Can a Declined Civilization be Re-constructed?

Islamic Civilization Or Civilized Islam?


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By

Mehdi Mozaffari
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I. INTRODUCTION & ASSUMPTIONS

Great civilizations are constituted of two inseparable parts. The first one is composed by an explicit world vision which can be a set of cultural system, an ideology or a religion which is generally the case. The second is represented by a coherent political, military and economic system which often is concretized as an empire or a historical system. I call civilization a junction between a world vision and a historical system. In other word, when a specific world vision is realized trough a historical system, this fusion called civilization. Only the historical system is an empirical reality. The world vision alone is an a-historical, diffuse and elastic concept. When a historical system is realized without having a comprehensive world vision, such a formation shapes tribes, empires, states and other forms of political entities, but not a civilization. Similar to it, when a world vision stands without a body, a ‘physical’ shape, it is merely ideology, culture or religion.

Civilization is often defined in vague and ambiguous terms: ‘The inevitable destiny of a culture’ (Huntington, 1996: 42), ’The kind of culture found in cities’ (Bagby, 1958: 162-3), ‘Civilizations are invisible, just as constitutions’ (Toynbee, 1995: 46) and so on and so forth. In reality, this kind of definitions say nothing tangible and workable about civilizations. Fernand Braudel provides us a better definition, when he defines civilization as ‘both moral and material values’ (Braudel, 1995: 5). Immanuel Wallerstein who is also skeptical about the various definitions of civilization makes a distinction between ‘historical system’ (from whom I borrowed this concept), on one side, and the ‘civilization’ on the other. Civilization is his view refers ‘to a contemporary claim about the past in terms of its use in the present to justify heritage, separateness, rights’ (Wallerstein, 1992: 235).
Wallerstein’s definition refers only to the cultural dimension of civilization leaving a side its material (political, economic and military) component. We know that civilization is broader than ‘culture’ and ‘historical system’ considered separately; we know also that the civilization is not merely about the claimed heritage in the passed. Civilization can also be the question of ‘present’ time and the ‘future’. Therefore, the inclusion of ‘historical system’ or ‘material’ dimension into the cultural body and memory seems indispensable, at least for having a workable concept.

Many civilizations declined and ultimately died without having experienced renewal. Few survived or lived longer than others, because of their skill, cumulative character and especially their flexibility and adaptation’s capability before everything else. No civilization is eternal, civilizations are changing eternally. In a low intense communicative world-time, different civilizations can live separately, side by side, conserving their specific identity. In a high and intensive communicative world-time, the civilizational differences tend to be diminishing. If inter-civilizational relations become very intense, the possibility for keeping civilizational particularities tend to be strongly diminished, depending upon the degree, intensity and durability of communication. A kind of fusion between different civilizations is theoretically plausible. No civilization can be the same and be renewed at the same time. They influence each other, culturally and, devour each other, ferociously. Despite the importance of the clash and conflicts to which civilizations are facing externally, though the real causes for decline and extinction are generally internal. The ‘decline’ is a longue durée phenomenon which is stretch out over many successive centuries; yet, the adherents of a declined civilization have difficulty to realize and to admit the decline, -in time-. When it is admitted and is interiorized, it is often too late for renewal. The ‘renewal’ does not mean ‘re-production’. Renewal means, roughly the exchange of the old currency with the new one, while it is still time. In a sense, renewal means sauver les meubles while the damaged house is still on its foots. The ‘Re-construction’ must be distinguished from ‘Re-production. A house damaged by earth-quick; can not be re-produced in the same way, in the same place and with the same materials, if the house owner likes to avoid new damages. The house must be re-constructed, not reproduced. Furthermore, while the re-production evokes a fixed and static mentality; a mentality prisoner of the passed and nostalgic to the good memories, re-construction calls for invention and needs innovation. The former is oriented toward the passed, the later to the future. Civilizations don’t reproduce themselves. They produce other civilizations.

Based on these assumptions, the lecturer knows already on what path this study is structured.
The axial question which this paper is dealing with is the following: Can a declined civilization re-emerge as a new civilization? This is a crucial and general question which is not necessarily connected with a specific civilization. All civilizations are facing -one day or another- to questioning about their capabilities for survival. This rule is also valid for a dominant and powerful civilization. In reality, the essence of Samuel Huntington’s highly polemical book is more about reflections on how to avoid the decline of the Western civilization than about the clash between civilizations.(Huntington: 1996, Chapter 12). In my case, I intended to deal here with Islamic civilization. In this connection, I will first to rise the question of ‘decline’ and ‘revival’ in general terms. Departing from some civilizations like Greek and Roman, the different theories about ‘decline’ and ‘revival’ will be discussed, before dealing, later on, with the theories dealing specifically with the decline of Islamic civilization. It is also to emphasized that the ‘decline’ of civilization is one thing and, the existence of consciousness and a clear and explicit will for the re-construction of the ‘declined’ civilization is another. In the case of Islamic civilization, the ‘decline’ is obviously admitted by Muslims themselves, but the will for its re-construction is often confused with reproduction and is thwarted by the forces of regression.

II. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS: ‘DECLINE’ AND ‘REVIVAL’

During the history, thinkers from different disciplines: theology, history, politics, philosophy and sociology studied the phenomenon of ‘decline’. For some author, the study of decline represents more interest than the study of law which governs the progress. Already in the Book of Genesis and in Mesopotamian creation stories, the fall of man almost coincides with the making of the world. (Fleischer, 1970: 1.). In the classical period, authors like Machiavelli, Falvio Biondo (1439-1453), Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), Montesquieu, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) are some of those who studied this phenomenon and, in contemporary epoch, Spengler, Quigley, Toynbee, Braudel and more recently Samuel Huntington are among who deal with the study of decay. Despite all the brilliant works on this field, it is to say that


2 In his short and insightful review of the evolution of studies on decline, Fleischer writes that "During the Renaissance, the decline theory swung back to the secular side. Petrarch (1304-1374) called the period of pre-Christian Rome antiqua…..the age of Constantine, nova, and his own time tenebrae.” (Fleischer, 1970: 1.)
there does really not exist a coherent and general theory on ‘decline’. There are some assumptions and there are some specific analysis of some specific civilizations, i.e. the decline of Roman Empire done by Montesquieu or the decline of Islamic-Arabic empires by Ibn Khaldun or even the decline of Western civilization as presented by Spengler and Huntington. If one will try to conceptualize the authors’ approaches to the problematic of decline, I think that one could identify three different approaches: The *biological-cyclical*, the *conjunctural* and the *structural*. The first one considers civilizations similar to human biological life: birth, youth, adult age, elderly and finally death. It is almost within the same optic that for example Quigley sees civilizations moving through seven stages: 1) mixture, 2) gestation, 3) expansion, 4) age of conflict, 5) universal empire, 6) decay, and 7) invasion (Quigley, 1961: 146ff).

