

# Mirrors and Windows: Redefining the Boundaries of the Mind

Ismail Serageldin

## On Boundaries

Frontiers are an invention of the mind. We set boundaries for ourselves and others by what we choose to see as reality and by what we choose to value. But men and women are social creatures, and individual behavior is subjected to the control of widely shared social values. These boundaries that define the limits of acceptable behavior also tend to reflect and reinforce limits on acceptable thinking.

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

Are such boundaries important? They certainly are. Shared values reflected in predictable behavior not only are the basis of all social organization but are at the core of "cultural identity"—a hackneyed expression that nevertheless remains essential to anyone who lives in a group.<sup>1</sup> Yet individuals within a group are not clones, interchangeable units within a collectivity. Each person interacts with others in an expanding series of circles starting with high intensity vis-à-vis the immediate family circle and with decreasing intensity to the limit of the group(s) with which the individual identifies.

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The author is Vice President, Environmentally Sustainable Development, at the World Bank. This paper was presented on 25 April 1992 and revised on 14 January 1993. The views expressed herein are those of the author and should not be attributed to the World Bank or to any of its affiliated organizations.

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

Social values clearly do not have the same impact on all members of a society or cultural group. Obvious cleavages are sex, age, wealth, race, creed, and national origin. Opinions—mostly concerning social values and whether and how they should or should not change—further subdivide the shifting mass of humanity. What prevents an explosion along one or more of these cleavages is a sense of shared cultural identity and the human need to organize social groupings around the family—still essential for reproducing the species and still the basic element of social organization.

Boundaries are multiple. Each individual identifies to varying degrees with different sets of individuals: immediate family, extended family, and groups based on ethnicity, nationality, region, religion, profession, and so on. At no time is one boundary the sole definer of an identity. Yet at different times—and for different issues—there is a most relevant boundary that becomes prominent and defines the us/them divide. It tends to reject the "other" and frequently reinforces itself by defining the "us," not by its members' specific positive attributes but by the elements in opposition to the "other." This mode stresses the negative, expands elements of separation, and makes it harder to stress the broader groupings that always exist, albeit in weaker form. Ultimately, we all belong to one group: humanity.

Despite this common humanity, other boundaries tend to prevail. When the "Yugoslav identity" weakened, it could not keep Serbs and Croats *voluntarily* in the same Yugoslav group. Thus the relevant boundaries were redefined inward to a smaller group. On the other hand, the strength of the "Swiss identity" is sufficient to hold together a population with several languages (German, French, Italian, and Romanche), several religious affiliations, and multiple local identities.<sup>2</sup> Further along, we see the emergence of a European identity, by which Germans, French, Italians, British, and others are gradually expanding the most important boundary outward—from the nation-state to the pan-European one.

## The West and the Muslims

Against this backdrop of shifting allegiances and identities is a reaffirmation of an old divide: "the West" versus "the world of Islam." It is an odd confrontation. "The West," as a precise concept, is less meaningful today than ever.<sup>3</sup> Is Japan part of the West? Is the West synony-

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<sup>2</sup>See J. M. Gabriel, *How Switzerland Is Governed* (Zurich: Schweizer Spiegel Verlag, 1983); and Carol L. Schmid, *Conflict and Consensus in Switzerland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

<sup>3</sup>The West has long been used by "western" scholars as well as politicians, preceding the East-West Cold War confrontation. See Oswald Spengler's influential *The Decline of the West* (New York: The Modern Library, 1962). For a rebuttal, see J. G. de Beus, *The Future of the West* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953). Of most relevance to the

mous with the OECD? The Group of 7? Where does "Eastern Europe" fit? How about the members of the former USSR? How about Turkey?<sup>4</sup>

Hazy as it may be, "the West," in very broad cultural terms, has some validity. Conceptually, it means rich industrial societies with market-based economies and multiparty democratic political systems. Individualism, secularism, and consumerism are hallmarks of values and behavior. The differences among nation-state societies within the group, large as they are, are still smaller than among the group and others. It is not just wealth that defines the divide: "the West" does not include oil-rich Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, and Brunei. Leaving aside the question of Japan's inclusion, "the West" clearly includes the most dominant sociopolitical group on the planet today. Aspects of its "culture" tend to invade the cultural space of other societies.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes such cultural transfers are enriching; sometimes they harm a people's heritage and identity.

It is just as hard to talk of the "world of Islam," or the "Muslim world." There are major differences among communities as diverse as Niger, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia. Numbering almost a billion people, mostly in Africa and Asia, Muslims are increasingly discernible as communities in the industrialized West. In France, the fact that they form over 5 percent of the population is as deeply felt—and resented—as the fact that 11 percent of French citizens are foreign-born. This Muslim "diaspora" creates issues unique to its own special position while sharing some of the general ones confronting the majority of Muslims.

## The Muslim Predicament

What are these general issues? Some are historical, while others are more recent. Historically, the first issue is the distinction between "Arab" and "Muslim" identities. Not all Arabs are Muslims, nor are all Muslims Arabs. When Islam as a faith, a social movement, and a system of governance exploded out of Arabia onto the world scene, it implanted itself by varying degrees of voluntarism and coercion in many lands. All became thoroughly "Islamized," remaining Muslim for centuries, even through colonial conquest and rule by non-Muslims. With the exception of the Iberian peninsula, where Islam was forcibly eradicated by 1492, once they became Muslim, most societies tended to stay Muslim.

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cultural aspect, see J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, *The Western Intellectual Tradition* (New York: Dorset Press, Harper & Row, 1986).

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

<sup>5</sup>See the concerns expressed by one contemporary Muslim thinker in Muḥammad 'Ammārah, *Al Ghazw al Fikrī: Wahm am Ḥaqīqah?* (Cairo: Dār al Shurūq, 1989).

However, some lands (i.e., Egypt) were "Arabized" and "Islamized" while others (i.e., Iran) were only "Islamized." The accompanying processes of cultural development are, regrettably, beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that there is a profound problem between the overlapping, but incomplete, concordance of Arab and Muslim identities that makes non-Muslim Arabs and non-Arab Muslims uncomfortable. This remains one dimension of the present Muslim cultural predicament<sup>6</sup> that is recognized by thoughtful Arab Muslims concerned about the definition of their own identities.<sup>7</sup>

Another problem is the historic "rupture" that characterized the cultural evolution of most Muslim societies.<sup>8</sup> It overlaps with, but is not synonymous with, the colonial experience, for much of what Muslims did to themselves in terms of intellectual sclerosis preceded colonization. It is arguable that intellectual sclerosis facilitated colonization and laid bare the Muslim intelligentsia's inability to meet the intellectual challenge posed by the western invaders as well as the ruling elites' inability to meet the military challenge. The latter is partially a result of the former. This intellectual failure, exacerbated by colonialism, hampers the efforts of would-be Muslim reformers by confronting them with two options, both of which are riddled with problems, albeit quite different problems.

