical analysis of the issues it confronts, it is essential that:

First, Intellectuals develop a more systematic methodological basis for the appreciation of such key concepts as community, culture, Islam, society, identity, myth, imagination, and creativity. This is not just an intellectual's request for esoteric discourse and hair-splitting definitions. This is an essential task that must be accomplished to construct a more sophisticated edifice for the theory and practice of intellectual criticism and art criticism in the Muslim World today. Without clearly understood and agreed concepts, terminology, and methodology, the interdisciplinary discourse on these vital topics is bound to remain loose, unstructured, and possibly unconstructive. In fact this concern has been expressed by a number of distinguished intellectuals, most vehemently by Mohammed Arkoun.³⁵

Second, Muslim intellectuals explore more thoroughly the problem of cultural continuity in today's Muslim societies. What is needed is not an endless array of descriptive monographs, useful as these may be, but a thorough analytical probing of the complex phenomena of an evolving culture and the way it is manifested, to situate the role of the intelligentsia both as agents of change and products of the milieu.

³⁵See, for example, Mohammed Arkoun, *Pour une critique de la raison islamique* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1984).

While the first of these tasks is arduous, it is a prerequisite to implement the second.

Given the paucity of knowledge about the contemporary cultural scene throughout the diverse Muslim communities and the speed with which both physical development and socioeconomic change are taking place, Muslim intellectuals have a monumental task ahead if they want their ideas to be relevant to this rapidly changing world. They must restate the basic questions that all societies ask so that their understanding of self will not be degraded into the mere modes of consumption of both materials and time. At present Muslim intellectuals cannot afford to be alienated from their societies.

Muslim intellectuals and artists must learn to correctly decipher the past and the present. Both the high technology of today and the socioeconomic reality of their societies must be integral parts of their present consciousness; a proper understanding of their cultural past must be an integral part of their sense of self and society.

Together, intellectuals and artists must dare to think the unthinkable and to go "where others fear to tread," in order not to fall prey to the prevalent mode of degraded thinking that has manipulated the symbols of the Muslim culture into debased ideologically charged signals that supplant critical appreciation with populist slogans. This is a tall order but it provides the springboard for the tasks ahead.

Two contemporary ideas pose a profound challenge to contemporary Muslim thinkers. These are *democracy* and *the role of women*, both of which derive their roots from the fundamental concept of *human rights*. In the remaining sections of this essay, I will address both of these questions, seen as indivisible parts of the broader issue of human rights.

Before proceeding, however, it is essential to reaffirm that although the following discussion will be limited largely to the intellectual domain of theoretical ethics, it must be rooted in the *social context* in which societies perceive the practical ethics and in which social values (which govern individual behavior) are forged.³⁶ Limitations of space will make it impossible to pursue this essential analysis of social context, which, incidentally, includes the historical legacy of the particular societies concerned. History matters.³⁷

8. On Method

³⁶See George Gaskell, "Collective Behavior in a Societal Context," in *Societal Psychology*, ed. Hilde T. Himmelweit and George Gaskell (Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage, 1990), 252-72.

³⁷See among others Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

Let me start by clearly setting out my personal position.³⁸ I adhere to the view that this synthesis of critical method and in-depth historical, cultural, and socioeconomic knowledge of a society is necessary to make progress in dealing with the challenges of contemporary Muslim societies. My line of argument is two-fold. The first is based on the application strictly Islamic *'Usuli* principles,³⁹ arguing within the framework of the rules established and recognized by Muslim scholarship, relying on the *Quran*,⁴⁰ the *Sunna*⁴¹ (and especially the *Hadith*⁴²), *Ijma'* (or unanimity of learned opinion), and *Qiyas* (or analogy). The second is a conventional analysis in the "Western" academic mode. Not surprisingly, it is my belief that both arguments can reach compatible conclusions. This belief is grounded in the following assumptions: *First*, if the objectives of the Islamic *'Usuli* argumentation are equity and justice in social interaction and if these are the professed objectives of the "Western" line of analytical reasoning, there is no a priori reason to expect different conclusions in addressing the same objective conditions and problems. *Second*, if we accept that any recommended course of action must be compatible with the objective of being adapted to and adoptable by the society concerned, that is, that the action

³⁸See Ismail Serageldin, "The Justly Balanced Society: One Muslim's View" in David Beckmann, Ramgopal Agarwala, Sven Burmester, and Ismail Serageldin, *Friday Morning Reflections at the World Bank: Essays in Values and Development* (Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press, 1991), 55-73.

³⁹See Muhammad Abu Zahra, *Usul Al-Fiqh* (The Principles of Jurisprudence) (Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi, 1958).

⁴⁰There are, however, several levels at which the *Quranic* text can be read. This issue has concerned theologians, philosophers, and mystics for many centuries, including most recently the work of such eminent scholars as Mohammed Arkoun, who seeks to subject the text to a semiotic analysis. This search for understanding is enjoined by God: "[Why] Do they not seek to Ponder [understanding the meaning of] the *Quran*?" (*Quran*, 47:24 and 4:82).

⁴¹The *Sunna*, meaning "the way" in Arabic, technically refers to the way the Prophet showed for all Muslims to practice to live as Muslims. More generally, it refers to the words and deeds of the Prophet, his "tradition." Thus in Islamic studies the *Sunna* is the record and analysis of the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad. It is distinct from the *Quran* and is considered by all Muslim scholars as complementary to the *Quran* and second only to the *Quran* as source of authority for legal and religious rulings. For a discussion of the subject see Ahmad Umar Hashim, *Al-Sunna Al-Nabawiyya wa 'Ulumiha* (The Prophetic Tradition and Its Sciences) (Cairo: Gharib Library, 1989).

