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Mustafa CERİĆ

(HIERO) HISTORIJA I ISLAMSKA CIVILIZACIJA

(HIERO) HISTORY AND ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

Abstract

This paper tries to penetrate into the merits of Islamic civilization in promoting the progress of humanity and the causes of the decline and withdrawal of Islamic civilization from the global cultural and political scene. The basic thought is that neither the meek nor aggressive civilization has ever ruled the world, but the world has always been ruled by cooperative civilizations, of which the Islamic civilization can serve as a proven historical example of civilizational cooperation. Therefore, the author claims that the recovery of Islamic civilization is neither in isolation nor in assimilation, but in the affirmation of civilizational values, which are common to all mankind.

Key words: *Islamic civilization, affirmative history, continuity and change, inclusive history, religious pluralism, cultural interaction, isolation, assimilation, affirmation*

(HIERO) HISTORY AND ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

Islamic Civilization as a Wheel

the phenomenon of the Islamic civilization may be seen as a wheel that is turning on the axis of a continuous divine message from the first Man Adam to the last Messenger Muhammad, (*a.s.*). This divine axis of the Islamic civilization has remained the same because it has the same meaning of the living spirit and because it is the same logic of the transcendental truth. The code of the axis is such that it moves the wheel of the Islamic civilization in different directions, but it remains in the vicinity of the axis. The dynamics of the movement of the wheel is faster at its edge than at its center. The axis of the Islamic civilization is the divine gift, which unfolds itself in the continuity of life and history. The wheel of Islamic civilization is the divine gift as well, but its movement is due to the human direction and speed.

Hence, the question is: Whither the wheel of the Islamic civilization is going? And with what speed it is moving?

Freedom of Spirit and Strength of Mind

but before dealing with these two questions, let us say that a civilization is more than a situation of urban comfort. A civilization, we believe, is an effort of human spirit to balance the memory of the past by the memory of the future time, to express the meaning of life, and to present the nature of human spirit both in its hope and in its fear. Indeed, the civilization is the state of mind which Ibn Khaldun^{▼1}

^{▼1} Ibn Khaldun (1332 – 1406) was an Arab sociologist, philosopher, and historian widely acknowledged to be one of the greatest social scientists of the Middle Ages, and considered by many to be the father of historiography, sociology, economics, and demography studies. “He has conceived and formulated a philosophy of history which is undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been produced by any mind in any time or place.” A. Toynbee, A. *A Study of History*, Oxford, 1934, vol. 3, p. 322. See, Lacoste, Yves. *Ibn Khaldun: The Birth of History and the Past of the Third World*, Librairie François Maspero, 1966, p. 1.

called the *al-‘aṣabiyyah*,^{▼2} the passion of “group feeling”^{▼3} for a particular human life as it progresses from one stage to another with a purpose of self-actualization in history. Very important forces of the passion (*al-‘aṣabiyya*) in human life are the freedom of human spirit and the strength of human mind.