The first option holds that our intellectual legacy is so "out of sync" with the contemporary world that it is better to ignore it and start from the present, defined largely by western institutions, standards, and concepts. Internalizing this new reality as quickly as possible would enable local Muslim cultures to be "reborn" in a new and more effective form. Extreme adherents assert that we are all part of a global village, that there is only one (technologically driven?) world culture, and that those who seek to keep alive anachronistic manifestations of the "heritage" are hopeless romantics. The world, it is asserted, is converging rapidly towards a single mode of thinking. Fukuyama's "End of History" is upon us, so why fight it?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Muḥammad 'Ammārah, *Al Islām wa al 'Urūbah wa al 'Almān-īyah* (Beirut: Dār al Waḥdah, 1984).

<sup>7</sup>See Ismail Serageldin, "Ta'qīb", 605-10, and "Comments," 100-101, 348, 475-76, in Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS), *Al Qawmīyah al 'Arabīyah wa al Islām*, (Beirut: CAUS, 1981) (proceedings of a conference held in Beirut, December, 1980).

<sup>8</sup>See Mohammed Arkoun in the proceedings of "Architectural Education in the Islamic World," Seminar Ten in *Architectural Transformations in the Islamic World* (Seminar series held in Granada, Spain, 21-25 April 1986) (Singapore: Concept Media for The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1986), 15-21, and subsequent discussion, 22-25.

<sup>9</sup>Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

This "bold" approach is really the path of least resistance, for, upon closer scrutiny, it allows the West to shape world affairs and the mechanisms of identity formation in Muslim societies. It eschews the arduous task of struggling with a complex and frustrating reality and reinforces the very dependence that is so troubling to Muslims today. It is thus a pathetic attempt to deny the reality of the heritage and the actual circumstances that define collectively the frame of reference for each individual.

The second option is also fraught with danger. It asserts that a new reality cannot make a *tabula rasa* of the past but must build upon it. A viable identity can only be created by a patient reconstruction of an intellectual edifice built upon the solid foundation of "pure, true Islam."<sup>10</sup> This is *one* of the many problems one encounters. What is "pure" unadulterated and uncontaminated Islam? Who decides what to keep and what to throw out? How and by what criteria can one select which mental constructs to keep and which to throw out? Even if one could erect such an edifice, what relationship would it have to the "faulty" western or hybrid concepts embedded in the minds of hundreds of millions of Muslims today? How could one replace these faulty concepts—the product of generations of slow evolution or nonevolution—all at once with the new construct? The history of cultural revolutions leaves much to be desired.<sup>11</sup>

## For a Critical Process

The reader will doubtless feel that this is the standard game of setting up and then criticizing two extremes in order to defend the middle ground as the only sensible position. That is close but not quite true, for there is no real middle ground here. There is, however, a third, different option. Of course there are others, but I will limit myself to presenting and defending this third approach—that of adopting the *critical process*.

The approach is *critical* insofar as it starts from a healthy skepticism and subjects all suggested positions and/or approaches to the discriminating scrutiny of critical analysis. This is not a purely "western" doctrine; it is found among the best of Muslim scholarship from al Fārābī<sup>12</sup> to Ibn Khaldūn<sup>13</sup> to Muḥammad 'Abduh,<sup>14</sup> all of whom applied a discriminating

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<sup>10</sup>An outstanding exemplar of this school is the distinguished scholar Fazlur Rahman.

<sup>11</sup>See Dareyush Shayegan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une révolution religieuse?* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991).

<sup>12</sup>See, among others, Muhsin Mahdi, *Al-Farabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (New York: The Free Press, 1962).

<sup>13</sup>See Ibn Khaldūn, *Al Mujallad al Awwal: Al Muqaddimah* (Beirut: Dār al Kitāb al Lubnānī, 1962).

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

It is a *process* insofar as there is no final conclusion or product: the perfect edifice is never built or completed. We cannot get from here to there because there is no final "there." Is this a cop-out? Not at all. The French identity has been described as the result of a long labor of self on self: "La France est devenue la France par un lent (long?) travail de soi sur soi." Yet even it has to reinvent itself constantly.<sup>15</sup> The three million North African Arab Muslims living there a cultural and sociological challenge, whether one chooses assimilation, acculturation, or another way, including forming a Swiss-like two-tier identity. Thus a process it must be. The pursuit of a conclusive solution is the pursuit of a mirage.

## Conceptual and Practical Problems

How can such a process of critical inquiry be launched? Here we run into two sets of problems: conceptual and practical. On the *conceptual* side are hegemonic western constructs, methods, instruments, and discourse. Our concepts of *geography* reflect this. The West (its North Atlantic and mainly European pole) has named the world's regions: Near East, Middle East, Far East. "Near" and "Far" in relation to what? For Australia, the Far East could be the Near North. Our concepts of *history* are determined from an ethnocentric European view. The medieval "Dark Ages" were dark only in Europe; they were an age of splendor in the Muslim world.<sup>16</sup> Our concepts of *nationality* are largely the result of western deeds or misdeeds. Almost all African and Arab national boundaries are lines drawn by European colonizers. These lines are a troublesome legacy for ethnic groups that fall across several states, such as the Kurds of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia. The creation of a national identity within these frontiers is another burden with which people have to cope, whether they consider themselves Muslims, Arabs, or Kurds.

The critical *methods* are largely those developed by western scholars in western institutions. Despite this frustrating asymmetry, made all the

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<sup>14</sup>See Mohammed 'Ammārah, ed., *Al A'māl al Kāmilah li al Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh*, 6 vols. (Beirut, 1972).

<sup>15</sup>The French identity has been much discussed. Perhaps the most noted commentator is Fernand Braudel, *L'Identité de la France* (Paris: Les éditions Arthaud, 1986). It assumes, however, twenty-six regional identities. An excellent recent survey is "La France dans ses régions: Vingt-six enquêtes sur le pays d'aujourd'hui," *Le Monde*, April 1992.

<sup>16</sup>See, among others, W. Montgomery Watt, *The Majesty That Was Islam* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1974), and D. M. Dunlop, *Arab Civilization to A.D. 1500* (New York: Praeger, 1971).

more so by the West's largely hostile and distorted view of Muslims and Islam,<sup>17</sup> these critical methods are excellent analytical tools within a given frame of reference. Muslim scholars who use them have to convince their colleagues that this does not imply the adoption of an "unacceptable" implicit frame of reference. They must also build a bridge to the orthodox Muslim framework<sup>18</sup> in order to be understood. This requires double work and often results in rejection by both camps. Western scholars may scorn such efforts as inappropriate and unconvincing, while orthodox Muslim scholars may dismiss them as disguised orientalism.<sup>19</sup> Thus it seems that the schism between "the Muslim world" and "the West" shows itself in the systematic way in which those who would follow a different path are forced to "choose a camp." Boundaries of the mind, again.