⁴²The sayings of the Prophet (the *Hadith*) are an essential source for the Exegesis of the *Quran* as well as for many aspects of religions and legal doctrine. Clearly, the collection and classification of the *Hadith* has been a subject of much debate, especially since the sayings of the Prophet were not recorded during the Prophet's lifetime, or even immediately thereafter, to make absolutely sure that the text of the *Quran* would remain absolutely "pure" from confusion with *Hadith*, which was quoted only orally. Ultimately, the masterwork in classifying the *Hadith* and establishing the basic foundations for the scholastic approach to its study has been Al-Bukhari's *Sahih*, written by Muhammad Ibn Ismail Al-Bukhari (194-256 AH/809-869 AD). It has gone through many editions worldwide, see *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dar Al-Sha'b, n.d.). A more recent classification of the *Hadith* has taken as a basis Al-Bukhari's *Sahih* and four other famous works, namely Muslim's *Sahih*, Tirmidhi's *Jami'*, Abi Daoud's *Sunan*, and Nisa'i's *Al-Mujtaba*. See Mansour Ali Nassif, *Al-Taj Al-Jami Lil'Usul Fi Ahadith Al-Rasool*, 5 vols., 4th ed. (Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr, 1975). For an introduction to the vast subject of *Hadith* see Subhi Al-Salih *'Ulum Al-Hadith wa Mustalahatiha* (The Sciences of Hadith and Its Terminology), 10th ed. (Beirut: Dar Al-Ilm Lil Malayeen, 1978).

must take the realities of the society into account, then there is also no a priori reason to expect that different recommendations should emerge.

Again, space limitations prevent anything but the sketchiest of presentations. Nevertheless, that should be sufficient to mark out the terrain of inquiry that should be worked in more detail to fill in the picture and develop the specific recommendations for specific

societies today. As explained, such recommendations perforce are beyond the scope of this essay even though the analysis of the social context is absolutely essential to give meaning to these otherwise abstract arguments.

My argument that there are no a priori reasons to expect contradictions is based upon a specific reading of Islamic doctrine.

The oft-quoted credo of Muslim activists that "Islam is for all times and all places" means the beliefs (*'Aqa'id*)⁴³ and core values of Islam are for all times and all places. It does not mean that specific rulings on social organization (the *Mu'amalat*) remain frozen for all time and transplantable to all places.

I buttress this view by references to three important precedents:

1. *The Prophet Muhammad*, in sending his emissary Mu'adh Ibn Jabal to Yemen,⁴⁴ asked him to use his judgment in making rulings on those things for which he could not find direct instruction in either the Quran or the Sunna.
2. *'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab*, the second Khalifa, changed rulings made by the Prophet and the first Khalifa, most notably the case of the *Mu'allafati Qulubahum* (those who have been (recently) reconciled).⁴⁵ The importance of that case is that 'Umar refused to give them support from the Muslim treasury even though they are allowed to receive Sadaqat (alms from the treasury) in a clear *Quranic* verse (*Quran* 9:60) and such alms were given to them by both the Prophet and the first Khalifa. The *hikma* (rationale) for the ruling was that these were (a) non-Muslims who did not side with the Quraishite enemies of the Muslims, or (b) that they were Muslim sympathizers in non-Muslim tribes who were being persecuted for their sympathies. The Muslims accordingly paid out of the treasury either to keep

⁴³See for example Mahmud Shaltut, *Al-Islam: Aqida wa Shari'a* (Islam: Beliefs and Law) (Cairo: Dar Al-Shuruq, 1980), 7-69.

⁴⁴Muhammad Husain Haikal, *Hayat Muhammad* (Life of Muhammad), 6th ed. (Cairo: Nahda, 1956), 485. The incident is particularly relevant because it occurred shortly before the Prophet's death and when the revelation was complete. The details of the incident are given in Khaled Muhammad Khaled, *Rijal Hawl Al-Rasoul* (Men around the Prophet), 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, 1973), 172-73 (with the biography of the emissary Mu'adh Ibn Jabal given at 172-81).

⁴⁵These were defined by Yusuf Ali as: ". . . men who have been weaned from hostility to Truth, who would probably be persecuted by their former associates, and require assistance until they establish new connections in their new environment. . . ." Yusuf Ali, [*The Meaning of*] *The Glorious Quran*, (Cairo: Dar al Kitab Al-Arabi; Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, n.d), 458, n. 1320.

them from joining Quraish or to compensate them if they were persecuted by the enemies of Islam. 'Umar held that this made sense when Muslims were an embattled and persecuted minority, but since the Muslim state was now a vast empire, "Let those who fear persecution come live under our protection, and let those who would wage war do so."⁴⁶ 'Umar held that things had changed and this a mere six years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. How much more change would 'Umar have seen over the next fourteen centuries!

3. *El-Shafei*, one of the four great jurists of Sunni Islam and the founder of the science of *Usul Al-Fiqh* (the principles of jurisprudence), himself changed his rulings between his period in Iraq and his period in Egypt, citing the differences between the two societies as justification.⁴⁷ Surely there is far more difference between the variegated societies in which Muslims find themselves today, over a thousand years later!

This permissiveness that I advocate finds its juridical expression in the legal principle that "that which is not expressly forbidden is allowed" (*Al-Asl fil Umur Al-Ibaha*).⁴⁸ This is in contrast with the fundamentalist position that tends to see in everything new a *bid'a* (which would lead believers astray). To discriminate between what is appropriate and what is not, we can refer to the well-established rule that the public interest dominates in enacting laws and regulations. Who can argue that contact with a rapidly changing and evolving world is not in the interest of all Muslims? Surely the experience of societies that have tried to "de-link" from the world community (such as Albania) are an important testimonial to the folly of this approach, which leads only to ever-increasing relative backwardness and lower levels of well-being.

This insistence on the intercourse among cultures, the promotion of trade, and the incorporation of the new does not mean that one cannot be selective in what one adopts. Japan showed that it could modernize without necessarily becoming Westernized.

9. Human Rights

⁴⁶Mohamed Husain Haikal, *Al-Faruq 'Umar* ('Umar the Just), vol. 2, 4th ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Al-Nahda Al-Misriya, 1965), 273-303, especially 282-83.

⁴⁷Muhammad Abu Zahra, *Al-Shafei* (Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi, 1978), 158-61.

⁴⁸"... He hath explained to you in detail what is forbidden to you..." (*Quran* 6:119). Hence anything not explicitly prohibited is allowed. For further discussion of this concept see among others Abdel-Wahab Khallaf, *Ilm Usul Al-Fiqh* (The Science of Jurisprudence) (Kuwait: Dar Al-Qalam, 1970), especially 115-16, and Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Al-Halal wal Haram Fil Islam* (The Accepted and the Forbidden in Islam) (Cairo: Wahba, 1980), especially 18-21.