Viewed from cyclical approach, the renewal of civilizations are contradictory with their natural rhythm and ‘biological’ evolution. Therefore, once a civilization passe trough the golden age, the decay and later the preaching is inevitable. Arnold Toynbee shared the vision of Quigley, thus with an important difference. Toynbee believes that a ‘challenged civilization’ which is facing the decay, is still able to survive (or renewed itself), depending on its various capabilities. The conjunctural approach emphasizes on the impact of external wars on the disintegration of empires and civilizations, while the structuralists look for the elements which are related to the construction (body and spirit) of a civilization. The elements like economic, internal crisis and fatigue as well as social breakdown and the important transformation in the field of commerce, roads and communications are considered structural changes. For instance, Toynbee explains the fall of the Greek civilization by a combination of internal and external factors.\(^3\)

On the other hand, in the fall of the Roman Empire, he focuses on the role played by the *economic* factors.\(^4\)

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\(^3\) The configuration of the Hellenic Civilization’s social history after its ‘breakdown’. The leading minority in the society comes to depend more and more on force, and less and less on attraction. Civilization’s religious history in the same phase. The internal proletariat creates a higher religion, Christianity, the draws its inspiration from one of the non-Hellenic civilizations…the role played by ‘the external proletariat’ (the barbarians)… the barbarians conquer the Hellenic universal state militarily and established successor-states on its domain. (Toynbee, 1995: 56).

\(^4\) The importance of the part played by the economic factor is determining whether a universal state is to collapse or is to survive can be gauged by comparing the respective fortunes of the Roman Empire in its different section. The western provinces, in which the Empire collapsed in the fifth century of the Christian Era, were relatively backward economically; the central and eastern provinces, in which, in the same century, the Empire survived, were the principal seats of the Hellenic World’s industry and trade; and their relative economic strength more than counter balanced the relative
For Montesquieu, what caused at first place the fall of the Roman Empire were the *internal divisions* within the metropolis *Roma*. The *grandeur* of Rome has been another decisive factor for its fall.5

Ibn Khaldun dealing with the rise and fall of Islamic empires and dynasties, observes that two major factors have been in origin of their decline. These two factors are the weakness and disappearance of *asabiyya*.6 Because, Civilization(*Umrân*) like establishment of a new dynasty

needs group feeling through which its power and domination can materialize, and the desert attitude is characteristic of group feeling. Now, if a dynasty at the beginning of its rule is a Bedouin one, the ruler possesses austerity and the desert attitude….Then, when his power is firmly established, he comes to claim all the glory for himself.(Ibn Khaldun, 1968: 101’II’).  

The second cause of the fall is *injustice* “which brings about the ruin of civilization” (Ibn Khaldun, 1968: 103).7

Concerning the Western civilization in our time, Huntington foresee the risk of the extinction of the current western civilization through increasingly *multiculturalism* and *multi-ethnicity*. The third danger comes independently from the West from the outsider powers (Huntington, 1996: Chapter 12),

*unfavourableness of their strategic position*.Though the center and the east were more directly exposed than the west was to assaults from the Eurasian nomads of the Great Western bay of the steppe, and from the Sasanian power in Iran and Iraq…” (Toynbee, 1995: 63)

5 “Pendant que Rome conquérait l’univers, il y avait, dans ses murailles, une guerre cachée; c’étaient des feux comme ceux de ces volcans qui sortent sitôt que quelque matière vient en augmenter la fermentation.” (Montesquieu, 1951: 111’II’).

“Ce fut uniquement la grandeur de la république qui fut le mal, et qui changea en guerres civiles les tumultes populaires. Il fallait bien qu’il y eût à Rome des divisions : et ces guerriers si fiers, si audacieux, si terribles au dehors, ne pouvaient pas être bien modérés au dedans....” (Montesquieu, 1951: 119 ‘II’).

6 Following Rosenthal’s translation, *asabiyya* means ‘group feeling’. Robert Cox gives to it a elaborated sense defining it as “the form of intersubjectivity that pertains to the founding of a state. It is the creative component in this critical phase of human development; and in this respect *asabiyya* has (for a westerner) some relationship to Machiavelli’s *virtù*”(Cox, 1966: 163).

7 In a more extensive sense, ibn Khaldun explains that “injustice should not be understood to imply only the confiscation of money or other property from the owners, without compensation and without cause. It is commonly understood in that way, but it is something more general than that.” (P. 106). “When people no longer do business in order to Make a living, and when they cease all gainful activity, the business of civilization slumps, and everything decays.” (Ibn Khaldun: ,1968: 104)
perhaps the ‘New Barbarians’ represented by China and the Muslim world together against the West.

Trough reviewing the main approaches to the phenomena of ‘decline’, we saw that the authors had different opinion about causes of ‘decline’; nevertheless, all agreed on the character of ‘decline, a negative state which causes considerable damages to the structure of a civilization, attacking its nerve’s and defense’s system, jeopardizing it in parts and causing finally its death and extinction. Consequently, the ‘decline’ can be defined as a situation where an empire or a civilization looses its internal and autonomous dynamic whatever could be the cause/s.

Concerning ‘Revival’, there exist, among authors, almost a consensual opinion. In fact, I didn’t find any noticeable author, old or contemporary who expressed explicitly against the possibility of revival of a civilization. Even the partisans of cyclical thesis (i.e. Toynbee) don’t reject possibility for recovering. The main difference between the authors is merely about whether history has a sense. Those who don’t believe that human history has a sense in itself, they believe on sporadic correction of a declined civilization and its eventual renewal. I labeled this approach corrective-renewable. On the other hand, those who believe on a sense in history, I called their approach progressive-cumulative.

Toynbee who belongs to the first category believes on a permanent movement challenge and response.8

The optimum challenge must be the one which not only stimulate the challenged partly to achieve a single response, but also stimulate him to acquire a momentum that carries him on a atep further…To convert the movement into a repetitive, movement rhythm, there must be an élan. (Toynbee, 1995: 137).

For Ibn Khaldun, the recovery of a declined civilization is depending on: 1) the potential of the enlightened individual in an era of decline and the revival of asabiyya under the ægis of a new world order (Cox, 1996: 164). It is almost in the same spirit that Brook Adams means that the revival of a exhausted civilization can only be realized “with fresh energetic material by

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8 A civilization which has been challenged is called to provide an adequate response. Its survival is depending on the success of the response. He puts it in the following way: “Civilizations, I believe, come to birth and proceed to grow by successfully responding to successive challenges, They break down and go to pieces if and when a challenge confronts them which they fail to meet.” (Toynbee, 1948: 56).
infusion of barbarian blood”. On the other side, an author like Melko thinks that in a period of culmination, civilizations, like lesser systems, face three alternatives: they either disintegrate, ossify, or reconstitute themselves and develop further.” (Melko, 1995: 42). Once the encounter between a declined civilization and a fresh and strong one realized, the frequent intrusion of alien civilizations makes difficult to decide whether recovery has taken place or whether the disintegrating civilization has simply been replaced by another (Ibid: 44).

Samuel Huntington, despite and maybe because of his alarming attitude toward the destiny of Western civilization, doesn’t reject, neither, the possibility of its renewal. In his view, the gradual and irregular decline of the west could continue perhaps century to come. Or “the West could go through a period of revival, reverse its declining influence in world affairs, and reconfirm its position as the leader whom other civilizations follow and imitate.” (Huntington, 1996: 302).

The alternative approach to cyclical one is the progressive-cumulative approach which is based on the rejection of cyclical theory and on belief on the cumulative character of human experiences. Against cyclical theory, they argue that:

A truly cyclical history is conceivable only if we posit the possibility that a given civilization can vanish entirely without leaving any imprint on those that follow. This, in fact, occurred prior to the invention of modern natural science. Modern natural science, however, is so powerful, both for good and for evil, that it is very doubtful whether it can ever be forgotten or ‘un-invented’ under conditions other than a physical annihilation of the human race. And if the grip of a progressive modern natural science is irreversible, then a directional history and all of the other variegated economic, social, and political consequences that flow from it are also no reversible in any fundamental sense(Fukuyama, 1992: 88).