On the *practical* side, there is an evolving social reality in Muslim societies that no scholar can ignore and expect his/her work to be relevant. Its essence is that communications, technology, mobility, and the demographic transition that many societies are undergoing all contribute to changing the way societies function and also accelerate the rate of change. Individuals facing change adapt by "unbundling" their attributes, protecting some and discarding others without regard for coherence or consistency. This phenomenon is seen in rapidly changing societies and is also at the core of explanations of changing social values: social values do not exist in a vacuum and would not be social values if they did not govern individual behavior for the vast majority of the population.

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

## A Model of Social Behavior

I have presented my views of a three-tiered model of social behavior elsewhere,<sup>20</sup> but as it is central to my arguments that serious change is required in Muslim-Arab societies and in Muslim thinking today and how such change, radical or modest, operates, I have summarized it here.

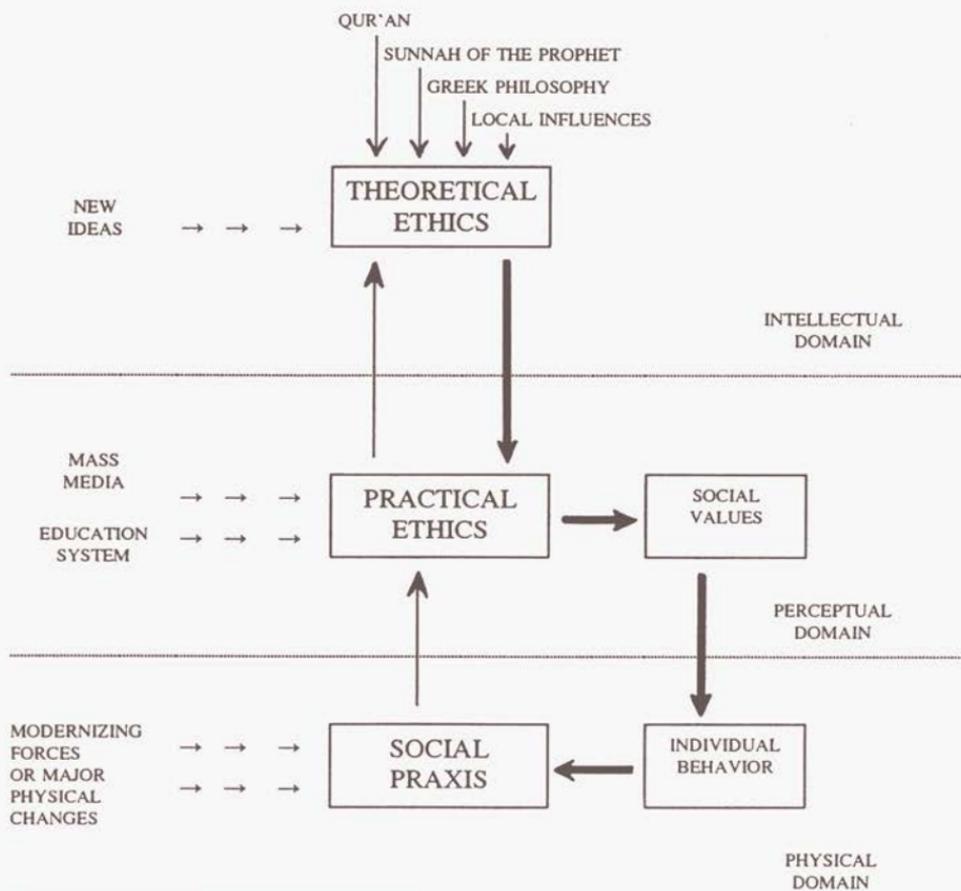
<sup>17</sup>See Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

<sup>18</sup>See 'Abd al Wahhāb Khallāf, *'Ilm Uṣūl al Fiqh* (Kuwait: Dār al Qalam, 1970).

<sup>19</sup>See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>20</sup>For a discussion of how this process and its dynamics affect Muslim self-image see Ismail Serageldin, "Individual Identity, Group Dynamics and Islamic Resurgence," in *Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World*, ed. Ali Dessouki (New York: Praeger, 1982), 54-66.

**Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Social Behavior**



The three tiers define the intellectual, perceptual, and physical domains. In the intellectual domain, "theoretical ethics" (what should be: the normative ideal) are debated by scholars, philosophers, and intellectuals. Here, in addition to the Qur'an,<sup>21</sup> the Sunnah,<sup>22</sup> and the body of Muslim scholarship, other elements come into play, including local pre-Islamic traditions, classical Greek philosophy, and contemporary western thought.

The vast majority of the population, however, does not perceive this "ideal order" of theoretical ethics. Their perception of ethics is a distorted "practical ethics,"<sup>23</sup> one which allows a Muslim to show prejudice and to feel free with the blood of others in the name being a good Muslim—in spite of the verse: "There is no coercion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256). Less dramatically, it condones the visitation of "saintly" shrines and the intercession by "saints," many of whom were unsavory persons. Such practices are rejected categorically by all Islamic theological schools.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, they are widespread and are considered by practitioners as signs of being a good Muslim. Thus does practical ethics become the relevant framework for the overwhelming majority of Muslims.

Practical ethics shape social values, for they are the primary guides to individual behavior in the real (physical) world. Many rituals, as well as people's sense of "what will others think," are dominated by the prevalent social values. Hence individual behavior, by and large, conforms to the prevalent social values. Individual behavior, when collectivized, becomes "social praxis," or what we see society doing every day.

Change can enter the schema in several ways. First, and most commonly, it enters at the level of social praxis due either to strong "modernizing forces" or to major physical changes. An example of the former is the impact that the huge increase in Saudi oil revenues during the mid-1970s had on northern Yemen. Not only did massive migration to the north bring money and new consumption patterns, but it also changed

<sup>21</sup>I have used the authoritative translation of Yusuf Ali, [*The Meaning of*] *The Glorious Qur'an* (Cairo: Dār al Kitāb al 'Arabī; Beirut: Dār al Kitāb al Lubnānī, n.d.). The two-volume edition is distributed by Saudi Arabia's Rābiṭat al 'Ālam al Islāmī.

<sup>22</sup>Of the many biographies, the best, in my opinion, is Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥaykal, *Hayāt Muḥammad*, 6th ed. (Cairo: Dār al Nahḍah al Miṣriyah, 1956). However, the topic and meaning of the Sunnah continue to be debated actively to this day. See Muḥammad al Ghazālī, *Al Sunnah al Nabawiyah bayna Ahl al Fiqh wa Ahl al Ḥadīth* (Cairo: Dār al Shurūḡ, 1989).

<sup>23</sup>Others have made a slightly different usage of these terms. See Marcus G. Singer, ed., *Morals and Values: Readings in Theoretical and Practical Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), 1, 2, 4, 8, 18.