The starting point is human rights. As used here, this is a body of "rights"⁴⁹ that is today accepted by the vast majority of peoples and nations and whose fundamental statement remains the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁵⁰ This statement has been codified in a number of international legal agreements.⁵¹ Additional declarations and instruments have been adopted to expand on the rights specified in the original declaration or to create vehicles for implementing them.⁵² Their relevance to international institutions as well as to governments has been the subject of scholarly study.⁵³

Despite their universal acceptance, the concept of "rights" continues to be debated in terms of philosophy⁵⁴ as well as international law.⁵⁵ It is increasingly suggested that these rights

⁴⁹See among others J. Roland Pennock, "Rights, Natural Rights, and Human Rights A General View," in *Human Rights: Nomos XXIII*, ed. J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (New York: New York University, 1981), 1-28.

⁵⁰The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted and proclaimed by the UN General Assembly Resolution 217 (III) on December 10, 1948.

⁵¹Especially *The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by General Assembly Resolution 2200 A (XI) of December 16, 1966, 21 UN GAO Supp. (No. 16), at 49, UN Doc. A/6316 (1967). This Covenant entered into force on January 3, 1976; and *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by General Assembly Resolution 2200 A (XI) of December 16, 1966, as above, at 52. This Covenant entered into force on March 23, 1976. Cited in Ibrahim Shihata, "The World Bank and Human Rights: An Analysis of the Legal Issues and the Record of Achievements" (Mimeograph, World Bank, Washington, DC, 1991, with data updated to January 1991) (Essay based on a paper presented to the International Third World Legal Studies Association Panel on the World Bank, Development Projects and Human Rights, at Miami, Florida, January 8, 1988, an edited version of which was published in *Denver Journal of International Law and Politics* 17 (1) (1988)).

⁵²United Nations Secretariat, Division of Human Rights, *Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments* (New York, United Nations, 1978).

⁵³The importance of these documents and their relevance to the work of such institutions as The World Bank has been the subject of an important study by the Bank's Vice President and Legal Counsel. See Ibrahim Shihata, "The World Bank and Human Rights: An Analysis of the Legal Issues and the Record of Achievements" (Mimeograph, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 1991, with data updated to January 1991) (Essay based on a paper presented to the International Third World Legal Studies Association Panel on the World Bank, Development Projects and Human Rights, at Miami, Florida, January 8, 1988, an edited version of which was published in *Denver Journal of International Law and Politics* 17 (1) (1988)).

⁵⁴See John Charvet, "A Critique of Human Rights," in *Human Rights: Nomos XXIII*, ed. J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (New York: New York University, 1981), 31-51; and Frithjof Bergmann, "Two Critiques of the Traditional Theory of Human Rights," in *Human Rights: Nomos XXIII*, ed. J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (New York: New York University, 1981), 119-47.

⁵⁵See among others Alan Gewirth, "The Basis and Content of Human Rights," in *Human Rights: Nomos XXIII*, ed. J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (New York: New York University, 1981), 119-47, and Richard B. Friedman, "The Basis of Human Rights: A Criticism of Gewirth's Theory," in *Human Rights: Nomos XXIII*, ed. J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (New York: New York University, 1981), 148-57.

are so clearly representative of a universal consensus that they should be an acceptable yardstick to judge government behavior, and could be invoked even to breach the sovereignty of nation states, as was done in the case of South Africa.⁵⁶

Is there a conflict between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Muslim view of society and the individual? From my personal vantage point,⁵⁷ I see none. The bulk of the arguments about this issue among Muslim intellectuals is whether it is valid for a Muslim to acquiesce to the authority of a man-made document rather than the Quran. The question, to my mind, is: are there contradictions between the Declaration and Islamic doctrine? If not, then surely there can be no problem in adhering to it as a general compact between peoples all over the globe.

Thus the starting point is that there is no contradiction between Islamic theoretical ethics and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thus rather than invest inordinate efforts in recasting it into an "Islamic Declaration," or to seek to derive a separate statement (as some scholars have done),⁵⁸ we should just adopt it as a universally acceptable statement of consensus that in no way contradicts any fundamental Islamic belief.

10. On Democracy

This leads to the question of democracy, which many have maintained is the only way of guaranteeing human rights while many Muslims view it with suspicion as a Western import of dubious value and possibly the harbinger of permissiveness and promiscuity.

⁵⁶See Ismail Serageldin, "Sovereignty, Governance, and the Role of International Institutions" (Unpublished manuscript, World Bank, Washington, D.C., February 21, 1991). More generally on the international aspects of human rights, see Louis Henkin, "The Universality of the Concept of Human Rights," in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science: Human Rights Around the World*, ed. Marvin E. Wolfgang (Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage, 1989), 10-16.

⁵⁷See Ismail Serageldin, "The Justly-Balanced Society: One Muslim's View" in David Beckmann, Ramgopal Agarwala, Sven Burmester, and Ismail Serageldin, *Friday Morning Reflections at the World Bank: Essays in Values and Development* (Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press, 1991), 55-73.

⁵⁸On this theme of basic human rights in Islam see among others Ali Abdel-Wahed Wafi, *Huquq Al-Insan fil Islam* (Human Rights in Islam) (Cairo: Dar Al-Nahda, 1979); and Mohamed Fathy 'Uthman, *Taqrir Huquq Al-Insan bayn Al-Sharia Al-Islamiyya wal Fikr Al-Qanuni Al-Gharbi* (The Affirmation of Human Rights in Islamic and Western Law) (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Imam Mohamed Ibn Saud Islamic University, 1978).

Democracy, however defined, is certainly most widely practiced in the rich industrialized societies of the OECD. Yet it would be wrong to consider it exclusively Western, for in its link to human rights it speaks to values of universal appeal.⁵⁹ It has been the result of a long evolution of institutions in Western societies, but it has not been directly associated with the concept of human rights until recently. By that I mean that democracy was seen to be a structure of institutions, procedures, and laws whereby citizens of a particular state are protected from the arbitrary exercise of power by the government and whereby they are given the opportunity to participate in the formulation of decisions that affect them. "No taxation without representation!" But participation by whom? The idea of universal suffrage is recent. Indeed, the attributes of citizenship in a democratic society were considered to be largely privileges that one acquired by membership in that society and are not rights extended to the totality of the human race. This is clearly demonstrated by the behavior of the various Western "democracies" during the past 200 years vis-a-vis other peoples, as well as vis-a-vis their own women, youth, and those lacking property and/or education among the males.