For Kant, one of the founding fathers of the progressive-cumulative thesis, the story is “one of the successive destruction of civilizations, but each overthrow preserved something from the earlier period and thereby prepared the way for a higher level of life”. In this way, the Roman state swallowed up the Greek, then the Roman influence on the barbarians who in turn destroyed it, and so on down to our times. In a more explicit way, Hegel (another founding father) precise the goal of history by saying that “the History of the world is none other than the progress of consciousness

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of Freedom”. From his point of view, the progress has been made in the following sense: “The Eastern nations knew that one is free; the Greek and Roman world only that some are free; while we know that all men absolutely (man as man) are free”. In our days, the idea of progress and the cumulative character of history brought some authors to declare clearly and definitively that:

Today there exists on Earth one civilization, a single global civilization….The single global civilization is the lineal descendant of, or rather I should say the current manifestation of, a civilization that emerged about 1500 BC in the Near East when Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations collided and fused. This new fusional entity has since then expanded over the entire planet and absorbed, on unequal terms, all other previously independent civilizations. (Wilkenson, 1995: 46).

In sum, the above study demonstrated at 1) the decline is a natural state for a civilization; at 2) the recovery of a declined civilization is possible, thus under some conditions; and 3) there is an substantial difference among authors on the issue of sporadic or cumulative character of history.

III. EMPIRICAL CONSIDERATIONS: RISE AND FALL OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

Islam in its origin has been a successor civilization of the second category following Toynbee’s classification. It is noticeable that Mohammad, the Prophet of Islam claimed explicitly being the true continuator of Abrahamian monotheist tradition in which Islam -as religion- is nothing else than a ‘modern’ and reviewed version of Judaism and Christianity. It is to say that even at the heart of its religion, therefore, Islam renewed itself by borrowing from ancient Eastern and Mediterranean civilizations” (Braudel, 1995: 73, Khamenei, 1998). However, when Mohammad moved in into Yathrib, an anonymous city north for Mecca, established his government, elaborated a constitution and changed even the name of Yathrib to Medina, it was already clear that he was looking for something bigger than founding merely a new state among others. The choice of Medina which means City from which the term of ‘civilization’ (tamaddun) is derived, was a good indicator about the real intentions of the New Apostolate. Another significant indication was the multi-ethnical character of his disciples; surely

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12 Toynbee believes that a civilization may emerge through 1) the spontaneous mutation of some pre-civilizational society, 2) stimulation of a pre-civilizational society into changing into a civilization by the influence of some civilization that is already in existence or 3) distintegration of one or more civilizations of an older generation and the transformation of some of their elements into a new configuration (Toynbee, 1995: 85).
Arabian in clear majority, but also with decisive contribution of some Parsians (Salman Pârsi) and nonetheless Ethiopians (Balâl Habashi). Mohammad aimed to achieve a universal religion through a universal message. After the Formative Age which was dominated by Arabs who were animated by the will to create an Empire, ”Muslim civilization began only when Islamic schools spread throughout the Umma or community of the faithful, from the Atlantic to the Pamirrs. Once again, old wine was poured into new bottles” (Braudel, 1995: 73). This was the beginning of the Axial Age.

During the Axial Age, Islam became both integrative and dynamic. It was integrative in the sense that it easily integrated within itself not only different races, ethnies, territories, but also and especially all the cultural, philosophical and scientific baggage that the new arrivals bring with themselves. It was also dynamic in the sense that it was able to absorb the alien ideas and concepts, having enough capacity to transform them into Islamic vocabulary and express them through Islamic terminology. The Islamic civilization reached its zenith at beginning of 9th century (A.D.), especially under the caliphate of Al-Ma’mûn (813-833), the founder of Bayt al-Hikma (Academia). From this epoch until thirteenth century (A.D.), Islamic civilization became more and more cosmopolitan and even secular. It was in such way that “the creative minority -philosophers and scientists in particular - viewed religious as a conventional matrix of social norms and communal behavior” (Kraemer, 1986: 14).In the time of the great philosopher and politologue Al-Fârâbi (827-950),

Philosophers saluted the banner of religion in deference to political and social responsibility. The regnant political philosophy, inspired by Al-Fârâbi, held religious to be symbolic representations of the truth. The true and the good were determined autonomously, not on religious grounds, and these criteria became the measure and standard for religion. Philosophy was viewed as independent of, not as ancillary to, faith and theology (Kraemer, 1986: 15).

It was also in the same period that Islamic civilization became cosmopolitan and tolerant, where Muslims were prepared to discuss religious issues with others on a fair basis, without threat of retribution (Kraemer, 1986: 29). In fact, during this period, “most Arabic-writing Faylasûfs (Philosophers) were either Christian, Jews, or Muslims; they all acknowledged the pagan Greek sages, especially Plato and Aristotle.”(Hodgson, 1974: 430 ‘I’). Kraemer attributes the open-mind character of Islamic civilization, during the Axial Age, to the emergence of an affluent and influential middle class, which, having the desire and means
to acquire knowledge and social status, contributed to the cultivation and diffusion of ancient culture. (Kraemer, 1986: 4).

In the evolution of Islamic civilization and its flourishing one thing has a huge importance which, explains also the gap which is separating in our days the Islamic thinking from the Western thinking. To referring again to Kraemer who has done an excellent work on this subject, we may say that the Aristotelian thought dominated Muslim’s “logical investigations, their work in natural philosophy, and their reflections on ethics. But this tendency does not broken a hardbound commitment to a specific philosophical system. Their political thought was fundamentally Platonic, and a blend of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism pervaded their metaphysical speculation.” (Kraemer, 1986: 6).

The question now is how and under what circumstances this brilliant, cosmopolitan, tolerant, integrative and dynamic civilization declined? And when the decay of Islamic civilization begun? All authors agreed that Islam has created a civilization. They also agreed that the Islamic civilization reached its peak in between 9th and the second half of 10th century (A.D.) continuing circa three centuries ahead. Fernand Braudel gives even two specific dates: one for the beginning and the other for the end of Islamic civilization. For him, the golden age lasted in 813, the year of Al-Ma’mûn’s caliphate and ended with the death of Averroës, -the Cordoba physician and commentator on the works of Aristotle- in Marrakesh in 1198 (Braudel, 1995: 73). In this way, Braudel included rightly the Andalusian epoch -at least partly- within the golden age of Islam. Whatever has been the exact period of Islamic golden age, we have to understand the causes of its decay. On this question, different responses have been provided. For the clarification’s task, we have to classifying them as follow: 1) Philosophical-intellectual, 2) Geo-strategic, 3) Technological-scientific, and 4) the ‘Unification of the World’s’ theory.

Philosophical-intellectual explanation: Those who are in favor of this thesis, offer two major arguments. Firstly, the question of quality and intellectual aspiration of Islamic philosophy. Muslims knew very well both Plato and Aristotle, thus despite the fact that Aristotelian though dominated their

13 In my recent book, I arrived to the same conclusion than many other did before me consisting that the Islamic political philosophy laid on Plato while the Western one is laying on Aristotle. See Mehdi Mozaffari, Fatwa: Violence and discourtesy, Oxford, Aarhus University Press, 1998 (Sura IV).