<sup>24</sup>See 'Ammārah, *Al A'māl al Kāmilah*, 2:205.

practically all aspects of Yemeni life, including architectural expression.<sup>25</sup> More importantly, villages without able-bodied men saw women assume new. Such changes became "acceptable" in terms of practical ethics and social values. A change in the social praxis moved up to practical ethics. When fourteen years of drought destroyed nomadism in Mauritania, new behavior patterns were acquired by the former nomads in a very painful transition to living in quasi-permanent refugee settlements around such cities as Nouakchott and Rosso. Again, changes in social praxis found their way to practical ethics and social values, where they supported and reinforced necessary changes in individual behavior (and social praxis).

If changes persist long enough in the domain of social praxis and become widely accepted in the domain of practical ethics, religious scholars, philosophers, and the intelligentsia generally start changing (or reaffirming) the theoretical ethics in response to that challenge. Thus, for instance, the widespread availability of interest-bearing banking has led to responses from various Muslim religious authorities.<sup>26</sup>

But change can also come directly into the intellectual domain when new ideas are confronted, analyzed, adapted, and incorporated, as was the case with classical Greek philosophy at the time of al Fārābī and as is the case today with a number of contemporary ideas. It can enter directly into the perceptual domain via the mass media and the education system. Both of these have much to do with shaping the worldview of most people and thus help define their concept of self and society, however imperfectly or inadequately.<sup>27</sup>

To the extent that these changes are entering or being addressed at the perceptual and intellectual domains (especially the latter), there is a chance of maintaining the general framework of a society's cultural identity. It would be an evolving framework, even a rapidly evolving one—but it would be both *integrated* and *integrating*. It would be integrated, for its internal coherence is maintained and people feel at ease with themselves and their society. It would be integrating, for it can incorporate new and novel elements, thus growing and adapting constantly

<sup>25</sup>See Ismail Serageldin, "Rural Architecture in the Yemen Arab Republic," in *The Changing Rural Habitat* (Proceedings of Seminar Six in the series *Architectural Transformations in the Islamic World*, held in Beijing, People's Republic of China, 19-22 October 1981), vol. 1, *Case Studies* (Singapore: Concept Media for The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1982), 1-10.

<sup>26</sup>It should be noted that western authorities are now looking at "Islamic banking" with less scorn than they did ten years ago. See *The Economist*, 4-10 April 1992, 49.

<sup>27</sup>In French, the concept "Imaginary Social" captures much of relevance to this issue. See Gilbert Durand, *Les Structures Anthropologiques de l'Imaginaire*, 10th ed. (Paris: Dunod, 1984).

to new challenges and generating the capacity to respond to new challenges and create new opportunities. This integrated and integrating framework is a healthy one in which artists and the intelligentsia can probe nature, society, and the inner self—opening windows and holding up mirrors for each of us, to help us expand the boundaries that limit our scope and define the wise constraints that make us free.

I submit that in the Muslim world today, most change is coming from the level of social praxis. A significant part of it is entering the perceptual domain of practical ethics via the mass media, which have in this age of global communications expanded primarily the influence of the seductive and effective mass culture of "the West" generally and of the United States specifically.<sup>28</sup> There is little, if any, integration being done at the intellectual level—hence the power of the rejectionist argument advanced by Muslim fundamentalist movements. Their framework is certainly *integrated*, but it is not *integrating*. Due to the weakness of its intellectual foundations, it fears modifying old solutions or designing novel ones in order to hold onto the old framework's coherence and logical integration.

The reformist or innovative current's relative weakness within the broad mainstream of Muslim thinking attests to the inadequacy of the volume and scope of the intellectual output produced thus far by the few active intellectuals among the reformers, although some of it is very, very good. It also attests to the despair of many would-be reformers who have opted for the easy (but in my judgment inadequate) option of equating "modernization" with "westernization."<sup>29</sup>

## The Task for the Intelligentsia

My premise is that serious intellectual work is needed if Muslims are to regain the feeling of being at ease with themselves that an integrated and integrating cultural framework provides. Furthermore, this work must clarify the overlap but (noncoincidence) of their national and ethnic identities (especially for Arabs) with their Muslim identities. Such work cannot be done without providing a *space of freedom* in which the intelligentsia can work to redefine the meaning and content of cultural authenticity in a rapidly changing world in which isolationism or "delinking" is no longer a viable option. The intelligentsia, *both artists and intellectuals*,

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<sup>28</sup>Edgar Morin, *L'Esprit du Temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1962).

<sup>29</sup>This issue touches all developing societies. See, among others, Alvin Y. So, *Social Change and Development: Modernization, Dependency, and World-System Theories* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990).

have a major responsibility, for they are the ones who fashion the *mirrors* in which we see ourselves and the *windows* through which we see the world. Through their work, the boundaries defining our identities are being reshaped. Unfortunately, however, it is my opinion that the Muslim intelligentsia of today is poorly equipped to handle such a task.

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

*First:* Intellectuals develop a more systematic methodological basis for the appreciation of such key concepts as community, culture, Islam, society, identity, myth, imagination, and creativity. This is not just an intellectual's request for esoteric discourse and hair-splitting definitions: it is rather an essential task that must be accomplished to construct a more sophisticated edifice for the theory and practice of intellectual criticism and art criticism in the Muslim world of today. Without clearly understood and agreed concepts, terminology, and methodology, the interdisciplinary discourse on these vital topics is bound to remain loose, unstructured, and, possibly, unconstructive.

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

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

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

Muslim intellectuals and artists must learn to decipher correctly the past and the present. Today's high technology and their societies' socioeconomic reality must be integral parts of their present consciousness, and a proper understanding of their cultural past must be an integral part of their sense of self and society. They must dare to think the unthinkable

and to go "where others fear to tread" so that they will not fall prey to the prevalent mode of degraded thinking that has manipulated Muslim cultural symbols into debased ideologically charged signals that supplant critical appreciation with populist slogans. This is a tall order, but it provides the springboard for the tasks ahead.

Two contemporary ideas pose a profound challenge to contemporary Muslim thinkers: democracy and the role of women, both of which derive their roots from the fundamental concept of human rights. Both of these issues are indivisible parts of the broader issue of human rights. Before proceeding, however, it is essential to reaffirm that although the following discussion will be limited largely to the intellectual domain of theoretical ethics, it must be rooted in the social context in which societies perceive the practical ethics and in which social values (which govern individual behavior) are forged.<sup>30</sup> Limitations of space make it impossible to pursue this essential analysis of social context, which, incidentally, includes the historical legacy of the particular societies concerned. History matters.<sup>31</sup>

## On Method

Let me outline my personal position.<sup>32</sup> I believe that this synthesis of critical method and in-depth historical, cultural, and socioeconomic knowledge of a society is necessary to make progress in dealing with the challenges of contemporary Muslim societies. My line of argument is two-fold. The first is based on the application of strictly Islamic *uṣūlī* principles,<sup>33</sup> arguing within the framework of the rules established and recognized by Muslim scholarship, relying on the Qur'an,<sup>34</sup> the Sunnah<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>See George Gaskell, "Collective Behavior in a Societal Context," in *Societal Psychology*, ed. Hilde T. Himmelweit and George Gaskell (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), 252-72.