Thus democracy in the contemporary sense is a product of evolving Western societies over the last 200 years with special contributions from the French enlightenment and Anglo-Saxon British constitutionalism and liberalism.

Today, whatever one thinks of its past history, from slavery through colonialism to the racism and sexism that still exists, there is no question that Western democratic institutions have gone further in providing guarantees for the respect of human rights of the individual living within these societies than any other structure known to date. But when we discuss the applicability of democratic concepts to non-Western societies in this case Muslim societies generally, of the Middle East specifically it would be an error to take the practice of

⁵⁹See Louis Henkin, "The Universality of the Concept of Human Rights," in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science: Human Rights Around the World*, ed. Marvin E. Wolfgang (Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage, 1989), 10-16. However, human rights also have a *moral* dimension. See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Human Rights and the Church: Historical and Theological Reflections* (Vatican City, 1990).

democratic institutions in the West as an entirely transposable product as is. Nor is it useful to reject it simply because it is "Western" as some extremists do. Indeed, rather than look to the form, it is essential to look to the substance of the democratic process and its institutions.

Here it becomes useful to go back to the fundamental thesis of human rights. Human rights as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, and subsequently codified by a number of legal instruments and declarations,⁶⁰ implies a set of values that are universal in character. There is within the theoretical ethics of Islam certainly a fertile ground to build up contemporary Muslim constructs that would respond to this universal obligation. This is not the same as to say that particular institutional forms that are seen as the "social praxis" of particular Western countries, including fairly specific multiparty structures and rather special electoral politics, are the only way in which the democratic ideal of respect for human rights can be provided. They may well be, but that cannot be taken as an a priori assertion. Furthermore, there are substantial differences between the various experiences of the industrialized countries. The systems of the USA, the UK, France, Switzerland, and Germany are structurally different in terms of elections, decision-making, separation of powers, and other related constitutional and legal aspects of the application of the democratic idea. Nonetheless, all of these societies are fundamentally democratic. What this underscores, therefore, is that there is significant room to innovate in the design of contemporary structures and institutions while maintaining the real "core" of democratic practice and its respect of human rights. This core has been ably identified and discussed by Robert Dahl in his masterful work on the subject.⁶¹

What then constitutes democratic government today? What should the Muslim societies of the Middle East and elsewhere do to promote "good governance" and "democracy"? Would that be an "Islamic government"?⁶²

⁶⁰Centre for Human Rights Geneva, *A Compilation of International Instruments* (New York: United Nations, 1988).

⁶¹Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁶²These topics of "democracy" and "Islamic government" have been tackled by many distinguished scholars in this century. See Ali Abdel-Raziq, *Al-Islam wa Usul Al-Hukm* (Islam and the Basis of Rule) (Beirut, 1966); Muhammad Husain Haikal, *Al-Hukuma Al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Government) (Cairo: Dar Al-Maaref, 1977); Muhammad Dia' Al-Din Al-Rayess, *Al-Nazariyat Al-Siyasiya Al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Political Theories), 4th ed. (Cairo: Dar Al-Maaref, 1966-67); Muhammad Salim Al-'Awwa, *Fi Al-Nizam Al-Siyasi Lil Dawla Al-Islamiyya* (On the Political Organization of the Islamic State) (Cairo: Dar Al-Shuruq, 1989); Khalid Muhammad Khalid, *Al-Dawla Fil Islam* (The State in Islam) (Cairo: Dar Thabet, 1981); Abul A'la Al-Mawdudi, *Al-Hukuma Al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Government), trans. Ahmad Idris (Urdu into Arabic), 2nd ed. (Cairo: Al-Mukhtar Al-Islami, 1980); and Ruhallah Al-Khomeini, *Al-Hukuma Al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Government), presented in Arabic by Hasan Hanafi (Cairo, September 1979).

First, it is important to recognize that while there are large overlaps between "governance" and "democracy," they are not the same.⁶³

"Democracy" connotes a representative form of government with participatory decision-making and accountability and the guarantees for human and civil rights without whose exercise the political system of democracy could not function. It does not connote "good government" or efficiency or lack of corruption, except to the extent that having the possibility to "vote the rascals out" acts as a rectifier of ineptitude or malice in government behavior. Democracy emphasizes universal suffrage and periodic elections as key features. It can be argued that it deals primarily with the "form" not the "substance" of governing, although advocates of Democracy quickly point out that we know of no other "form" that has successfully delivered the substance, and that this is one area where "function follows form."

"Governance," on the other hand, does not pre-suppose a particular form of government but rather connotes "good government," in the sense of greater efficiency and rationality in resource allocation, an enabling environment, and a lack of corruption. It emphasizes as its key

⁶³The following few paragraphs are taken from Ismail Serageldin, "Governance, Democracy, and the World Bank in Africa" (Unpublished manuscript, World Bank, Washington, D.C., September 20, 1990).

features transparency, accountability, participation, and the rule of law and, implicitly, the guarantees of the civil and human rights needed for effective participation. Many of us consider these to be the "substance" as opposed to the "form" implied in discussions of "democracy."

Both of these general, "journalistic" descriptions fall short due to lack of clarity on such key areas as the nature of the relationship between state and society, and its constellation of interlinked concepts and issues of agency, instrumentality, legitimacy, power, and authority.⁶⁴

Given the conceptual complexity noted above, the only viable practical approach is to try to identify and foster those aspects of governance that seem least controversial.⁶⁵ Thus, while there are many different views as to what constitutes good governance, some of which are ethnocentric or culturally determined, we can, nevertheless, specify a minimal core of characteristics which, if not universally accepted, are nonetheless widely agreed upon. In large measure, these derive from, or are related to, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has been signed and thus accepted, at least nominally, by the vast majority of countries as representing the moral consensus of the international community of nations. This core includes the following:

1. The political rulers and government officials are held accountable to the ruled for their actions through clearly formulated and transparent processes, and, more particularly, the legitimacy of a government is regularly established through some well-defined, open process of public choice such as elections and referenda (Article 21).

⁶⁴See among others C.S. Whitaker and G. Bergen, "Doctrines of Development and Precepts of the State: The World Bank and the Fifth Iteration of the African Case" (Paper presented to the World Bank's Seminar on African Governance, May 1990).

⁶⁵The following few paragraphs are taken from Ismail Serageldin and Pierre Landell-Mills, "Governance and the External Factor," in *Proceedings of The World Bank Conference on Development Economics* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1992), 303-20.