14 On Andalusian epoch see Juan Vernet, La cultura hispanomusulmana en Oriente y Occidente (Spain, 1978) and, Salma Khadra Yayaui (ed.), The Legacy of Muslim Spain, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1994. The Andalusian experience accomplished at least two main objectives: Firstly, it created a cosmopolitan forum for different scholars of different disciplines. Second, and actually the result of the first, is the transfert of Hellenistic knowledge to medieval Europe (Mozaffari, Fatwa, 1998: 172-73).
logical investigation and their reflections on ethics, their political though was fundamentally Platonic (Kraemer, 1986: 6). Moreover, their approach to philosophy was more literal and textual than critic. The knowledge was used rather for the purpose of refinement and urbanity (adâb/âdâb) than a commitment to a specific philosophical system. Braudel attributes this fact to the force exercised by Religion on Philosophers. He says “As admiralers of Aristotle, the Arab philosophers were forced into an interminable debate between prophetic revelation, that of the Koran, and a human philosophical explanation.” (Braudel, 1995: 83). Second, general stagnation of Islamic civilization was due to uprising of a powerful Islamic dogmatism in twelfth century which aimed to eradicate philosophy as a compatible discipline with Islam as religion. This movement was leaded by theologians like Al-Ghazâli (1058-1111) and Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328). The rise of dogmatism puts an end to the tolerant, integrative, cosmopolitan and dynamic character which were the dominant trends of the golden age.

Geo-strategic explanation: Following this explanation, the decay began when power was taken over by barbarian soldier slaves (Seljuqs) in almost all of the Muslim territories. Parallel to this, it happened a dramatic fact with long and substantial consequences: After the twelfth century, Islam “lost the control of the sea” (Braudel, 1995: 87). When Islam conquered the Mediterranean Sea in the end of 7th century (A.D.), this was a fatal blow to the Byzantine empire and divided the unity of European Mare Nostrum establishing even until our days a ‘barrage liquide’ in Henri Pirenne’s jargon. When Islam lost the control of Mediterranean, it began to be closed to Islam, which found itself permanently handicapped, unable to expand and ill-equipped for its ordinary daily life. (Braudel, 1995: 87). The lost of the sea was not limited to the Mediterranean; the lost became, with the time, world-wild. Toynbee means that the epoch rupture happened in 1498, when Frankish ships arrived in India, these ‘water-gypsies’ which did even not captivated the attention of Babur, the Emperor of India. Nevertheless, that the oceanic voyages of discovery made by West European mariners were an epoch-making historical event. (Toynbee, 1948: 62). From this time, Islam became a merely territorial power deprived from the modern communication’s means, which were the necessary and efficient instruments for political, economic and cultural power.


16 In a sense this event did contribute to the rise of European civilization which will dominate progressively the Woorld. As Henri Pirenne puts it: “L’Occident est embouteillé et forcé de vivre sur lui-même, en vase clos. Pour la première fois depuis toujours, l’axe de la vie historique est repoussé de la Méditerranée vers le Nord. La décadence où tombe à la suite de cela le royaume mérovingien fait apparaître une nouvelle dynastie, originaire des régions germaniques du nord, les Carolingienne.” (Pirenne, 1939: 187).
**Technological-scientific explanation:** The Galileo and then the Copernican revolutions changed fundamentally the human view on the World and on itself. These revolutions did transformed the mentality of human which resulted to the Renaissance and the birth of European civilization. The point is that the Islamic civilization remained untouched and uninformed. It continued its traditional way which at that time was similar to stagnation and further disintegration. The emerged technological rationality was characterized by three elements: 1) The progressive conquest of all areas of knowledge by mathematics, 2) the application of scientific knowledge through associated technology and 3) the appearance of an impersonal bureaucracy (Shayegan, 1997: 85). None of these elements was present in the Islamic world. Furthermore, the technological revolution demands a secular scientific rationalism. Islam, after having experienced a dose of rationality,17 secularity and cosmopolitan culture during three or four centuries (9th to 13th), did actually returned back to dogmatism and the revivification of theological sciences (fiqh and kalâm).18 In short, the technological backwardness of Islamic civilization at that time was enhanced by a gradual intellectual and mental backwardness. And this was the cause of its decline.

**Unification of the World:** This explanation is a sort of combination of various elements which caused the decline of Islamic civilization. It is to say that the lost of sea, the return to dogmatism and technological backwardness made the Islamic civilization unable to be dynamic and integrative. Essentially, because the sense and orientation of encounters were changed. The revolutionary Western invention was the substitution of the Ocean for the Steppe as the principal medium of world-communication (Toynbee, 1948: 70). The world became unified and divided at the same time. Unified by the Western new communication’s web and divided by the end of encounters between non-Western civilizations. Shayegan illustrates very well the depth of the new gap. He writes:

The decline of these Asian civilizations brought their mutual cross-fertilizations to an end. The era of the great translations leading to fruitful encounters between India and China, Iran and India, China and Japan, came to an end. These great civilizations turned away from each other and towards the West. They withdraw from history, entered a phase of expectation, stopped renewing themselves and lived increasingly on their accumulated fat. They were like rich aristocratic families overtaken by events, ruined by a shift in economic reality, who keep up

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18 It is astonishing that Al-Ghazâlî, the most prominent figure of dogmatism, daubed his monumental work ‘Revivification/Ihya’ which is a clear indicating of the dominant trend of his time. In fact, the Revivification was a Dogmatic Renaissance; a rupture with philosophy and Hellenism and return to theology.
appearances for a time by selling off their inheritance bit by bit: jewelry, paintings, carpets, silver, everything, until the bitter day comes when there is nothing left (Shayegan, 1997: 44).

The ‘Unification of the World’ did not happen only through the introduction of modern communication’s and transportation’s facilities. The most substantial change occurred in the filed of economy. “For the first time in human history, an instance of a world-economy survived its ‘fragility’ and consolidates itself as a capitalist system” (Wallerstein, 1992: 223). Without going here into further discussion about the rise of capitalism, it is to mentioning that this was a qualitative change in world history which had (and still has) a huge impact on all civilizations, included Islamic one.

Continuing its fall, the Islamic civilization lost completely the impulsion and the will which characterized it during the golden age. The decline has been so striking that some authors asked whether there exists any more a Muslim civilization (Braudel, 1995: 111). As we will see later, the doubt about the existence of such civilization is not really proper to the Western authors, the Muslims themselves (even the Fundamentals) are asking themselves the same question. What about the Ottoman empire which was Islamic and lived several centuries, extinct only in 1923? It is true at the Ottoman empire was Islamic, but this was rather by name than by essence. In reality, the Ottoman empire was almost a culturally inert construction which contributed little to the development of Islamic civilization.

Until now, I deal only with the explanations provided by the Non-Muslims authors. The reason is that as paradoxical as it could appears, there were not many Muslims thinkers (except for Ibn Khaldun) who, in the Medieval period, which is corresponding to the beginning of Islamic decline, were interested to the study of the decay of Islamic civilization. In fact, Muslims began to be conscious about their own stagnation and fall only after Napoleonian invasion of Egypt, in 1798. It was during the French occupation of Egypt that the Muslims became aware of their own backwardness in social, political, technological and intellectual terms. Thanks to Al-Jabarti who described with an extraordinary precision and accuracy the story of this encounter. This event had huge repercussion on Muslim awareness which started in 19th century and is continuing in the 20th. The thinkers and leaders like Al-Afgani (…), Abduh (…), Tahtawi( ) and many others by observing the progress of Europe, they tried to ‘reform’ Islam and the Muslims’ way of life. The important thing is that from this period all Muslims admitted the decline of Islam and the necessity for reform.