<sup>31</sup>See, among others, Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

<sup>32</sup>See Ismail Serageldin, "The Justly Balanced Society: One Muslim's View" in David Beckmann et al., *Friday Morning Reflections at the World Bank: Essays in Values and Development* (Washington, DC: Seven Locks Press, 1991), 55-73.

<sup>33</sup>See Muḥammad Abū Zahrā', *Uṣūl al Fiqh* (Cairo: Dār al Fikr al 'Arabī, 1958).

<sup>34</sup>There are several levels at which the Qur'anic text can be read. This issue has concerned theologians, philosophers, and mystics for centuries, including most recently the work of such eminent scholars as Mohammed Arkoun, who seeks to subject the text to a semiotic analysis. This search for understanding is enjoined by God: "[Why] Do they not seek to Ponder [understanding the meaning of] the Qur'an?" (Qur'an 47:24 and 4:82).

(especially the *hadith*<sup>36</sup>), *ijmā'* (unanimity of learned opinion), and *qiyās* (analogy). The second is a conventional analysis in the western academic mode. Not surprisingly, both arguments can reach compatible conclusions. This belief is grounded in the following assumptions. *First*, if the goals of the Islamic *uṣūlī* argument and of western analytical reasoning are equity and justice in social interaction, there is no a priori reason to expect different conclusions in addressing the same objective conditions and problems. *Second*, if we accept that a recommended course of action must be compatible with the aim of being adapted to and adoptable by a given society (i.e., the action must take the society's realities into account), there is no a priori reason to expect different recommendations to emerge.

Although there is enough space for only the sketchiest of presentations, it should be enough to mark out the terrain of inquiry that needs to be filled in so that specific recommendations can be formulated. Such recommendations are beyond the scope of this essay, even though the analysis of the social context is absolutely essential if meaning is to be given to these otherwise abstract arguments.

My claim that there are no a priori reasons to expect contradictions is based upon a specific reading of Islamic doctrine. The oft-quoted credo of Muslim activists that "Islam is for all times and all places" applies to Islam's beliefs (*'aqā'id*)<sup>37</sup> and core values and does not freeze specific rulings on social organization (*mu'āmalāt*) into eternal truths. Thus:

1. The Prophet, before sending Mu'ādh ibn Jabal to Yemen,<sup>38</sup> asked him to use his judgment when ruling on issues for which he could not find direct instruction in either the Qur'an or the Sunnah.

<sup>35</sup>The Sunnah refers technically to the way the Prophet showed for all Muslims to follow to live as Muslims. More generally, it means the Prophet's words and deeds. See Ahmad Hāshim, *Al Sunnah al Nabawiyah wa 'Ulūmihā* (Cairo: Gharīb Library, 1989).

<sup>36</sup>The *hadith* are an essential source of Qur'anic exegesis and religious and legal doctrine. Their collection and classification has been controversial, for they were not recorded during or immediately after the Prophet's lifetime. The primary collection is al Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Other important ones are Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, al Tirmidhī's *Jāmi'*, Abū Dāwud's *Sunan*, and Nisā'ī's *Al Muḥtabah*. See Mansūr Nasīf, *Al Tāj al Jāmi' li al Uṣūl fī Aḥādīth al Rasūl* (Cairo: Dār al Fikr, 1975). For an introduction to the subject, see Subḥī al Ṣāliḥ *'Ulūm al Ḥadīth wa Mustalahātihā* (Beirut: Dār al 'Ilm li al Malayīn, 1978).

<sup>37</sup>See Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *Al Islām: 'Aqīdah wa Shari'ah* (Cairo: Dār al Shurūq, 1980), 7-69.

<sup>38</sup>Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muḥammad*, 485. The incident is particularly relevant, for it occurred shortly before the Prophet's death and when the revelation was complete. Details are given in Khālīd M. Khālīd, *Rijāl ḥawāl al Rasūl*, 2d ed. (Beirut: Dār al Kitāb al 'Arabī, 1973), 172-73 (with the biography of the emissary Mu'ādh ibn Jabal given at 172-81).

2. 'Umar ibn al Khaṭṭāb changed rulings made by the Prophet and Abū Bakr concerning those [recently] reconciled to Islam.<sup>39</sup> He denied them *ṣadaqah* (alms) from the treasury, even though they were entitled to it by the Qur'an (9:60) and the practice of the Prophet and Abū Bakr. His rationale was that this practice was meant for non-Muslims who had not been allies of the Quraysh or Muslim sympathizers who were being persecuted. Treasury funds were used to keep them from joining the Quraysh or to compensate them for their ordeals. 'Umar ruled that this made sense when Muslims were embattled and persecuted. Now that they were the rulers, he said: "Let those who fear persecution come live under our protection, and let those who would wage war do so."<sup>40</sup> He saw that things had changed—and only six years after the death of the Prophet.
  
3. Imām al Shāfi'ī, the founder of the science of *uṣūl al fiqh* (the principles of jurisprudence), changed his rulings between his stay in Iraq and his stay in Egypt, citing social differences as justification.<sup>41</sup> Surely there is far more difference between the variegated societies in which Muslims find themselves today, over a thousand years later!

This permissiveness finds its juridical expression in the legal principle of "that which is not expressly forbidden is allowed" (*al aṣl fī al umūr al ibāḥah*).<sup>42</sup> This contrasts with the fundamentalist view that tends to see in everything new that which would lead Muslims astray (*bid'ah*). To determine what is appropriate, we can refer to the well-established rule that the public interest is dominant when enacting laws and regulations. Who can argue that contact with a rapidly changing and evolving world is not in our interest? Surely the experience of societies that have tried to "de-link" from the world community (such as Albania) are an important testimonial to the folly of this approach, which leads only to ever-increasing

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<sup>39</sup>These were defined by Yusuf Ali as: "men who have been weaned from hostility to Truth, who would probably be persecuted by their former associates, and require assistance until they establish new connections in their new environment." Yusuf Ali, [*The Meaning of*] *The Glorious Qur'an*, 458, n. 1320.

<sup>40</sup>Muḥammad Haykal, *Al Fārūq 'Umar*, vol. 2, 4th ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al Nahḍah al Miṣriyah, 1965), 273-303, especially 282-83.

<sup>41</sup>Muḥammad Abū Zahra', *Al Shāfi'ī* (Cairo: Dār al Fikr al 'Arabī, 1978), 158-61.

<sup>42</sup>"He hath explained to you in detail what is forbidden to you" (Qur'an 6:119). See 'Abd al Wahhāb Khallāf, *Ilm Uṣūl al Fiqh*, especially 115-16, and Yūsuf al Qaradāwī, *Al Ḥalāl wa al Ḥarām fī al Islām* (Cairo: Wahbah, 1980), especially 18-21.

relative backwardness and lower levels of well-being. This insistence on the intercourse among cultures, the promotion of trade, and the incorporation of the new does not rule out selectivity and choice. Japan showed that it could modernize without necessarily becoming westernized.