2. The safety and security of citizens is assured (Articles 3 and 5) and the rule of law prevails, such that contracts can be fairly enforced both among private operators (individuals or enterprises) and between a private operator and the state. Moreover, citizens should be legally protected from arbitrary or capricious actions by public authorities (Articles 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 28).
3. Public agencies are responsive to the needs of the public, and social and economic development is promoted equitably for the benefit of all citizens (Articles 22, 23, 24, and 25).
4. Information is readily available to permit accountability to be practiced, laws to be correctly applied, markets to function, and people to be creative and innovative (Article 19).
5. Citizens are guaranteed freedom of association and expression of opinions (Articles 19 and 20).

These principles provide an excellent template against which to assess the proposed actions of governments as well as the institutional arrangements being advanced. They provide the real yardstick by which the governmental constructs of contemporary Muslims can be judged if democracy is indeed to flourish in the Muslim world.⁶⁶

But democracy is more than the form and substance of government. It involves societal relations at every level. There can be no true democracy, no true respect for human rights, if the rights of women and of youth are flouted in the home and in the streets. Authoritarian

⁶⁶Most critical in this area is how a "Muslim democracy" will deal with non-Muslim citizens. Among those struggling, still unsatisfactorily, with this topic, see Fahmi Huwaidi, *Muwatinun La Dhimiyyun* (Citizens Not Special Status "Dhimmis") (Cairo: Dar Al-Shuruq, 1990), especially 252-63; and Muhammad 'Imara, *Al-Islam wal Wahda Al-Qawmiyya* (Islam and National Unity), 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1979). For a pithy and thoughtful discussion of this and other relevant topics, see A.K. Aboul Magd, *Hiwar la Muwajaha* (Dialogue, Not Confrontation) (Kuwait: Kitab Al-Arabi, 1985), 109-22.

behavior, like freedom, is indivisible. It is essential that this broader view of democracy and human rights find its manifestations in all aspects of contemporary life, including, most specifically, in the role of women in society.

11. The Role of Women

The issue of the status of women in Muslim societies has been a controversial topic for some time.⁶⁷ On one side of the debate are those who would argue that women were considerably worse off in pre-Islamic society, especially in Arabia, and that Islam considerably improved their condition.⁶⁸ This view is probably historically accurate, but it is totally irrelevant to today's problems. On the other side are those who argue that Islamic jurisprudence is fundamentally inimical to women and must therefore be discarded, thereby giving a new version of an old argument used with special force in the time of empire to justify colonialism.

In my judgment both of these positions must be set aside in favor of a more balanced reading of both the doctrine and history on the one hand and present social conditions and needs on the other.

With respect to the doctrine, I adhere to the view, called by some recent observers⁶⁹ as the reformist or modernist view, that would apply both fundamental human rights and equality before God to those specificities of treatment that gender may require.

⁶⁷See among others Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Qadaya Al-Mar'a bayn Al-Taqalid Al-Rakida wal Wafida* (The Issues of Women between Stagnant Traditions and Imported Ones) (Cairo: Dar Al-Shuruq, 1990). For an academic overview of the topic see Lois Beck and Nikki Keddi, eds., *Women in the Muslim World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978).

⁶⁸See among others Ma'aruf Al-Dawaliby, *Wad' Al-Mar'a fil Islam* (The Status of Women in Islam) (Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, 1981); and Muhammad Abu Zahara, *Tanzim Al-Islam Lil Mujtama'* (Islam's Organization of Society) (Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi, 1975), 5-14.

⁶⁹Donna Lee Brown, "Islamic Law and the Position of Women" (Mimeograph, World Bank, Washington, D.C., March 14, 1992).

The most forceful statement of equality before God comes from the *Quran*:

For Muslim men and women,
For believing men and women,
For devout men and women,
For true men and women,
For men and women who are
Patient and constant, for men
And women who humble themselves,
For men and women who give
In charity, for men and women
Who Fast (and deny themselves),
For men and women who
Guard their chastity, and
For men and women who
Engage much in God's praise,
For them has God prepared
Forgiveness and great reward.

(*Quran* 33:35)

From this starting point, and using the adoption of fundamental human rights as a foundation, an argument can be elaborated for a contemporary reading of the status of women that transcends most of the existing Islamic jurisprudence, certainly in the area of personal status law. This is in line with what has been termed "modernist jurisprudence."⁷⁰ There is indeed a body of opinion that would define the special role of women from the premise of fundamental human rights and equality inherent in the Islamic belief in the liberation of all humankind. Using a derivative approach, it would seek amendments to that body of rights and not start from an a priori position on the status and the role of women.⁷¹

Such views are modernist in their line of argument but certainly are not revolutionary in their outcomes.⁷² Already, a century ago, Muhammad Abduh, the Mufti in Egypt at the end of

⁷⁰See Justin Leites, "Modernist Jurisprudence as a Vehicle for Gender Role Reform in the Islamic World," *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 22 (2) (Spring 1991): 251-330, especially 323-30 (on Fazhur Rahman and his work).

⁷¹See Ismail Serageldin, "Comments," in Center for Arab Unity Studies, *Islam and Arab Nationalism*, Arabic ed. (Beirut, 1981), 605-10. For a writer who takes the same derivative approach from universal human rights to the specificities of women's issues but arrives at diametrically opposed conclusions, see Ali A. W. Wafi, *Huquq Al-Insan Fil Islam* (Human Rights in Islam) (Cairo: Dar Nahdat Masr, 1979).

⁷²The following section is drawn largely from Afaf Mahfouz and Ismail Serageldin, "Women and Space in Muslim Societies," chapter 3 in *Expressions of Islam in Buildings* (Proceedings of an International Seminar sponsored by The Aga Khan Award for Architecture and The Indonesian Institute of Architects, Jakarta and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, October 15-19, 1990) (Geneva: The Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 1991), 78-96.

the nineteenth century, wrote in a published opinion that it was within the power of the state to limit polygamy under an Islamic rule.⁷³

What makes that particular statement by such an eminent authority of great importance is that it was not a decision rendered under pressure from a state that wanted to move in that direction. It was a volunteered position moving against prevailing official opinion and therefore did not constitute an ex post facto rationalization of a societal condition. It was the thoughtful reading of both text and precedent and the realistic understanding of a changing society by a scholar of rare insight and distinction.