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As a Muslim leading thinker of 20\textsuperscript{th} century described it: “During the last century, we became aware of at, We, Muslims, we need a deep and correct reform, in our religious approach. We need to re-vive Islam by re-turning to the limpid source from which we get lost during fourteen centuries.” (Shariati, 1973: 2-3) This citation illustrates a genuine Muslim discourse which resumes the essence of all various discourses (Reformist and Fundamentalist under their different etiquettes) from last century until now. The genuine discourse attest the progress of the West, the backwardness of Muslims; although tow incontestable facts, but the solution that is proposed is not the logical result or consequence of the observed facts. In stead for looking forward, trying to joint the idea and the path of progress, it propose regression and looks backward by rhetorical statements such as “returning to the limpid source from which we get lost during fourteen centuries”.

In short, all Muslims admitted the decline of Islamic civilization, they have interiorized this fact; at the same time they are avoiding to draw the necessary conclusion in accordance with the already observed admitted fact.

IV. SPECULATIVE CONSIDERATIONS: HOW TO RE-CONSTRUCTE?

While the Muslims are agreed on the decline of Islamic civilization, they are on the contrary significantly divided on the ways to reconstructing it. Is re-construction possible? Is there any empirical evidence? As I have already argued at the beginning of this article, the re-construction differs from reproduction in this sense that the former doesn’t aim to reproduce something identical to something else. On the contrary, the reproduction is, in a way, aiming for reincarnation. One is a photography; another one is painting. Reproduction is mechanic and Reconstruction intellectual. The process of re-construction takes place at two stages: At the first one, the ‘civilization’, which is subjected to revision and renewal, must be deconstructed. Without deconstruction, the concept of ‘civilization’ will remain vague and a-historic. The de-constructing model that I proposed is founded on specifying the elements of a civilization, which, in a condensed form, constitute of two elements. A World vision and a Historical system. After acknowledging this, we have to begin the second phase; although reconstruction stage. As we know, civilizations have generally a long life extending over many centuries. When we talk about the reconstruction of a specific civilization, we don’t mean that the target civilization must be reconstructed in its long and entire life. We have a selected momentum, as well as some selected values, ideas, concepts, organizing principles and so on and so forth; all these, related to this specific civilization By re-
construction, I mean that a civilization is civilization only when the World vision and the Historical system meet each other in a coherent and fertile manner. In this way, the Islamic civilization which is our case here doesn’t necessarily mean fourteen centuries; it means maybe three or four centuries where precisely the above mentioned elements constituted one and integrated system. The advantage of such a method founds in its empirical verifiability. Because, we know when and in which specific periods the junction occurred. In this connection, the best and perhaps the unique example for a successful re-construction of a declined civilization, is the Renaissance that is a historical proved experience. Renaissance was a reconstruction of the Greece and Roman heritage all together. Athena represented the main source of inspiration, the ‘Idea’ and the ‘Spirit’ while Rome stands for the ‘Body’, a form for organizing Power, based on Law and prosperity. Beside these two basic elements from which sprang out the European civilization, Christianity added itself to it as an ad hoc element; then, the rising capitalism, completed the whole construction. The Renaissance model shows the way and the mechanism for a successful reconstruction.

After the above discussion, we have to discuss the possibilities, opportunities and the views of Muslims themselves on this subject.

Three highways: Different authors presented different classification of Muslims’ tendencies towards the revival of Islam. In this connection, Fred Halliday identified four distinct responses or themes from within an Islamic discourse. “The approaches they adopt are classifiable as: assimilation, appropriation, particularism, confrontation; to which may be added a fifth approach, present within Islamic societies and the non-Muslim world and falling outside an Islamic discourse. This fifth could be described as the incompatibility thesis.” (Halliday, 1995: 135-36). Toynbee, already in 1948, longtime before the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and Islamic revolution in Iran, made a broader and, in a sense, a prophetic classification of Muslims by dividing them into Zealots20 and Herodians.21 Muslims’ leading

20 “The ‘Zealot’ is a man who takes refuge from the unknown in the familiar, and when he joints battle with a stranger who practises superior tactics and employs formidable newfangled weapons, and finds himself getting the worst of the encounter, he responds by practising his own traditional art of war with abnormally scrupulous exactitudes.” (Toynbee, 1948: 188). The North African Sanusis and the Central Arabian Wahhabis (Saudi Arabia) are used as examples.

21 “The ‘Herodian’ is the man who acts on the principle that the most effective way to guard against the danger of the unknown is to master its secret; and, when he finds himself in the predicament of being confronted by a more highly skilled and better armed opponent, the responds by discarding his traditional art of war and learning to fight his enemy with the enemy’s own tactics and own weapons.” (Toynbee, 1948: 193-94). As example for Herodian, he names Mustafa Ataturk.
figures have their own classification. Personalities like Sayyed Qub (executed in 1966), Al-Mawdudi (d. 1979), Shariati (d. 1977), Khomeini (d. 1989), Sorush and Khatami have almost the same classification, only with small variations. All divide Muslims in three categories: The Traditionalists-Conservatives, the True-Revolutionaries and the Corrupts (i.e. Shah of Iran, President Sadat or Saudi king family). The view of each of these groups on revival problematic is of course different. In this study, for the purpose of a better clarification, I divide Muslims’ options adopted vis-à-vis the renewal of Islam into three paths or three highways: Reproductivism, Communalism and Universalism.

1) Reproductivism is animated by an idé-fixe and is a temptation for the reincarnation of a ossified body. What must be reincarnated is the Medina model at the time of Mohammad himself (Madinat ul-Nabî) and in some extent the period followed immediately after the death of Mohammad (632 A.D.), the epoch of the Rightful Caliphs (632-651). This approach has at least this advantage to be clear and precise. It refers itself to a specific time, space within which an explicit world vision did create a historical system. All these elements are empirical verifiable. The ‘time’ is limited to 622 until 632 or 651. The ‘space’ is geographically located in Medina and secondarily in other parts of Arabian peninsula. The ‘world vision’ is represented by the Message embodied in Koran and, the ‘historical system’ is illustrated by the Government of Mohammad and his four immediate successors. The Medina with its fixed set of values (unchanged for ever) is perceived as the Perfect City, the Sublime form of human organization and the Unique valid model for humankind. What is important to know is that the Medina model is not considered the departure point nor an aspiration’s source alone. It is, indeed, the arrival and the final point. The Harbor, not the Voyage. Consequently, the task of Muslims, today as any time in history, consists, consequently, to recreate the Medina model as closer as possible to the original version. The leaders and thinkers like Khomeini, Sayyed Qutb, Mawdudi and many others

22 Abdul Karim Sorush (alias Hossein Dabbagh) studied pharmacology in Iran and history and philosophy of science in England. After Revolution of 1979, he became one of the most influential ideologue of Islamic revolution and was member of the Committee of the Cultural Revolution until 1987 where he resigned from the Committee. Sorush is a author of many books and articles such as Religion is broader than Ideology’ (1993), Theoretical Contradiction and Expansion of the Shari'a, (1990) (both in persian). For a short review of his ideas, see Valla Vakili, Debating Religion and Politics in Iran: The Political Thought of Abdolkarim Soroush, New York, Council of Foreign Relations, 1996.