## Human Rights

The starting point is human rights: the body of "rights"<sup>43</sup> that is now accepted by most people and nations and whose fundamental statement remains the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights,<sup>44</sup> which has been codified in several international legal agreements.<sup>45</sup> Additional declarations and instruments expand on the rights specified in the original declaration or create vehicles for implementation.<sup>46</sup> Their relevance to international institutions as well as to governments has been the subject of scholarly study.<sup>47</sup>

Despite their universal acceptance, the concept of "rights" continues to be debated in terms of philosophy<sup>48</sup> as well as international law.<sup>49</sup> It is

<sup>43</sup>See J. Roland Pennock, "Rights, Natural Rights, and Human Rights—A General View," in *Human Rights: Nomos XXIII*, ed. J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (New York: New York University, 1981), 1-28.

<sup>44</sup>The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted and proclaimed by the UN General Assembly Resolution 217 (III) on 10 December 1948.

<sup>45</sup>Especially *The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by General Assembly Resolution 2200 A (XI) of December 16, 1966, 21 UN GAO Supp. (No. 16), at 49, UN Doc. A/6316 (1967). This covenant entered into force on 3 January 1976; and *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by General Assembly Resolution 2200 A (XI) of 16 December 1966, as above, at 52. This covenant entered into force on 23 March 1976. Cited in Ibrahim Shihata, "The World Bank and Human Rights: An Analysis of the Legal Issues and the Record of (cont.) Achievements" (Mimeograph, World Bank, Washington, DC, 1991, with data updated to January 1991) (Essay based on a paper presented to the International Third World Legal Studies Association Panel on the World Bank, Development Projects and Human Rights, at Miami, Florida, January 8, 1988). An edited version was published in *Denver Journal of International Law and Politics* 17, no. 1 (1988).

<sup>46</sup>United Nations Secretariat, Division of Human Rights, *Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments* (New York, United Nations, 1978).

<sup>47</sup>These documents' importance and relevance to such institutions as The World Bank were the subject of a study by the Bank's Vice President and Legal Counsel. See Ibrahim Shihata, "The World Bank and Human Rights."

<sup>48</sup>See John Charvet, "A Critique of Human Rights," in *Human Rights: Nomos XXIII*, 31-51, and Frithjof Bergmann, "Two Critiques of the Traditional Theory of Human Rights," *ibid.*, 119-47.

increasingly suggested that these rights are so clearly representative of a universal consensus that they should be an acceptable yardstick by which government behavior can be judged and could be invoked to overrule the sovereignty of nation states, as was done in the case of South Africa.<sup>50</sup>

Is there a conflict between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Muslim view of society and the individual? I do not see any.<sup>51</sup> The main concern among Muslim intellectuals is whether a Muslim is allowed to acquiesce to the authority of a man-made document. The question, to my mind, is: are there contradictions between this declaration and Islamic doctrine? If not, then surely there can be no problem in adhering to it as a global general compact.

Thus we should start from the view that there is no contradiction between Islamic theoretical ethics and the above-mentioned declaration. Rather than investing inordinate efforts in recasting it into an "Islamic Declaration" or seeking to derive a separate statement (as some scholars have done),<sup>52</sup> we should adopt it as a universally acceptable statement of consensus that does not contradict any fundamental Islamic belief.

## On Democracy

This leads to the question of democracy, which many maintain is the only way of guaranteeing human rights. But there are many Muslims who view it with suspicion as a western import of dubious value and possibly the harbinger of permissiveness and promiscuity.

Democracy, however defined, is most widely practiced in the rich industrialized societies of the OECD. Yet it would be wrong to consider it exclusively western, for in its link to human rights it speaks to values of

<sup>49</sup>See, among others, Alan Gewirth, "The Basis and Content of Human Rights," *ibid.*, 119-47, and Richard B. Friedman, "The Basis of Human Rights: A Criticism of Gewirth's Theory," *ibid.*, 148-57.

<sup>50</sup>See Ismail Serageldin, "Sovereignty, Governance, and the Role of International Institutions" (Unpublished manuscript, World Bank, Washington, DC, 21 February 1991). More generally on the international aspects of human rights, see Louis Henkin, "The Universality of the Concept of Human Rights," in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science: Human Rights Around the World*, ed. Marvin E. Wolfgang (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 10-16.

<sup>51</sup>See Ismail Serageldin, "The Justly-Balanced Society," 55-73.

<sup>52</sup>On this theme of basic human rights in Islam, see, among others, 'Alī 'Abd al Wahīd Wāfī, *Huqūq al Insān fī al Islām* (Cairo: Dār al Nahḍah, 1979), and Muḥammad Fathī 'Uthmān, *Taqrīr Huqūq al Insān bayna al Shari'ah al Islāmīyah wa al Fikr al Qānūnī al Gharbī* (Riyadh: Imam Mohamed Ibn Saud Islamic University, 1978).

universal appeal.<sup>53</sup> Even though it is the result of a long institutional evolution in western societies, it has only recently become associated directly with the concept of human rights. In other words, democracy was understood traditionally as a structure of institutions, procedures, and laws designed to protect citizens of a particular state from arbitrary governmental power and to give them chance to participate in the formulation of decisions that affect them. "No taxation without representation!"

But participation by whom? The idea of universal suffrage is recent. Indeed, the attributes of citizenship in a democratic society were considered to be largely privileges acquired by membership in that society, as opposed to rights extended to the entire human race. This is demonstrated clearly by the behavior of various western "democracies" over the past two hundred years vis-à-vis other peoples as well as their own women, youths, and those males without property and/or education. Democracy, in the modern sense, is thus a product of two hundred years of western social evolution with special contributions from the French enlightenment and Anglo-Saxon (British) constitutionalism and liberalism.

Today, whatever one thinks of the West's history (i.e., slavery, colonialism, and lingering racism and sexism), it is clear that western democratic institutions do more than any others to provide guarantees for the respect of individual human rights within those societies. But when we discuss applying democratic concepts to nonwestern societies—in this case Muslim societies generally, of the Middle East specifically—it is mistaken to believe that the resulting western democratic institutions can be transferred and implemented anywhere without modification. Nor is it useful to reject them as "western," as some extremists do. We must look at the substance of the democratic process and its institutions, not just the form.

Here it becomes useful to go back to the fundamental thesis of human rights. As expressed in the above-mentioned declaration, which has been codified by several legal instruments and declarations,<sup>54</sup> "human rights" implies a set of universal values. Within the theoretical ethics of Islam, there is much fertile ground upon which contemporary Muslim constructs responding to this universal obligation can be built. This is not the same as saying that the particular institutional forms seen as the "social praxis" of particular western countries (i.e., fairly specific multiparty structures

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<sup>53</sup>See Louis Henkin, "The Universality of the Concept of Human Rights," 10-16. However, human rights also have a moral dimension. See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Human Rights and the Church: Historical and Theological Reflections* (Vatican City, 1990).

