



## **Debates on Civilization in the Muslim World: Critical Perspectives on Islam and Modernity**

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editor (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017)

pp. 433+ x. ISBN 0-19-946688-2,

INR 1,195 @USD 15,35.

Since the advent of the publication by the late Samuel Huntington on “Civilization” in his 1992 article in *Foreign Affairs* and the book publication, in 1996, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*, there has been globally a response, either negative or positive. Several international conferences, for example, in Istanbul, Cairo, London, or Berlin, has shown that the notion of what civilizations are and what they represent turns out to be highly relevant for “native” populations, not to mention global politics and economics. However, when we are dealing with personal identity, matters get, in fact, personal and private to an individual and his/her society framework. In addition, the issue of who am I? becomes an existential and emotional matter. This is the reason why responses to Huntington, as rational dialogue, also turned out emotional. No doubt, ideologists and fake-news turned out to be rampant, across the board, on local and international scope. However, by 2018 as this review article is being composed, minds have become more down to earth, and a more sobering inventory as to who we are, as human beings, and socio-political-economic members of specific societies and communities is in process. Happily we found a collection of articles and essays that starts to take account of the somber mood, after Huntington.

This collection of essays stem from an International Conference held in Istanbul in 2013, entitled “The Civilization Debate”. The majority of authors are from Turkish Universities, from Sociology Departments, including several members from the United States, Iran, and

Malaysia. Important is, that the perspective is presented from a sociological dimension that makes the volume somehow unique. However, before we go into some detail, we need to reach back, somewhat, into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and provide a short sketch of the present global debate on what civilization ensues. In fact, we are dealing with a subject matter, that is celebrating a resurgence, and used to be considered old fashioned, and not “scientific”, we mean the academic subject matter called “philosophy of history”. Since Hegel and Marx we have a rough idea how history can be approached, philosophically, and provide us with a compass as to where the ship called “civilization” is moving. We remind ourselves of the German private scholar, namely Oswald Spengler, who after the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, equivalent to 9/12 in the United States, published, in two volumes, a sensational work called, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (The Decline of the West: A Sketch of a Morphology of World History), after the First World War, 1917 (first installment), and 1922. The publication caused a sensation in the general German public, but not necessarily in German academia. The immediate critique of the latter was, that it was not scientific enough, did not follow the dictum, by the great Leopold von Ranke, “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*” (how it really was). Of course, this was not Spengler aim, but he presented an expansive projection, as to the life cycle of civilizations, specifically western civilization. More important, he suggests a morphology, a structural ramification analogous to organic growth and death. Very much so, invoked by Spengler is the British historian’s massive ten-volume study entitled *The Study of History*, by Arnold Toynbee, whose volumes were published between 1925 and 1955. In the meantime, until the appearance of Huntington, Spengler and Toynbee, had been somewhat forgotten. However, due to the process of globalization, supported by the newly emerging communication technology, like E-mail, Facebooks, Twitter, or Instagram (new terminologies that did not exist prior to 1991, when Email turned public, and not the reserve of secret service, exclusively) the hidden masses of peoples, millions, suddenly got their chances of voicing an opinion in the world; unheard of in previous history. What a sensation if the global news media would announce they found a long forgotten diary of a person who worked on the ancient pyramid in Egypt! Whatever, we can only guess who they were, how they actually lived, and what they were thinking. All forgotten voices in world history. Thus, with the Spengler, Toynbee, and Huntington background, this present volume provides another perspectives that is presented by sociologists, active at Turkish Universities. The volume not only addresses the issue of civilization, as such, but particularly in the countries with the majority of its population Muslim. Some countries such as Egypt still represent, aside Islam, Coptic Christianity, as a

successor of Pharaonic Egypt; or Malaysia with its Hindu and Buddhist background, while the majority of Malays tend to be Muslim, islamized during the period of Arab expansion into the Southwestern hemisphere of the globe.

However, in the meantime there appeared several scholars and personalities with “eastern” background who have provided us with excellent dialogue and studies that gives us a hint as to where to start to understand, historically, politically, religiously, and economically, countries that are not considered “western”, but influenced by western civilization, or, provided us bridges to walk across to meet civilizations that may have, in one way or another, various roots, that do not have its sources in western Europe. I should, specifically name, for the very fact, that this reviewer happens to be lucky, meeting and knowing these global scholars and was able, for decades to follow their work. I should cite S. M. N. Al-Attas, who works out of Malaysia and provided us with highly interesting works that points to native and local roots, almost forgotten, and to most in the west, unknown; there is the late Fazlur Rahman, religious scholar at the University of Chicago, who provided deep insights, theologically as well as historically, into the nature of Islam, especially for westerners; and there is S. N. Nasr, still active at George Washington University, as University Professor of Islamic Studies, who provided a vast cultural platform in the form of numerous works on the religious life of Islam and the cultural formations, especially of the Persian world. A matter of honor, we should not forget the Turkish sociologist Ziya Gökalp, who, analogous to Atatürk, tried to reform Turkish society, after the disaster of Ottoman Civilization, and the Caliphate, of the First World War. Gökalp, no doubt, was a forerunner of a sociological approach to comprehend society with eastern roots. Of course, at this point we should also point to the Tunisian thinker Ibn Khaldun who experimented with sociology, without, perhaps unknown to him that he did sociology, from the modern point of view.