23 ‘Muslims’ here are both the Muslim believers and those wore merely cultural or secular Muslims.

24 On the government of Medina under Mohammad, see (among others): Mehdi Mozaffari, Authority in Islam, New York, Sharpe, 1987 (Chapter 2.).
who share this view do not, however, reject science and technology. In this respect, it is interesting to see how Ayatollah Khomeini admit new technology and what has in mind on Western civilization. In his Political Testament, he writes:

If civilization's illustrations (mazāhib) means innovations, inventions and advanced industry, Islam nor any other monist religion opposed to these things. But if civilization and modernization (tajaddud) means as the professional intellectuals put it, freedom in all illicit, prostitution, even homosexuality and such things, these things are in contradiction with all heaven religions as they are in contraction to scientific experts and rationalists (Khomeini, 1990: 178).

Mawdudi, another reproductivist, explains the reason why Muslims may use -without concern- the modern science. It is because ‘the modern science was not based on any particular philosophical perspective, nor did it promote a set of values or require an attitude from Muslims that could interfere with their faith’ (quoted by Nasr, 1996: 53). What they accept, there are some techniques which ‘can be exchanged and diffused fairly easily in isolation’. What they reject, there is ‘a certain scientific vision of the world in conjunction with a certain perception of reality'; they reject any new set of values, any think which could disturb the Koranic immutable set of values.25 Hasan al-Turâbi, the influential Sudanese Islamic fundamentalist leader, represents another example of this tendency. For him, revival required by the need for a ‘total revival in all aspects’. Revival here is not understood to mean modernization along Western lines. Revival is seen as a means toward the establishment of a new society where shari'a is applied. Furthermore, Turâbi, in our days, claims for same thing than Al-Ghazâli claimed in 11-12th centuries (A.D.): Renewing the Fundamentals of religion(Abu Khalil, 1995: 435). Turâbi’s arguing is circular indeed: We have to revive Islam, in all aspects with the purpose to return to shari'a. The claimed values here are static, because the Reproductivists don’t recognize the autonomy and authority of human being. On this question, a scholar, criticizing precisely the Fundamentalists’ approach, writes that the Man “is everything because he is the jewel of creation, distinct from the other created beings in that he incarnates the divine Logos; but he is nothing, because he is not a founding authority” (Shayegan, 1997: 34). Another important characteristic of this approach found in their belief on the absolute supremacy of Islamic civilization over all others is past as well as in the future. In fact, they belief on the existence of a single civilization which is Islamic one. All others are either corrupt or unjust,

25 On this point, Mawdudi declares that “We aspire for Islamic renaissance on the basis of the Qur’an. To use the Qur’anic spirit and Islamic tenets are immutable, but the application of this spirit in the realm of practical life must always vary with the change of conditions and increase of knowledge” (quoted in Nasr, 1996: 51).
belonging all to Jâbiliyya (Ignorance). Consequently, in the contemporary
time where the Western civilization is dominant, Muslims must opt for
an antagonistic attitude vis-à-vis the West as did Muslims in formative
period of Islam towards Persian, Byzantine and other civilizations and
empires. They could also ‘wait for the West to destroy itself and then
take the West’s place in the world leadership’. This confrontation
mentality is ignoring the reality that ‘if the West destroys itself, either
physically or morally, it will hardly perish alone’ (Hogdson, 1974: 430
‘III’).

2) Communalism refers to a agglomerate of various Muslim thinkers
who have not yet formulate a coherent discourse; thus they are all aware
of the weakness and inaccuracy of reproductivist thesis and, try to
conciliate some aspects of Islam with some aspects of modernity. They
may be called half and half: half zealot and half herodian; half
traditionalist and half modernist, half democrat and half theocrat. There
main reference model remains Medina; the limpid source’, thus not as
an immutable model,

not in order to return and stay in the past which is pure regression, but for discovery of the
essence of our identity and its refinement in the mentalities and habits...as well as for the
rational criticism of the past in order to find the proper support for today...and for a future
more splendid than the past (Khatami, 1997).

They make a distinction between ‘religion’ and ‘ideology’, arguing also
for a further distinction between ‘Islam’ which is eternal and unchanging on
one side and, the ‘human understanding of Islam’ which is changing, on the
other (Shariati and Soroush). They believe on ‘Religious society’ which
makes the government religious; such society remains an open one, where
criticism is permitted and nobody is above criticism.

The above view was shared by people like Afghani (d. 1897) and Abduh
(d. 1905) in 19th century and, by Shariati, Bazargan27, Arkoun, Hasan

26 Khatami is statement on Medina is insightful. He says that “The civil society we have in mind has its
origin, from a historical and theoretical point of view, in Madinat al-Nabî”. Which “remains as our eternal
moral abode” (Khatami, 1997)

27 Mehdi Bazargan was a French educated engineer who became Professor at Tehran University and the
leader of Liberation movement of Iran. After Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, he became the first Prime
minister of revolutionary regime, but resigned on November 1979, after the occupation of US embassy in
Tehran and the ‘Hostage affair’. He is author of a number of books and articles through which he tried
reconcile islam with modern science. He died in 1995.

28 Mohammed Arkoun was Professor at Sorbonne in Paris and is author of books on Islam. One of his best work is
maybe Pour une Critique de la Raison islamique, Paris, Maisonneuve & Larose, 1984
Hanfi, Sorush and Khatami in 20th century. In their optic, Medina remains primordial source, thus not as immutable one. They are for a new interpretation of Islam in which ‘Reason’ must play a key role. In a sense, they represent the New Mu’tazila of Islam. Some of them (Arkoun, Hanfai, Bazargan) are more rationalist than others. It seems, at their favored historical reference to Islamic civilization is essentially Al-Ma’mûn’s epoch where, Islam was tolerant, rational, cosmopolitan and powerful. This group are fully aware on the fall of Islamic civilization, but hey believe that a New one can/must be reconstructed. Because, if it is true that the glory (historical system) of Islam belongs to the past, the religion (world vision) is still in life, and ‘religion is broader than a single civilization’. They accept ‘the positive aspects of Western civilization’ rejecting only ‘Western vision on freedom and on human being which is wrong, narrow and uni-dimensional’ (Khatami, 1997: 183-191). The fact that they don’t reject in toto the Western civilization as does the Reproductionists, and they pay respect to the ‘Reason’, (thus not autonomous one), means, at they implicitly accepted the multiplicity of civilizations too, which may dialogue to each other. It is in this spirit that the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) which embraces all Muslim countries and is chaired (1997-2000) by Iran, launched recently the idea to organize a ‘world dialog among civilizations’. To prepare such dialog, a symposium is scheduled for February 1999 on ‘inter-Islamic dialog’, at first place. According to the General Secretor of OIC, the goal of this symposium is to achieve a ‘unified Islamic strategy to guide dialog with other civilizations’ (IRNA/ Islamic republic News Agency, July 1, 1998). Such statements and such ideas from this group sounds positive and has also the appearance to be the appropriate solution for reconstruction of Islamic civilization. The problem resides in the ambivalence and also in the contradictory character of this kind of reconstructive project. It is not clear which part of the past is likely to be included in the reconstructed civilization and, which part must be rejected. In the same way, how much of Western civilization is likely to integrated into the ‘New’ one. The partial integration of the Western civilization shall only be limited to the technological rationality or it may extend also to the scientific mentality, critical spirit, the idea of freedom and the genuine human rights? How to combine individual freedom with a religious government? Democracy, theocracy or theo-democracy? How a monotheistic conscience developed in an agrarianistic social context, and a pre da-Gama world vision can be transformed to a prosper and powerful civilization in the modern time? The most significant element of the Islamic heritage now is religion and the religious conscience. Is it possible or likely