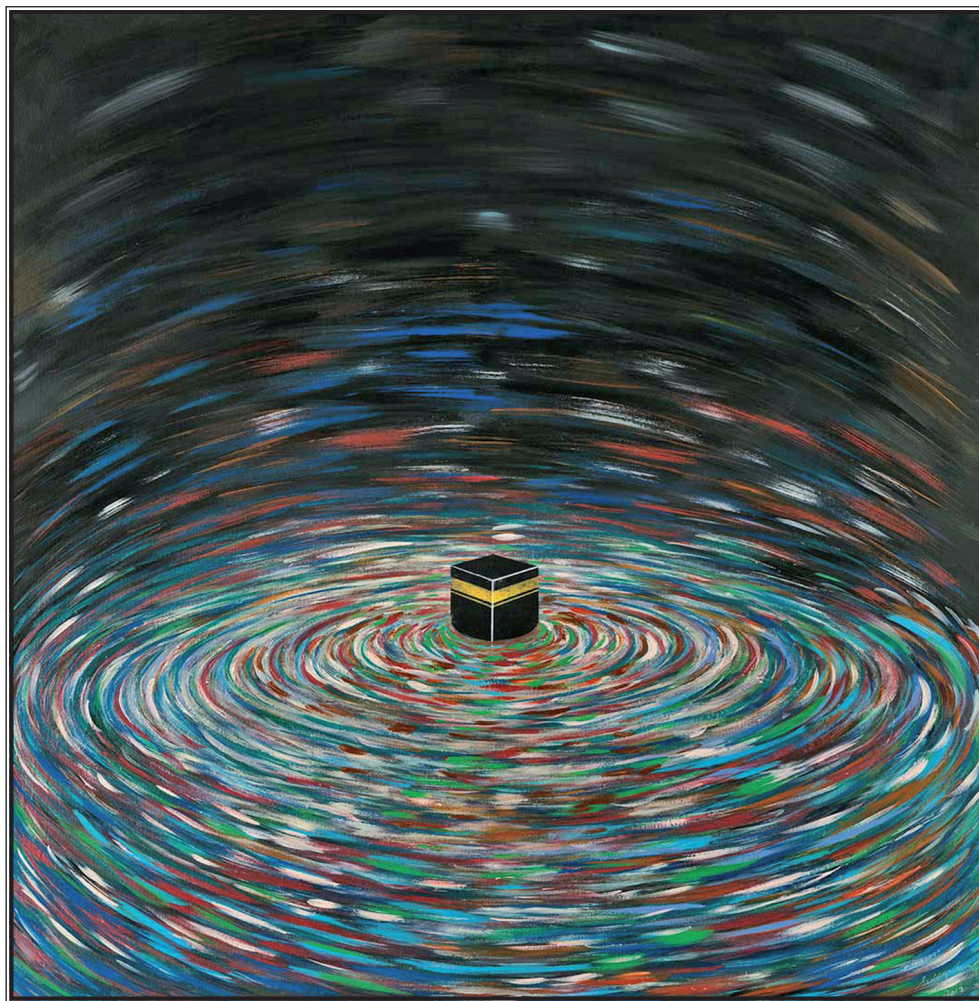


ILLUSTRATION ~ Freedom of spirit as the passion of “group feeling” for a particular human life as it progresses from one stage to another with a purpose of self-actualization in history. (© painting by Siddiq Juma, 2015.)

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Sloboda duha kao strast “grupnog osjećaja” za određeni ljudski život dok prelazi iz jedne faze u drugu sa svrhom samo-aktualizacije u historiji. (© slika Siddiqe Jume, 2015.)

▼2 “As soon as some kind of social organization is formed, ‘civilization’(*‘umrān*) results... Ibn Khaldun replies that there must be some factors, some incitement, for the desire for co-operation to exist on a larger scale among some human beings than among others. Only thus can large and powerful states have originated. This factor he calls (*‘aṣabiyyah*) ‘solidarity’, ‘group feeling’, ‘group consciousness’...” See, Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah – An Introduction to History*, tras. Franc Rosenthal, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1981, pp. x-xi.

▼3 *Passion* – a strong liking or desire for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept.

Continuity and Change in Life and History

The attribute “Islamic” to civilization should lead us to the notion of the coexistence of continuity and change in history and life.^{▼4} That, we believe, is the crucial point whereby the course of the Islamic civilization has been determined in the past – its ability to comprehend the essential continuity of tradition with possible changes in history. It is, then, in this ever-demanding challenge – the appreciation of the continuity of tradition and the acceptance of changes in history – that I see the real test for the future of the Islamic civilization both in terms of its spiritual boldness and its intellectual creativity. In fact, the idea of the co-existence of continuity and change is the major idea and the one, which had provided the Islamic civilization with an unprecedented success in world history. The strength of it lies in the notion of affirmative (*hiero*) history^{▼5} (*al-taṣdīq*) and the notion of guilt-free origin of man (*al-barā’at*).



ILLUSTRATION ~ The idea of the coexistence of continuity and change is a test for the future of Islamic civilization in terms of its spiritual boldness and intellectual creativity. (Arhiv Akšamija)

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Ideja koegzistencije kontinuiteta i promjene je test za budućnost islamske civilizacije u smislu njezine duhovne smjelosti i intelektualne kreativnosti. (Arhiv Akšamija)

^{▼4} “... History and life consist of the coexistence of continuity and change. Nothing vanishes entirely”. Lukacs, John. *At the End of an Age*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2002, p. 31.

^{▼5} The word *hierohistory* (*hiero* – sacred) indicates to what is known as *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*.