<sup>54</sup>Centre for Human Rights in Geneva, *A Compilation of International Instruments* (New York: United Nations, 1988).

and rather special electoral politics) are the only way by which the democratic ideal of respect for human rights can be provided. They may well be, but this cannot be taken as an a priori assertion.

I base this claim on the existence of substantial differences in the experiences of the industrialized countries. The American, British, French, Swiss, and German systems are structurally different in terms of elections, decision making, separation of powers, and other constitutional and legal aspects of applying the democratic idea. But they are all fundamentally democratic. This shows that there is significant room for design innovation in contemporary structures and institutions while maintaining the real "core" of democratic practice and its respect of human rights. This core has been identified and discussed brilliantly by Robert Dahl.<sup>55</sup>

What, then, constitutes democratic government today? What should Muslim societies in the Middle East and elsewhere do to promote "good governance" and "democracy"? Would that be an "Islamic government"?<sup>56</sup>

First, we must recognize that "democracy" and "governance" are not the same.<sup>57</sup> "Democracy" connotes a representative form of government with participatory decision making, accountability, and guarantees of human and civil rights without whose exercise its political system could not function. It does not connote "good government," efficiency, or lack of corruption, except to the extent that being able to "vote the rascals out" is a rectifier of governmental ineptitude or malice. Democracy stresses universal suffrage and periodic elections. It can be argued that it deals primarily with the "form," not the "substance," of governing, although advocates are quick to say that no other "form" delivered the substance successfully and that, in this case, "function follows form."

"Governance," on the other hand, does not presuppose a particular form of government but rather connotes "good government," in the sense

<sup>55</sup>Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>56</sup>"Democracy" and "Islamic government" have been tackled by many contemporary scholars: 'Alī 'Abd al Rāziq, *Al Islām wa Uṣūl al Ḥukm* (Beirut: 1966); Muḥammad Ḥaykal, *Al Ḥukūmah al Islāmīyah* (Cairo: Dār al Ma'ārif, 1977); Muḥammad al Race, *Al Naẓarīyāt al Siyāsīyah al Islāmīyah* (Cairo: Dār al Ma'ārif, 1966-67), Muḥammad al 'A, *Fī al Nẓām al Siyāsī li al Dawlah al Islāmīyah* (Cairo: Dār al Shurūq, 1989), Khālid Muḥammad Khālid, *Al Dawlah fī al Islām* (Cairo: Dār al Thābit, 1981), Abū al A'lā al Mawdūdī, *Al Ḥukūmah al Islāmīyah*, trans. Ahmad Idris (Cairo: al Mukhtār al Islāmī, 1980), and Ruhallah al Khomeini, *Al Ḥukūmah al Islāmīyah*, paper presented in Arabic by Ḥasan Ḥanafī, Cairo, September 1979.

<sup>57</sup>The following paragraphs are taken from Ismail Serageldin, "Governance, Democracy, and the World Bank in Africa" (Unpublished manuscript, World Bank, Washington, DC, 20 September 1990).

of greater efficiency and rationality in resource allocation, an enabling environment, and a lack of corruption. It emphasizes transparency, accountability, participation, the rule of law, and, implicitly, guarantees the civil and human rights needed for effective participation. Many of us consider these to be the "substance" as opposed to the "form" implied in discussions of "democracy."

Both of these general "journalistic" descriptions fall short due to a lack of clarity on such key areas as the nature of the relationship between state and society and its constellation of interlinked concepts and issues of agency, instrumentality, legitimacy, power, and authority.<sup>58</sup> Given the conceptual complexity noted above, the only viable practical approach is to try to identify and foster those aspects of governance that seem least controversial.<sup>59</sup> Even though there are many different views as to what constitutes good governance, some of which are ethnocentric or culturally determined, we can specify a minimal core of characteristics that, if not universally accepted, are nonetheless widely agreed upon. In large measure these derive from, or are related to, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has been signed and thus accepted, at least nominally, by most countries as representing the moral consensus of the international community of nations. This core includes the following:

1. Rulers and government officials are held accountable through clearly formulated and transparent processes. More particularly, governmental legitimacy is established regularly by such well-defined and open process of public choice as elections and referenda (Article 21).
2. The safety and security of citizens is assured (Articles 3 and 5) and the rule of law prevails, so that contracts among private operators (individuals or enterprises) and between a private operator and the state can be enforced fairly. The law should protect citizens from arbitrary or capricious governmental acts (Articles 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 28).
3. Public agencies are responsive to the needs of the public, and social and economic development is promoted equitably for the benefit of all citizens (Articles 22, 23, 24, and 25).

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<sup>58</sup>See C. S. Whitaker and G. Bergen, "Doctrines of Development and Precepts of the State: The World Bank and the Fifth Iteration of the African Case." Paper presented at the World Bank Seminar on African Governance, May 1990).

<sup>59</sup>The following paragraphs are taken from Ismail Serageldin and Pierre Landell-Mills, "Governance and the External Factor," in *Proceedings of The World Bank Conference on Development Economics* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1992), 303-20.

4. Information is readily available to permit accountability to be practiced, laws to be correctly applied, markets to function, and people to be creative and innovative (Article 19).
5. Citizens are guaranteed freedom of association and expression of opinions (Articles 19 and 20).

These principles provide an excellent template against which to assess the proposed actions of governments as well as the institutional arrangements being advanced. They provide the real yardstick by which the governmental constructs of contemporary Muslims can be judged if democracy is indeed to flourish in the Muslim world.<sup>60</sup> But democracy is more than the form and substance of government, for it involves societal relations at every level. There can be no true democracy or respect for human rights if the rights of women and youth are flouted in the home and in the streets. Authoritarian behavior, like freedom, is indivisible. It is essential that this broader view of democracy and human rights find its manifestations in all aspects of contemporary life, including, most specifically, in the role of women in society.

## The Role of Women

The status of women in Muslim societies remains controversial.<sup>61</sup> Some Muslims argue that women were much worse off in pre-Islamic society, especially in Arabia, and that Islam improved their condition considerably.<sup>62</sup> Although this is probably accurate, it is irrelevant to modern problems. Others argue that Islamic jurisprudence is fundamentally inimical to women and must be discarded. All this does is give a new version of an old argument used with special force in the time of empire to justify colonialism.

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<sup>60</sup>Most critical is how a "Muslim democracy" will deal with non-Muslim citizens. A satisfactory way has not been found. See Fahmī Huwaydī, *Muwāṭinūn lā Dhimmīyūn* (Cairo: Dār al Shurūq, 1990), 252-63, and Muḥammad 'Ammārah, *Al Islām wa al Waḥdah al Qawmīyah* (Beirut: 1979). For a pithy discussion of this and other relevant topics, see A. K. Abū al Majd, *Hiwār lā Muwājahah* (Kuwait: Kitāb al 'Arabī, 1985), 109-22.