20 Hasan Hanafi is Professor at Cairo University and one of the front figure of Islamic revivalist. One of his work is Istishriq/Occidentalism (in arabic) which is a reply to Orientalism. See also his article on ‘An Islamic Approach to Multilateralism’ in Robert Cox (ed.), The New Realism, Tokyo, Macmillan, 1997.
to create - in our time - a ‘New’ civilization on the basis of the same religion or on religion in general? These questions needs answer, at least, clarification which is still lacking in communalism. It is to say that some of them (i.e. Khatami) provide clarifications; these clarifications consist on rejection of principle like ‘freedom’ which constitute the pillar of Western civilization. Therefor, it is not exaggerating to pretend that they represent communitarian thesis. Which will lead in the best envisagable case, to the rise of a neo-Shar‘i communalist revival.

3) **Universalism**: From this point of view, the reconstruction of a declined civilization is directly conditioned by the *world-time* where the *New* civilization shall emerge. In the old world, living civilizations were in touch with each other, though not so closely as to be. In such a world, a particular civilization could be renewed itself after having go through a process of weakness and decay. One reason for the existence of such possibility was that the cumulative process consisting of perpetual learning and accumulating experiences proceeded almost internally, within the civilization’s own universe. This situation made also possible that various civilizations lived in separate spaces, side by side, at the same time. In our time, under the pressure of the *World system* represented essentially by what Braudel called the *world economy*, combined with increasingly tendency to globalization, the very existence of different civilizations - each preserving their own set of values, world vision, their specific moral and political organizing principle and operating with their own parochial economic system (*world-economy*) is hardly plausible. How can different civilizations continue to live together in a world which is administrated by the globalized capitalism and by increasingly standardized civilization and standard human rights? In such a world, different cultures can easily lived together and enrich each other. But, civilization as I defined it, can hardly be more than one. Furthermore, if we recognize that “the need, even the urgency, for ‘universal references’ has never been so strongly as in our time” (Bourricaud, 1987: 21), we have no other alternative than to admit the existence of such ‘references’. Where we may look for the ‘universal references’ in our day? Someone could maybe say to the internet. Actually, this is not a bad guess. But, more seriously, it seems obvious that the great number of these references found in the Western civilization. Here, we have to distinguish Western civilization from Westernization. These two concepts have been often confused with each other, creating further confusion, misunderstanding and have also been used for manipulation the people and a justification for authoritarian political regimes in Muslim countries. The distinction consists on, at the former concept refers to a set of values and concepts which are
embodied in a world vision which is materialized in form of a specific historical system that generally is called Western civilization. The ideas like belief on progress, freedom, equality, justice, democracy, secularity, criticism, dialog are representative for this civilization. There are the basic concepts which are in operation in the West. Saying that, it is not to neglect the ugly side of the West which is expressed by colonialism, domination, exploitation and war. The point is that the ugly side is not the whole story of the West, and it will be incorrect to reduce the West only to its non-civilized picture. Furthermore, these elements are far to be specific to the West; all other empires and civilizations have also been expansionist, they made war and committed crimes, including Islamic successive empires (i.e. Ummayads, Abbasids, Ottomans). But non of them was based on the trilogy Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité; and on all other ideas related to this. Non of them, neither, create an economic system (capitalism) which is applicable world wide for good and for bad. The ‘Westernization’ (‘Modernization’ in Huntington’s jargon) is a mimic and mechanical adoption of some superficial and trivial aspects of the way of life in the western societies. Doing the things in a way that has no relation with the reality. To consume deliberately imported articles which are used only with the purpose to emphasizing consumer’s distance from the indigenous environment. This is a kind of alienation, a ‘plague’. This is one of the main reasons why, in Muslim societies, the West is often perceived, as a trivial, moral ‘decadent’, luxurious, dominant, arrogant all together, at the same time. In this imaginary, Westerns are caricaturized a bunch of immoral exploiters who, by stealing Muslims natural resources, expend their time in leisure, dinking alcohol and practicing free and bizarre sex!!

Faced to the ‘Westernization’, the Muslim universalists deny this reductionist and superficial picture of Western civilization. They don’t considered Western civilization, a civilization belonging only to the West, alone. As Toynbee puts it: “The West is not just the West’s own parochial concern but is their past history too” (Toynbee, 1948: 83). A West who’s basic set of values -if is not universel- it is certainly universalisable (Morin, 1987); although a civilization with potential capability to be ‘universal’. Because, its basic set of values is broader than all other existing civilizations, taken them separately.

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30 Jalla Al-e Ahmad, an Iranian author who’s writings had have a decisive influence on the fall of Shah’s regime described -not without exaggeration- the impact of the westernization on Iranian society. See his book on Plagued by the West/Gharbzadegi, trans. By Paul Sprachman, New York, Caravan Books, 1982.
The reconstruction’s project of Muslim universalists resumes in 1) Considering the existing Western civilization as the necessary basis for a universal civilization, 2) Qualitative transformation of Muslims to actors and contributors to universality, in stead for challenging it and being, ultimately, submitted to it; 3) Preserving cultural identities and identities of Muslims. How these things can concretized. The first step consists of a ‘mental migration’ from a parochial and communitarian mentality, which looks backward, to look forward, by jointing a broader value system consisting of gender equality, religious equality, toleration culture, social justice and so on and so forth; leaving also aside the permanent suspicion toward the West, continuing to believe on a mysterious international plot against Islam and Muslims. These things are rather emanating from pure imaginary which result to unnecessary frustration and baseless cultural and political depression. Because, as it has already been mentioned, in the globalizing process that the world is going through in our time, there is not only Islam which is challenged; globalization is challenging every religion, ideology, culture, included the West ones.