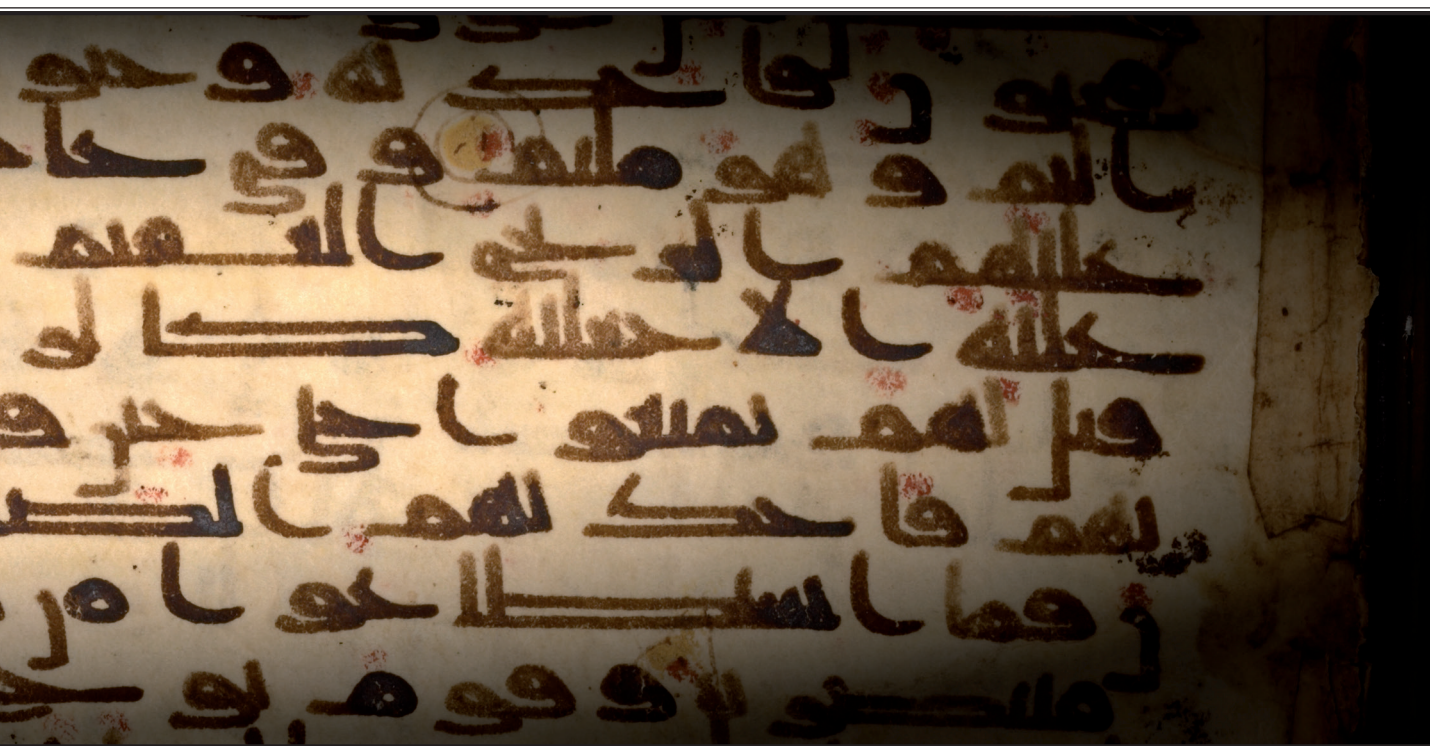


ILLUSTRATION ~ Qur'ān, fragment, Sārat al-Dhāriyāt. Iraq or Arabia? 801 - 900 (Approximate). (Arhiv Akšamija)

Affirmative History

the affirmative (*hier*o)history comes as the most convincing proof that the Qur'an is the culmination of an inclusive divine Message and that the Prophet Muḥammad, (*a.s.*), is the universal divine Messenger. In other words, the revelation of the Qur'an does not come as a surprise, it does not break the rules of the God-Man communication, and it does not begin from nowhere:

And before this, was the Book of Moses as a guide and mercy. This book (Qur'an) affirms it in the Arabic tongue; to admonish the unjust, and as Glad Tidings to those who do right.^{▼6}

God! There is no god but He, - the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Eternal. It is He Who sent down to thee in truth, the Book, affirming what went before it. He sent down the *Tawrāt* (the Law of Moses) and *Injīl* (the Gospel of Jesus) before as a guide to mankind, and he sent down the Criterion of judgment between right and wrong.^{▼7}

▼6 Qur'an, 46:12.