Let us go into some detail as to the volume we are presenting, namely the edited collection of articles, essays, and presentation at that International Conference on Civilization in Istanbul 2013. Lutfi Sunar, a Turkish sociologist of the younger generation, along with Anthony Pagden, a political scientist, and Mustafa Demirci a historian, provide us a social science view of defining and discussing the notion of Civilization. They provide a sort of platform to take off for the subsequent contributions. Of course, the classic idea of civilization of Europe’s age of Enlightenment, of the 18th Century, is represented, as well as a taxonomy and processes of civilization formation in which Spengler and the Italian philosopher of history Vico, is given due honors. The third part of this section deals with the periodization of Islamic Civilization,

something novel, and tries to come to terms with centuries and episodes of Muslim formation of societies. Of special interest is the mentioning of what the German philosopher Karl Jaspers called “Axial Age”, between 800 BC and AD 600, in which the sages of civilizations appeared, such as Buddha, Socrates, Jesus, and, of course, the initiation of Islamic Civilization with the first revelation to the Prophet Mohammed in AD 610 that is considered the starting point of the history of Islam.

Part II of the volume presents some of the debates on civilization in the contemporary world of Islam: we find Ibn Khaldun’s well known concept “al-‘Umran” discussed and its relevance to the contemporary world (Vahdettin Işık); we find an interesting discussion of the revolt against the West, within the pan-islamic and Asian realm (Cemil Aydin); special interest is provided on the notion of progress and civilization in Turkish thought, especially the secular revolution by Atatürk and its consequences for the whole Turkish speaking area (Necmettin Dogan); a glimpse is given into contemporary political thinking as regards the notion of civilization within Muslim thought (Halil Ibrahim Yenigun); an interesting, extensive analysis is offered on Ali Shariati, who had extensive influence in Iran during the 1960s/70s, but also beyond among various communities of scholars in the West (Seyed Javad Miri); an interesting discussion, particularly for westerners, on the cultural understanding of the Balkans, on Alija Izetbegovic, who makes use of Spengler’s highlighting various insights, provides relevant issues in contemporary debate in the Balkan region (Mahmut Hakki Akin); discourse on the thinking of the Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi, who applies the phenomenological method to cultural and religious sphere of sociological relevance and the Moroccan thinker Abdallah Laroui’s application of neo-marxist version applied to the islamic world (Driss Habti). In the Third Part the volume deals with the notions of modernization, globalization, and the future as to where the civilization debate will take us: there is a critical relevance to discourse on modernization in the Muslim world (Syed Farid Alatas); a critical stance toward the notion of a clashing of civilizations within the process of globalization (Yunus Kaya); a highly interesting philosophical discussion on the “othering” and multiculturalism (Murat Cemrek); and an epistemological discourse on the dynamics of civilizations within intercultural relations (Khosrow Bagheri Noaparast). In addition to these collections of discourse on civilization by non-western scholars, in majority, the additional bibliographies attached to each specific contribution turn out to be highly valuable for any reader as an orientation to the specific subject matter at hand. At this point we like to take the opportunity to honor, specifically Turkish historians, whom we have known in person, outstanding scholars and personalities

who have, on a global stage, provided us subtle insights into the world of Ottoman civilization, namely, Halil Inalcik, İlber Ortaylı, and not the least, the great Suraiya Faroqhi. These historians and thinkers have given us support and encouragement to take a second, critical look at the Ottoman past, which turns out to be highly relevant as to the happening on the contemporary global stage of world history. In short, we highly recommend this volume as to initiate a critical, objective assessment of what is going on, intellectually, in the Muslim world. We need an expansive platform that comes to terms with histories that pre-date the advent of Islam, in order to come to terms with the contemporary chaotic condition of many societies located in North Africa. Ideology will not do, it short cuts serious matters which must be worked out, at times in detail be it especially in the social sciences and the sociology of religion. There must be a subtle consciousness developed between religious faith, the world of the true believer, and the sociological manifestation of societies and communities who organize their respective religious life, be the majority and minority. We need, desperately high quality research and publications that provide us with real knowledge as to these relevant societies in order to offer support and sympathy and respect, so that individual members, especially of the Muslim world see a reason to promote civilization, despite the current hardship and chaos and desperation. We must start, especially in the West, to provide a supportive hand, with respect, to those less fortunate in world history, whatever the cause and reason, in order to participate in a new lease of civilized life ushering into a golden age of global history.

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