On the other side, we have to recognize that Islam represents a rich and high culture. Islam posses a message to humanity. The concept of Umma, the Islamic notion of brotherhood, recognition of differences between the peoples, some principles concerning human moral and physical integrity are among many others that could be transmit to the universal civilization. What is need is the re-interpretation of these concepts. Umma, Community, is easily ‘universisable’. In a period where everything is becoming global, where peoples are becoming citizens of the Global village, sharing the same destiny and facing similar problems (environment, health, internet, CNN, disaster, etc.), they are in reality members of the same community: the Umma. So, the Umma of Islam (Ummat al-Islâmiyya) may be extend to Umma of Humankind (Umma-Insâniyya). The other fact is, at Islam is alien to racism, preaching universality and equality among human beings, these elements constitute, in reality, powerful pillars of Islam’s strength, and are highly qualified to contribute largely to the improvement of ‘Western’ civilization. Also, Islam’s particular focusing on justice, (‘adâlu) could bring a new blood to a civilization which is suffering of lack of justice. The virtue of compassion (sabr) and the quality of solidarity (ta’âwûn) are necessary for the correction of the dominate capitalist system. The list of components that Islam can contribute with, is quite long. There are such elements that must be saved and used as materials to reconstruction’s task. Considering world power system today, it is undeniable that “something of the leadership …for all mankind is likely to come from the West. But moral vision cannot be left to the West alone. Muslims must face their share of the tasks. There is much in their heritage itself that should help them find the relevance of that heritage to Modern mankind.” (Hodgson, 1974: 436 “III”). What is also necessary is a
“heroic act, maybe; Promethean audacity, perhaps; rebellion against established truths, undoubtedly.” (Shaye: 1997, 34). The problem is that these ‘Herodians’, who are called to audacity and rebellion, are in absolute minority in Muslim societies. The Muslim thinkers and intellectuals who really believe on an universal civilization, with Islamic contribution and participation, are generally quite prudent to express their ideas, explicitly. Maybe for avoiding reactions (violently sometimes); they are also sensitive to allegations labeling them as ‘White Man Niggers'. In general, they try to attract public attention to their ideas, through the translation of classical works of thinkers like John Lock, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, Hobbs and contemporary authors like Karl Popper Bertrand Russel and Jürgen Habermas. Nevertheless, taking the current situation in Iran as example, it is astonishing that, in recent times, some groups, composed especially of young men and women, did slowly emerged from the very heart of a fundamentalist culture and regime. One of them, among the most active and open minded, is composed of people who are reassembled around the newspaper Jâmi’a (Society). In the issue of July 1., 1998 of this newspaper, one could read the following lines:

In the matter of History and Civilization, we (Muslims, Iranians?) are plying the role of radical critic. Criticizing (Western civilization) is, of course, much easier than participating to its improvement.

Such statement, in a democratic-pluralist society, sounds normal, maybe too normal, even a banal remark. But considering that this is published in today’s Tehran, where the Western civilization is still perceived as ‘satanic’, this statement takes a different dimension.

In July 27, Jâmi’a ceased its publication in accordance to an order from a jurisdictional trial.

V. CONCLUSION: ISLAMIC CIVILKIZATION OR CIVILIZED ISLAM?

One

The question about possibility of reconstructing a declined civilization is an important one, especially in the current world-time where globalization, clash of civilizations, dialog between civilizations figure on the world agenda. Thus, there is no clear cut answer to this question. Much is depending on what we mean by ‘civilization’, by ‘decline’ and ‘revival’ and also on our understanding on ‘reconstruction’. I proposed a
definition of ‘civilization’ which is workable in the sense that it is empirical verifiable. If we accept that civilization is a junction between a world vision and a historical system, the ‘decline’ shall be defined as a rupture in the junction. And, the ‘revival’ is characterized by tentative aiming the reconnecting the defective junction. The reconnecting process can’t be mechanic, because it will forego under other circumstances that the junction (civilization) was initially fabricated. I called these circumstances ‘world-time’. Therefore, the junction must necessarily obey to new imperatives which are independent of the declined civilization. So, it means a revision of both world vision and historical system. That was the reason that I rejected the possibility of ‘reproduction’ a civilization. There is no historical-empirical evidence supporting ‘reproduction’. On the contrary, there is, at least, one example on possibility of ‘reconstruction’: The Renaissance. Unless, that we deny completely the close affinity lines between the European civilization on one side, and the Greco-Roman civilizations on the other, we otherwise must admit that European civilization has been, in origin, a revived and reconstructed version of Greece and Roman civilizations. If we agree on this, the reconstruction means ultimately creation of a new civilization on basis of some old materials, added by some new one in a quite different world-time. The life time of the new civilization is depending on its ability to the permanent challenge and response process. Since the Renaissance, the European civilization has known many up and down, but it also demonstrated to be still able to make necessary corrections and improvements, in time. It did at the same time, move, basically, toward a broader and more general set of values than ever before. That is the reason for allocating a ‘universal’, at least, a ‘universalisable’ character to this civilization.

Two

Millions of Muslims dream of the revival of Islam. They start to dream it, once they discover and acknowledge the decline of Islamic civilization. I described the fall and rise of this civilization in part II. Since 19th century, the Muslims’ dream has taken different shapes and different volumes. I discussed them in part III of this paper. The real struggle is going on between those who believe that reconstruction of Islamic civilization can only be realized through new patterns. Patterns which are not necessarily identical to the disconnected Islamic civilization that it exists today. Therefore, ideas and projects which calling for reproduction of the original model have not much chance for fulfillment. As it has been argued before, the success of a reconstruction is depending -at first place- on connecting with reality; it means world-time. There are an overwhelming number of facts and reasons which are
indicating that the world is moving rather toward a broader construction than a pure narrow religious construction. The new waves of religious awakens are, in fact, reactions to universality, at least to globalization than being independent factors. I argued that Islam as civilization is unlikely to be reproduced. At the same time, I argued that Islam is in possession of a valuable set of values and visions which are highly likely to be incorporated into the new world system. The notion of Umma, Justice, even ‘Asabiyya are needed for the improvement of Civilization. Robert Cox provide us with a redefinition of ‘Asabiyya, by putting it in world system’s context. ‘Asabiyya as a supra-intersubjectivity, a new global Mahdi. Who could take the form of a collectivity rather than an individual. This “surpa-subjectivity would have to embody principles of coexistence without necessarily reconciling differences in goals. It would have to allow for a degree of harmonization of trajectories of different macro-societies” (Cox, 1996: 168).

Three

In this respect, it is important to mention that Islam is not the only civilization or religion which is called to joint, let us say, the Universal civilization. Before Islam, Christianity did it, Japanese did it and, nonetheless Judaism did it too. This thesis did meet resistance and skepticism. Some authors argue that ‘Islam is very different. In its fundamentalist form, at least, it makes impurities demands: it wants to rule everything, to manage society, to regiment minds’ (Shayegan, 997. 23). Or, at Japanese religion is a syncretism, a mixture of various religious traditions of which Shinto and shamanism are the most important (Robertson, 1993: 94). Shayegan in his critic refers -as himself admit- rather to fundamentalist interpretation of Islam than a genuine one. Robertson remark seems more accurate. It is true, at Islam’s rigid monotheist character represents an obstacle to a multi-religious civilization. Nevertheless, we may not forget that Islam is, in its monotheist character, almost a copy of Judaism. Since Judaism became a component of Western civilization, so, there is, at least theoretically, no valid reason, that Islam can not do the same. It is possible that ‘eventually Islam like Christianity already in some circles, will prove to have its most creative thrust by way of the great ‘secular’ literature in which its challenge has been embedded, and will move among its heirs like a secret leaven long after they have forgotten they were once Muslims.’ (Hodgson:1974, 441 (III)). However, at the end, there are Muslims themselves that must find their own way. Yet, the situation can hardly better described as Braudel did., when he said that “every religion, indeed, has its emergency exits. Islam may delay or oppose changes; but it can also be influenced and outflanked.” (Braude, 1995: 100).
Islam, in its existing shape, constitutes an absolute disconnected and disintegrated construction. What is need, is, to connecting Islam with the world-time. The idea of a new Islamic civilization, as a parochial and autonomous entity, possessing its own world vision, a specific historical system and a world-economy, this idea seems to bee rather a matter of imagination than reality. The true way (Sīrāt al-Mustaqīm) is perhaps to join this ‘Auberge espagnole’ which is the World civilization. The door is open to a civilized Islam; as a guest and as owner, at the same time.
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