▼7 Qur'an, 3:1-3.

Prophet Muḥammad (a.s.) as a *Muṣaddiq*

Consequently, the Prophet Muḥammad, (a.s.), is not the first, but the last Messenger of God. The history does not begin, nor does it end with Muhammad, a.s.. He is not a rebellious revolutionary who negates everything that came before him.^{▼8} The Prophet Muḥammad, (a.s.), is the Messenger of God who has come to affirm all the good things which preceded him (*muṣaddiqan limā bayna aydīhim*), but also he is here to teach people how to avoid bad things in life and history from the experience of far-gone people and nations.

Thus, have We sent you to a community before which [other] communities have passed on so you might recite to them that which We revealed to you, while they disbelieve in the Most Merciful. Say, "He is my Lord; there is no deity except Him. Upon Him I rely, and to Him is my return."^{▼9}

Inclusive History

The notion of the affirmative history (or hiero-history) has enriched the Muslims with the idea of an inclusive approach to history^{▼10} as a whole and, in turn, freed the Islamic history from an exclusive possession of it. Of course, Muslims took very seriously their ultimate role as inheritors of (*hiero*)history, but they never denied the role of others, especially the role of *ahl al-kitāb*, i.e., Jews and Christians, who, in turn, argue about three theological issues:

- about the Christian doctrine of the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a doctrine that is not accepted by Judaic theology because of the implication of the corporatization of the divine;
- about the second coming of the Messiah because, according to Judaic theology, the Messiah comes only once and not a second time after he had been supposedly killed or crucified;

^{▼8} Compare that with some recent revolutionary movements in the world, especially that of the Marxist-Leninist type and see how destructive they had been in the name of change and fake progress. Even in some Muslim revolutionary movements we can notice the destructive force, which is entirely in contradiction to the spirit of Islam. The idea of *tajdīd*, renewal, is a strange idea and it does not correspond to the continuity of memory as the core of Islamic identity and it does not reflect the real purpose of the progress in the continuity of Islamic civilization.

^{▼9} *Qur'an*, 13:30.

^{▼10} "History is not a social science but an unavoidable form of thought. That "we live forward but we can only think backward" is true not only of the present (which is always a fleeting illusion) but of our entire view of the future: for even when we think of the future, we do this by *remembering* it." Lukacs, John. *At the End of an Age*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2002, p. 53.

- around the issue of the covenant with God, where Christian theology denies the right of Jews to the Old Testament of the Tora Torah after the New Testament of the Gospel. ▼¹¹

Holy Qur'an and Critique

While reading the Holy Qur'an, a Muslim cannot but feel the presence of the *ahl al-kitāb*, the People of the Book, in almost every page of it. By the same token that the Jews and Christians cannot read any relevant book of world history without recognition of the Muslim presence in all fields of human life.

Surely, the Qur'an criticizes some Jews and Christians, but it does the same with some Muslims as well. I guess, it is the Muslim moral responsibility not to take advantage of the critique of others in the Holy Qur'an in order to cover the Muslims' own shortcomings. If nothing else, but for the fact that the Qur'an, as the word of God, is almost unique in appreciating the goodness of people of other religions, especially of the *yahūd* and *al-naṣārā*, the Muslims have a duty to carry out the spirit of tolerance in the midst of religious pluralism. Here is one of many verses of the Holy Qur'an that clearly indicates to that effect:

Verily, those who have attained to faith (in this divine writ), as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and Sabians ▼¹² – all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. ▼¹³

Religious Pluralism

Of course, it would be naïve to conclude that there are no differences between Islam and other religions, namely, Judaism and Christianity. The point here is not a vague notion of poor flattering or cheap religious propaganda, but a sincere conviction based on the most important Islamic source that teaches Muslims how to cope with religious pluralism on their own and how to appreciate the fact that this world

▼¹¹ It is important to know that Jews, Christians and Muslims agree that Jesus, may God bless him and grant him peace, is the Messiah, but differ on his messianic role and function. In Judaism, the Messiah is the appointed king who will rule the world in the days after God judges all mankind; in Christianity, the Messiah is God himself in the flesh who should die for the sins of mankind and redeem them; in Islam, the Messiah is the one who should come again at the end of the world to bring it out of darkness and defeat the Dajjal (Anti-Christ) and convince all people to believe in One God as Islam preaches.