Even in civic and political leadership, areas in which women are considered to be most marginalized in Muslim societies, there is evidence that there is little that is inherently Islamic in the barriers that women confront.⁷⁴ Thus, even in the medieval period, a few women of exceptional character were able to rule Muslim states, like Sultana Radia in Delhi (1236 A.D.) and Shajarat al-Durr in Cairo (1250 A.D.). In the second half of the seventeenth century one could note four Indonesian women rulers.⁷⁵ Recently, in Pakistan Mrs. Benazir Bhutto became the first elected woman prime minister in a Muslim country, and the last election in Bangladesh was fought between two women. More broadly, Muslim women have carried their share in national struggles, occasionally bearing arms (from documented cases in Iran at the beginning of the century to Libyan women serving in the Libyan army today), but more frequently participating in organized political activity against colonialism and occupation forces. Needless to say, there are countless examples of distinguished professional women making major contributions⁷⁶ in many Muslim countries today,⁷⁷ *but that is still very far short of the role that*

⁷³See the full text of this *fatwa* (legal opinion) in Muhammad Imara, ed., *Al-Amal Al-Kamila Lil Imam Muhammad Abduh* (The Complete Works of the Imam Muhammad Abduh), vol. 2 (Beirut: Al-Mo'assassah Al-Arabiyya Lil Dirasat Wal Nashr, 1972), 90-95. In general there is a vast literature on the question of polygamy in Islam, but pre-Islamic Arabia included many other forms of marriage which Islam prohibited. See among others El-Sayid Sabeq, *Fiqh Al-Sunna*, vol. 2, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, 1977), 8-9.

⁷⁴For a comprehensive review of the *Quran* and *Hadith* on the role of women see Abdel Halim Abu Shuqqa, *Tahrir Al-Mar'a fi 'Asr Al-Risalah* (The Liberation of Women in the Era of the [Islamic] Message), 6 vols. (Kuwait: Dar Al-Qalam, 1990), especially vol. 2 (on women's participation in social life) and vol. 3 (on dialogues with those who oppose the participation of women in social life).

⁷⁵See Fatma Mernissi, *Sultanes oubliées: Femmes chefs d'Etat en Islam* (Casablanca: Editions Le Fennec, 1990).

⁷⁶These women are usually expected to, and usually manage to, maintain their traditional societal roles of wife and mother, as well as their professional careers. See Earl L. Sullivan, *Women in Egyptian Public Life* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1987), 14.

⁷⁷Norma Salem, "Islam and the Legal Status of Women in Tunisia," in *Muslim Women*, ed. Freda Hussain (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 141-68.

women could play in the development of the Muslim world if they could achieve their full potential.

Why then is there such widespread discrimination against women in Muslim countries today?⁷⁸ The answer lies at least in part in that the social group that interpreted *Shari'a* throughout the last fifteen centuries by and large wanted to retain the status quo as it existed in the days of early Islam or to return to it as an important plank of a political platform.

Peculiarly, none of those stridently advocating the return to the status quo of seventh-century Arabian society when it came to women's roles (in fact, frequently advocating restrictions exceeding the limits that existed then) would argue that slavery, which existed in seventh-century Arabia, is an integral part of the Islamic ethic. Indeed, there are many excellent treatises that show that Islam took an "evolutionary" approach in legislating against slavery and that many of the rulings of early Islam were indications of where Muslim society should go, that is, towards limiting the scope of slavery, expanding the rights of slaves, and establishing an increasing set of incentives for liberating slaves.⁷⁹ Surely this same line of reasoning can and should be used to reinterpret the pre-Islam/post-Islam improvement in the status of women as the direction that society should move, not a once-and-for-all-time shift in status.

More importantly, however, is the review of existing social structures today and the mechanisms by which the myths and images of women in Islamic society are reinforced both by artists and intellectuals and through popular discourse. Two excellent recent books have made major contributions on these two topics. Leila Ahmad has provided an excellent social and historical contextual view.⁸⁰ Fedwa Malti-Douglas has provided us with an insightful exploration of the role of women in Arabo-Islamic discourse.⁸¹ It is, of course, a further manifestation of how the intelligentsia artists and intellectuals fashion the mirrors in which we see ourselves and the windows through which we view the world. This aspect of cultural

⁷⁸It is important to note that this is *not* a uniquely Muslim phenomenon. Women are discriminated against in most societies. See among others Mino Vianello and others, *Gender Inequality: A Comparative Study of Discrimination and Participation* (London: Sage, 1990); and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, *Gender Equity: An Integrated Theory of Stability and Change* (Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage, 1990). On methodological issues of studying inequality generally see Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., *Understanding Social Inequality: Modeling Allocation Processes* (Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage, 1991).

⁷⁹See Ali Abdel-Wahed Wafi, *Al-Huriya fil Islam* (Liberty in Islam) (Cairo: Dar Al-Ma'aref, 1979).

⁸⁰Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁸¹Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Mind: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991).

outputs, insofar as it contributes to a view of women that perpetuates their present unsatisfactory status, needs to be subjected to careful critical analysis.⁸² We will address this later. For the moment let's note that Muslim society's view of women and Muslim women's view of themselves are not particularly empowering.

Should this view be changed? Undoubtedly. Arguing from the interest of Muslim society as a whole, there is no doubt that there is great benefit to be derived by improving the status of women. There is ample evidence that poverty is gender-biased⁸³ and that women bear an inordinate burden in periods of economic hardship.⁸⁴ It is equally demonstrable that significant improvements in social indicators are achievable by improving female education,⁸⁵ by increasing the assets owned by women, and by increasing the returns to the assets held by women.⁸⁶ That it is doable has been dramatically demonstrated by the brilliant success of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh.⁸⁷

From the reading of doctrine I espoused earlier, it becomes the duty of those serving the public interest to actively promote improvements in the status of women, whose marginalization contributes so significantly to the perpetuation of poverty and misery *of the whole society*.⁸⁸

⁸²This requires careful study of specific contextual situations. See among others Sawsan El-Messiri, "Self-Images of Traditional Urban Women in Cairo," in *Women in the Muslim World*, ed. Lois Beck and Nikki Keddi (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 522-40; and Soraya Al-Turki, *Women in Saudi Arabia: Ideology and Behavior among the Elite* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 152.