▼¹² "The Sabians seem to have been a monotheistic religious group intermediate between Judaism and Christianity." See, *The Message of the Qur'an*, Translated and Explained by Muhammad Asad, Dār al-Andalus, Gibraltar, 1984, p. 14, n. 49.

▼¹³ *Qur'an*, 2:62.

is not made up of one religion or one nation, because if God wanted the world to be so, He could do it, but He wanted the people of this world to be multiple in their religions and nations so that they may compete with each other in good deeds.



ILLUSTRATION – Religious pluralism – the world is not made up of one religion or one people. (Arhiv Akšamija)

Competition in Good Deeds

this idea of the competition in good deeds applies, especially, to these three world religions of the Book: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, not only because of their claim to the similar heritage of the Book, but also because of their heritage of a unique historical interaction that could not be avoided in the past and their historical responsibility that cannot be ignored in the future. It is precisely in this historical unavoidability of Judaism, Christianity and Islam that I see hope, but also, I must say, I sense a kind of fear. My hope is based on the good heart of the majority, though very often silent in its goodness, of sincere Jews, Christians and Muslims who seek their own peace in the coexistence of these religions rather than conflict.

Similarity and Difference

Unfortunately, there is a very loud minority in all three religions who, in fact, see in the similarity of Judaism, Christianity and Islam the very reason for conflict rather than peace. This kind of attitude leads us almost to the conclusion that the similarity, and not the difference, provokes the conflict while the difference brings the respect. We are familiar with the history of a severe debate among the similar, not different, religious groups, the debate that has often turned into a very violent conflict. I have in mind some historical conflicts between the Sunnites and the Shiites in the Muslim religion and the conflict between the Catholics and Protestants in the case of Christianity. I am sure that such examples exist in Judaism as well.

The logic of this kind of conflict among those who are similar, whatever it may be, lies in the false notion that in order for me to keep the purity of my religion, the deep difference must be seen of the other who is similar to me. It is this difference of his in a common similarity which is not tolerated. This is the real issue of the relationship between Judaism, Christianity and Islam today: their similarity, not the difference in their spiritual roots, their hope, not fear from each other, their love, not hate of each other, and their justice toward each other, and not oppression of each other. ▼¹⁴

▼¹⁴ Ceric, Mustafa. "Judaism, Christianity, Islam: Hope or Fear of our Time", in Beyond Violence: *Religious Sources for Social Transformation*. The Conference at the University of Southern California on the 5-7th of May, 2003.



ILLUSTRATION - In the past, Muslims valued different opinions and were guided by the belief in coexistence instead of conflict.
(© Freerange)

Cultural Interaction

Should I remind you that the glorious time of the Islamic civilization had been the time of its interaction with other civilizations. The idea of isolation is strange to the Islamic civilization because the Prophet Muhammad, a.s., was sent to all mankind and thus he is the witness over the world in the sense of bringing upon it the mercy and not the curse: *We have sent you as a mercy to the worlds!* (*wa mā arsalnāka illā raḥmatan li al- 'ālamīn*).^{▼15}

It is clear, then, that the Muslims in the past knew how to interact with others who had been both similar to and different from their faith and their expectations of life and history. They had been guided by the strong belief of the conformation (*al-taṣdīq*) rather than (*al-takfīr*) denunciation, the belief of life sharing (*al-ta'āyush*) rather than conflict (*al- ṣirā*). Furthermore, they knew how to appreciate the different opinions amongst themselves while keeping in mind the same direction towards the glory of the Islamic civilization as a common achievement of the whole *Ummah*.

Balancing Memories

Since we are not children of the moment, we must be able to balance the memory of the past by the memory of the future time. It is in this point, i.e., the balancing of the memory of the past by the memory of the future time that I see the difficulty in the Muslim present. In other words, the Muslims have difficulty, on the one hand, to free themselves from the guilt of some previous historical events and to take the risk of the future by fresh spiritualism and creative intellectualism, on the other hand.

We are Born Free

Should we remind you that the idea of sin-free origin of man (*al-barā'h*) (is one of the most important ideas of the so-called modernity, which has led the world to a spiritual and intellectual advancement, i.e., humanism and renaissance? The slogan: "We are all born free and all men are equal before God", is the reaction to the notion that all men are born with the sin of Adam and that some men are born as masters and the others are born as slaves. It took Europe centuries and many bloody wars to overcome these two general ideas: the idea of predetermined - inherited sin and the idea of preordained slavery.

^{▼15} *Qur'an*, 21:107.

We believe that one of the reasons why the Muslim world was in advance to the rest of the world lies in the fact that Islam had freed humanity of an inherited sin and had set the stage of equal chance for all to show their historical merit.

We are Born Free

the current crisis of the Islamic civilization may be seen in the lack of self-confidence, which came as a result of a cultural insecurity, which was introduced with the time of losing the belief in freedom of guilt and the belief in the equal chance for a success in life and history. Consequently, generations of Muslims have lost the spiritual boldness and intellectual creativity. Instead, we have seen a kind of spiritual shyness that has led the Islamic civilization into isolation, as well as an intellectual borrowing that was going to lead the Islamic civilization into assimilation.

Here is a possible answer to the question as to: “Whither will the wheel of the Islamic civilization go”? Or whither it ought to go from here? To isolation or to assimilation? Or whether it will make its way towards an interaction and co-operation?



ILLUSTRATION ~ All people should be freed from the idea of predestined slavery. (© Freerange)

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Svi ljudi treba da su oslobođeni ideje unaprijed određenog ropstva. (© Freerange)

Neither Isolation, nor Assimilation, but Civilizational Affirmation

the Islamic civilization is not made either for isolation, or assimilation. It is made for the interaction and co-operation. However, in order to go towards that direction, the Islamic civilization must reject the idea of historical guilt. It has been being imposed nowadays upon the Muslims in the sense that the current generation of youth must correct all the mistakes of the previous generations before it thinks of improving an immediate and long-term future of the *Ummah* – the Universal Muslim Community.

In other words, the contemporary generation should hold fast to the belief^{▼16} of freedom from the past mistakes and thus take responsibility for the future of the world not in the way of isolation, nor in the way of assimilation, but in the way of equal cultural interaction and civilizational co-operation. The middle ground of historic interaction and rational co-operation is the right way out from the embarrassment of isolation and the risk of assimilation of the Islamic civilization.

Time for Third Interaction

It is now the time for the third historic interaction of the Islamic civilization with the rest of the world, especially the western world, after it had experienced the interaction in the time of the venture of Islam and then in the time of the great Islamic impact on both the spiritual and intellectual change in the West. This time, however, the situation is somewhat different from the two previous ones because the West does not feel the need to learn anything from the East as it used to be the case.

On the contrary, the West believes that the East should imitate the West in everything, even in the strange moral behavior, which is against human decency as well as human reproduction. This situation though should not discourage the Muslims from the interaction with the West because of the permanent interdependence between the two worlds – the East and the West – which did not start yesterday and will not end by tomorrow.

Let me now address the second question as to: With what speed will the wheel of the Islamic civilization move? With the speed of its center? Or with the speed of its edge?

^{▼16} “After all, everything a man does depend on some kind of belief. He will speak or act in a certain way because he thinks that this kind of speaking or acting is better than another”, Lukacs, John. *At the End of an Age*, p. 88.

Center and Periphery

But, first is there a center of Islam? Yes, there is a center of Islam, but not so much in the sense of geographical compact, economical product, or political impact on the global development as in the sense of a universal identity, the time-space *Ka'ba - Qibla* orientation and of the faith-based solidarity among common Muslims all over the world. These rather abstract characteristics of the idea of the center of Islam will remain strong because the message of the Qur'an is strong in its universality and its credibility for the human salvation.