⁸³See among others Paul Collier, *Women in Development: Defining the Issues*, Working Paper Series No. 129 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1988); and World Bank, *World Development Report 1990: Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁸⁴See Commonwealth Secretariat, ed., *Engendering Adjustment for the 1990s: A Report of a Commonwealth Expert Group on Women and Structural Adjustment* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat Publications, 1989); and Paul Collier, *Women and Structural Adjustment* (Mimeograph, Oxford University, Oxford, February 1989).

⁸⁵Lawrence H. Summers, "Investing in All the People," Policy Research Working Paper WPS 905 (World Bank, Washington, D.C., May 1992).

⁸⁶See *Bangladesh: Strategies for Enhancing the Role of Women in Economic Development*, World Bank Country Study (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1990); *Women in Pakistan: An Economic and Social Strategy*, World Bank Country Study (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1989); and Leela Dube and Rajni Palriwala, eds., *Structures and Strategies: Women, Work and Family* (New Delhi: Sage, 1990).

⁸⁷For a detailed review of the Grameen Bank experience, see Mahabub Hossain, *Credit for Alleviation of Rural Poverty: The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh*, Research Report no. 65 (Washington, D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute; Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, 1988); and Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Bank Credit for Rural Women: Report on Study Tour of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh* (Thailand: United Nations, 1985).

⁸⁸See among others Price J. Gittinger and others, *Household Food Security and Role of Women* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1990); and Paul T. Schultz, *Women's Changing Participation in the Labor Force* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1989).

The empowerment of women should be at the top of the reformist agenda of Muslims. This is not a case of calling for the adoption of strident Western feminism or its more sedate manifestations;⁸⁹ rather it is a call to act in accordance with Muslim precepts of the public good and to promote the spirit of the fundamental equality or equity argued in the best of the Islamic tradition. Actions in this domain are the true test of whether democracy and human rights in the fullest sense of those terms takes root in the Muslim World generally and the Middle East specifically.

12. Criticism of Cultural Output

But what of the mirrors and windows that the artists and intellectuals are constructing this very instant? Will they provide the means and the symbols of this liberating, empowering future? Or will they perpetuate the myths and images of the past? To address these questions we must, once more, advocate the creation of a *space of freedom* for expression and debate, and we must sharpen our critical analysis of art and intellectual output to focus on cultural expressions from the perspective of gender-sensitive criticism.⁹⁰

The preceding discussion has shown that addressing women's special issues is central to empowering them to play a full part in the reshaping of Muslim societies in transition. The unique dilemma of the search for cultural identity in Muslim societies, one that risks being stifled and trampled by an overpowering and insensitive Western mass-consumption culture, finds an echo in microcosm in the dilemma of the contemporary Muslim woman trying to define her role and contribution in a Muslim society that frequently tries to suppress her contribution as a means of asserting its own societal individuality, its otherness, from the dominant West. This oppressive status is neither inherently Islamic nor is it necessarily the sole or correct reading of the tradition of the past. Much less will it be the correct path for the future of truly Muslim societies.

Again, this is not an appeal for Muslim scholars to adopt the ideological constructs or the

⁸⁹Janet K. Boles, "American Feminism: New Issues for a Mature Movement," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. 515 (May 1991).

⁹⁰The rest of this section is taken from Afaf Mahfouz and Ismail Serageldin, "Women and Space in Muslim Societies," chapter 3 in *Expressions of Islam in Buildings* (Proceedings of an International Seminar sponsored by The Aga Khan Award for Architecture and The Indonesian Institute of Architects, Jakarta and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, October 15-19, 1990) (Geneva: The Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 1991), 89-91.

positions of Western feminism generally⁹¹ nor of Western feminist art criticism specifically.⁹² Rather, it is an appeal to broaden our own intellectual criticism and art criticism, which has already made its own contribution in recognizing the profound problems of cultural continuity and authenticity as important elements to assert in the face of a "historical rupture" that has torn the cultural fabric of Muslim societies. It is now pertinent to expand our concerns and recognize the needs of women as well as their unique contributions to building society in a Muslim World in the throes of rapid change.

Such gender-sensitive criticism would have certain characteristics. The key to significant gender-sensitive criticism is to transcend the mere recognition that women intellectuals and women artists exist and to give them due recognition, which hitherto has been lacking. In other words, it should not just be the same old criticism with women added. What is required is to go to the heart of the present critical thinking in art (as well as other forms of cultural expression) and to "question the universal validity of those very myths and values and cultural assumptions that, in the past, have automatically excluded from the domain of Art the experiences of half of our population."⁹³ Or as Carol Duncan pointed out, "The value of established art thinking and how it functions as ideology must be critically analysed, not promoted anew."⁹⁴

In bringing to the fore the need to develop gender-sensitive criticism, we underline the need to bring to bear the modern tools of critical analysis, to deconstruct the discipline of criticism itself,⁹⁵ so as to rebuild it anew, informed and enlightened by the process of critical deconstruction itself. To rebuild it with new insight that will not just be beneficial to establishing a place for women in Muslim art and society, not just to liberate their expressive and

⁹¹On feminism generally see Janet K. Boles, "American Feminism: New Issues for a Mature Movement," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. 515 (May 1991).

⁹²For an excellent survey article of the subject the reader is referred to Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *The Art Bulletin* (Quarterly published by the College Art Association of America) LXIX (3) (September 1987): 326-57, especially 346-57. Showing that there are no monolithic views on the subject, that excellent survey article was poorly reviewed by Casandra Langer, "Feminist Art History: Critique Critiqued," *Women Artist News* 12 (5-6) (Fall/Winter 1987): 38. For a scholarly compendium of essays see the anthology of American work given in Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, eds., *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982). For a review of significant recent works see Ellen Handy, "Women, Art, Feminism," *Arts Magazine* (May 1989): 25-31. For a recent anthology see Arlene Raven, Casandra Langer, and Joanna Frueh, eds., *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*, Icon ed. (New York, Harper-Collins, 1991).

⁹³Norma Broude, "Review of Germaine Greer's *Obstacle Race*, Munro's *Originals* and Loeb's *Feminist Collage*," *Art Journal* XLI (1981): 182.

⁹⁴Carol Duncan, "When Greatness Is a Box of Wheaties," *Art Forum* (October 1975): 64.