The issue here, then, is not about the obvious blessings of the Heaven, but about the use and misuse of those blessings by humans. No one can deny the bliss of the time of the Prophet and “no one can deny the glory of the caliphate, the might of the Ottomans or the transformative impact of modern Europe... The caliphs and sultans – at least some of them – deserve their fame... And above all, the story of Muhammad (*a.s.*) and early followers has been a linchpin of Islamic identity for fourteen centuries.”^{▼17}

Yet, continues Richard Bulliet, the view from the center leaves too many questions unanswered. Where did all those Muslims come from? Why did they develop a coherent culture or civilization while Europe, despite its Christian homogeneity, was so fractious and diverse?

The view from the center portrays Islamic history as an outgrowth from a single nucleus, a spreading inkblot labeled “the caliphate”. But what other than a political label held Islam together? And why did its political cohesion evaporate after little more than two centuries, never to reoccur?

The view from the edge holds out the possibility of addressing questions like these. It starts from the fact that most Muslims outside the Arabian Peninsula are not the descendents of the Arabs ... Most of them learned about Islam after they entered the community, not before; and what they learned never assumed a homogeneous character, though from the fourteenth century on there was a strong impulse toward normative homogeneity.^{▼18}

Furthermore, no one can deny the central role of the Arabs, the Persians and the Turks in the mainstream history of the Islamic civilization. But also no one can ignore the fact that the heaviest burden of the Islamic civilization for the last two centuries was put on the Arab shoulders. It is only recently that the edge or periphery of Islam is beginning to emerge and to show some signs of rallying around the center expecting that the center will come with an initiative to strengthen the internal relationship of the *Ummah* on a global level.^{▼19}

^{▼17} Bulliet, Richard W. *Islam: The View from the Edge*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p. 7.

^{▼18} *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8

^{▼19} See: Mehmet, Ozyay. *Islamic Identity & Development: Studies of the Islamic Periphery*, Routledge, London & New York, 1990.

Center Must Move Faster

the periphery of Islam is becoming impatient to see a practical action of the center, if the center is aware that it is really a center of Islam today, in terms of translating the unique spiritual richness of Islam that can be seen in the unity of faith, the unity of purpose, the unity of prayers and the unity of destiny. The periphery of Islam cannot understand why the center is slow in addressing so many contemporary issues which stay on the way for a moral, political and economic development of the global *Ummah*. It is difficult to explain to the generation of “Internet” that the Muslims cannot determine the universal date of their Eid in advance; it is difficult to explain to rational people that the global Muslim policy is still based on the rule that one member of the *Ummah* must lose so that the other may survive; and it is hard for decent people to believe that the Muslims do not have the strategy for a global economy which could decrease the poverty and increase the literacy among the Muslims who are by all standards still suffering from these two social illnesses – poverty and illiteracy – more than any other religious group in the world.



ILLUSTRATION – The future of Muslims lies in their ability to synthesize their past memory with future history. (Archive of Akšamija)
ILUSTRACIJA – Budućnost muslimana je u njihovoj sposobnosti da sintetiziraju svoje prošlo pamćenje sa budućom historijom.

There Must be a Synthese

I believe that the Muslims do not have choice today but to come to the realization that their future is in their ability to synthesize their past memory with the future history which may unfold itself in the internal co-operation of all the aspects of rich spiritual gifts and intellectual fruits as well as in the external interaction of all the possibilities of the advancement of human life that a positive human knowledge may offer to an individual and society.

Self-Respect and Mutual Trust

In addition to that, the Muslims today must come to the point of self-respect so that the others may respect them as well and they must know that today's world operates on the basis of mutual trust that requires much more time to build it than to destroy it.

Conclusion

By all measures, the Islamic civilization today is in a crisis as the whole humanity is at risk. There are ways for the Islamic civilization to turn this crisis into an opportunity. First of all, the priorities of the *Ummah* must be recognized so that all its members know what is important and what truly matters for its prosperity, peace and security. Second, the Muslims must know who are the nations that they can rely on in order to foster their relationships with them. Third, there must be a collective support system of the Islamic world across the globe. And, forth, there must be a self-assessment of the *Ummah* in the sense of strengths and areas for improvement. The *Ummah* must show where it stands out in excellence not only in a crisis but also in the situation when the whole humanity is at risk. Therefore, the task of the Islamic civilization today is to keep its memory of the past for the sake of the future of humanity in the sense of fostering a civilizational cooperation as it used to be in the service of a salvation of humanity as it must be in order to survive today's risk of annihilation.

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