⁹⁵For such a consistently radical position on methodology, albeit from a narrow Western feminist perspective, refer to Griselda Pollock, "Women, Art, and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians," *Women's Art Journal* (Spring/Summer 1983): 42-44.

talented contributions as women, but to transcend feminism and through this rethinking of criticism itself, to make a contribution to liberating the evolving cultures of Muslim societies. To liberate these cultures from insisting on defining themselves in the negative terms of how they must be different from the rejected Western Other, to a new position where they can define themselves in the positive terms of their own achievements and fulfillment.

13. Concluding Remarks

Running through the topics discussed above are the primary concerns of Muslim societies today, namely the issues of cultural continuity and authenticity.⁹⁶

⁹⁶See Ismail Serageldin, *Space for Freedom: The Search for Architectural Excellence in Muslim Societies* (Geneva: The Aga Khan Award for Architecture; London: Butterworth Architecture, 1989), 54-58.

Few issues have affected contemporary Muslim societies as deeply as the sense of loss of identity⁹⁷ and the corollary search for cultural authenticity, which are seen by many as a return to the fountainhead of the Islamic faith to redefine the Muslim culture in its essential terms, thereby purging it of the "extraneous elements" that history, Western hegemony, and geographic realities have introduced.⁹⁸

This essay rejects this approach as too narrow, overly romantic, and fundamentally non-historical. Instead, the proposed approach recognizes the need to thoroughly understand the past and to decode its language through contemporary eyes that can sift the relevant from the timebound. The arsenal of contemporary analysis must be brought to bear on the reality of Muslim history as much as on the reality of Muslim societies today. We must come to grips with the historical rupture that characterizes the evolution of Muslim cultural development,⁹⁹ and, by better understanding it, learn to transcend it.

This approach, although scientific and systematic, is far from the arid and descriptive scholasticism of much academic research. It explores and revitalizes the myths and images that nourish the creative imagination of contemporary artists and intellectuals. It develops the iconography and enriches the symbols that punctuate their contemporary universe. Most importantly, it does so by grounding these expressions of culture in all its myriad manifestations, past and present.

We hope that the integrity of this approach will separate this search from the doomed attempts to escape a chaotic and unsettling present by a headlong flight into a romanticized past,¹⁰⁰ or the equally shortsighted approach that equates modernity with wholesale importation

⁹⁷This manifests itself in many ways, some modernist and thoughtful, for example Husain Ahmad Amin, *Al-Islam Fi 'Alam Mutaghayir* (Islam in a Changing World) (Cairo: Madbuli, 1988); and Muhammad 'Imara, *Al-Islam wa Qadaya Al-'Asr* (Islam and the Issues of This Age) (Beirut: Dar Al-Wahda, 1980). On the side of art and architecture see Ismail Serageldin, "Architecture as Intellectual Statement: Modernism in the Muslim World," in *Criticism in Architecture* (Geneva: The Aga Khan Award for Architecture; Singapore: Concept Media, 1989), 16-30; and Ismail Serageldin, *Al-Tajdid wal Ta'sil fe 'Imarat Al-Muitam'at Al-Islamiyya: Dirasa li Tajribat Ja'izat Al-Aga Khan Lil'Imara* (Innovation and Authenticity in the Architecture of Muslim Societies: A Study of the Experience of The Aga Khan Award for Architecture) (Geneva: The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1989).

⁹⁸See Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Mushkilat Fi Tariq Al-Hayat Al-Islamiyya* (Problems on the Road to Islamic Living) (Cairo: Dar Al-Shuruq, 1983), especially 10-12.

⁹⁹For a discussion of these issues see Mohammed Arkoun, "Current Islam Faces Its Tradition," in Ismail Serageldin, *Space for Freedom: The Search for Architectural Excellence in Muslim Societies* (Geneva: The Aga Khan Award for Architecture; London: Butterworth Architecture, 1989), 241-46.

¹⁰⁰Sometimes this romantic flight can take lead to delinking from society and even violence. See among others Adel Hammooda, *Al-Hijra Ila Al-'Unf* (Migration to Violence) (Cairo: Sinai, 1987). Contrast this view with that of Ahmad Kamal Aboul Magd, *Hiwar la Muwajaha* (Dialogue, Not Confrontation), rev. ed. (Cairo: Dar Al-Shuruq, 1988), especially the two introductory statements at 5-22.

of Western technology, aesthetics, and patterns of behavior. The former is tantamount to a slow suicide for no community can isolate itself from the present no matter how unpleasant its realities are. The latter approach is an agonizing negation of self and identity since no society can exclude its past from the constituents of its contemporary reality.

The pursuit of cultural continuity by maintaining the fragile links with a society's past requires special effort if it is to avoid falling into populist kitsch or ideological stereotyping. Critical scholarship is needed to understand the legacy of the past, to decode the historical symbols, and to see them through contemporary eyes, thus enhancing both the understanding and the appreciation of the heritage and making it more accessible to a modern public who has suffered from a rupture in its natural cultural evolution. This is essential if the transition from theoretical to practical ethics is not to be too distorting. Along with this deepening of understanding of self and society, the intelligentsia must make a major effort to expand the space of freedom within which discussion and debate can take place to broaden the awareness of the public, public officials, and decisionmakers. Thus, sociologists, anthropologists, economists, philosophers, artists, writers, journalists, and politicians are all part of the contributing intelligentsia in this all-important task of maintaining this space of freedom within which artists and intellectuals can fashion the mirrors in which we see ourselves, and the windows through which we perceive the world.¹⁰¹ For it is by these contemporary mirrors and windows that we redefine the boundaries of the mind, and the future of the Muslim world is even at this moment being invented in the crucible of our minds.

¹⁰¹The struggle to link identity and world-view is at the heart of the intellectual debate among Muslims of different persuasions. My personal view is set out in Ismail Serageldin, "The Justly Balanced Society: One Muslim's View," in David Beckmann, Ramgopal Agarwala, Sven Burmester, and Ismail Serageldin, *Friday Morning Reflections at The World Bank: Essays on Values and Development* (Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press, 1991). Others have articulated their views, ranging from the most liberal, such as Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, *Ru'ya Islamiyya* (An Islamic View) (Cairo: Dar Al-Shuruq, 1987), to the more conservative, such as Sayyid Qutb, *Khasa'is Al-Tassawur Al-Islami wa Muqawimatuhu* (The Characteristics of the Islamic Vision and Its Components), 11th ed. (Cairo: Dar Al-Shuruq, 1989).