<sup>61</sup>See Muḥammad al Ghazālī, *Qaḍāyah al Mar'ah bayna al Taqālīd al Rākidah wa al Wāfīdah* (Cairo: Dār al Shurūq, 1990). For an academic overview, see Lois Beck and Nikki Keddi, eds., *Women in the Muslim World* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978).

<sup>62</sup>See Ma'rūf al Dawālibiy, *Waḍ' al Mar'ah fī al Islām* (Beirut: Dār al Kitāb al Lub-nānī, 1981) and Muḥammad Abū Zahrā', *Tanzīm al Islām li al Mujtama'* (Cairo: Dār al Fikr al 'Arabī, 1975), 5-14.

Both positions must be set aside in favor of a more balanced reading of doctrine and history and of present social conditions and needs. With respect to doctrine, I adhere to what some recent observers<sup>63</sup> call the reformist or modernist view that would apply fundamental human rights and equality before God to gender-specific treatment. The most forceful statement of equality before God comes from the Qur'an (33:35):

For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in God's praise, for them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward.

From this starting point, and using the adoption of fundamental human rights as a foundation, an argument can be made for a contemporary reading of the status of women that transcends most current Islamic jurisprudence, certainly in the area of personal status law. This is in line with "modernist jurisprudence."<sup>64</sup> There is a body of opinion that would define women's special role from the premise of fundamental human rights and equality inherent in the Islamic belief of humanity's liberation. Using a derivative approach, it would seek amendments to those rights instead of starting from an a priori position on women's status and role.<sup>65</sup>

Such views, though modernist in tone, are not revolutionary in their outcomes.<sup>66</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, Muḥammad 'Abduh

<sup>63</sup>Donna Lee Brown, "Islamic Law and the Position of Women" (Mimeograph, World Bank, Washington, D.C., March 14, 1992).

<sup>64</sup>See Justin Leites, "Modernist Jurisprudence as a Vehicle for Gender Role Reform in the Islamic World," *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 251-330, especially 323-30 (on Fazlur Rahman and his work).

<sup>65</sup>See Ismail Serageldin, "Comments," in Center for Arab Unity Studies, *Islam and Arab Nationalism*, Arabic ed. (Beirut: 1981), 605-10. For a writer who takes the same derivative approach from universal human rights to the specificities of women's issues, but arrives at diametrically opposed conclusions, see Wāfī, *Huqūq al Insān fī al Islām*.

<sup>66</sup>The following section is drawn largely from Afaf Mahfouz and Ismail Serageldin, "Women and Space in Muslim Societies," in *Expressions of Islam in Buildings* (Proceedings of an International Seminar sponsored by The Aga Khan Award for Architecture and The Indonesian Institute of Architects, Jakarta and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, October 15-19, 1990) (Geneva: The Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 1991), 78-96.

stated that an Islamic state could limit polygamy.<sup>67</sup> What makes this ruling important is that it was not given under pressure from a state seeking to move in that direction: it was a volunteered position opposed to prevailing official opinion. It was not an *ex post facto* rationalization of a societal condition, but a thoughtful reading of text and precedent and a realistic understanding of a changing society.

Even in civic and political leadership, where Muslim women are considered most marginalized, there is little that is inherently Islamic in the barriers they face.<sup>68</sup> Several exceptional have women ruled Muslim states: Sulṭānah Radia in Delhi (1236 CE) and Shajarat al Durr in Cairo (1250 CE). Four Indonesian women ruled their lands during the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>69</sup> More recently, in Pakistan Benazir Bhutto became the first elected woman prime minister of a Muslim country, and the last election in Bangladesh was fought by two women. Muslim women have shared in national struggles, occasionally bearing arms (from documented cases in Iran at the beginning of the century to Libyan women now serving in the Libyan army), but more often participating in organized political activity against colonialism and occupation forces. Many professional women are making major contributions<sup>70</sup> in Muslim countries today,<sup>71</sup> *but that is still far short of the role they could play in the Muslim world's development if they could achieve their full potential.*

Why is there such widespread discrimination against women in Muslim countries today?<sup>72</sup> A partial answer is that interpreters of the Shari'ah

<sup>67</sup>See the full text of this legal opinion in 'Ammārah, *Al A'māl al Kāmilah*, vol. 2, 90-95. While much has been written on polygamy in Islam, pre-Islamic Arabia included many other marital practices that were prohibited by Islam. See, among others, Al Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh al Sunnah*, vol. 2, 3d. ed. (Beirut: Dār al Kitāb al 'Arabī, 1977), 8-9.

<sup>68</sup>For a comprehensive review of the Qur'an and the hadith literature on the role of women, see 'Abd al Ḥalīm Abū Shuqqā, *Tahrīr al Mar'ah fī 'Aṣr al Risālah*, 6 vols. (Kuwait: Dār al Qalam, 1990), especially vols. 2 and 3.

<sup>69</sup>See Fatima Mernissi, *Sultanes oubliées: Femmes chefs d'Etat en Islam* (Casablanca: Editions Le Fenec, 1990).

<sup>70</sup>These women are usually expected to, and usually manage to, maintain their traditional roles of wife and mother as well as their professional careers. See Earl L. Sullivan, *Women in Egyptian Public Life* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1987), 14.

<sup>71</sup>Norma Salem, "Islam and the Legal Status of Women in Tunisia," in *Muslim Women*, ed. Freda Hussain (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 141-68.

<sup>72</sup>This is *not* unique to Muslims. See Mino Vianello et al., *Gender Inequality: A Comparative Study of Discrimination and Participation* (London: Sage, 1990) and Janet S. Chafetz, *Gender Equity: An Integrated Theory of Stability and Change* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1990). For relevant methodological issues, see Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., *Understanding Social Inequality: Modeling Allocation Processes* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1991).

have, for the last fourteen centuries, largely sought to retain the status quo of early Islam or to return to it as an important plank of a political platform. However, those who advocated the return to the status quo of seventh-century Arabian society as regards women (in fact, often advocating even more restrictions) also argued that slavery, which existed in seventh-century Arabia, was integral to the Islamic ethic. And this despite the many excellent treatises showing Islam's "evolutionary" legislation against slavery and indicating, in many early rulings, where Muslim society should go: limiting its scope, expanding their rights, and creating more incentives for liberating slaves.<sup>73</sup> This same reasoning can and should be used to reinterpret the pre-Islam/post-Islam improvement in women's status as the direction in which society should move, instead of seeing it as a once-and-for-all-time shift in status.

More important is the review of current social structures and mechanisms by which the myths and images of Muslim women are reinforced by artists, intellectuals, and popular discourse. Two authors have made major contributions here: Leila Ahmad, who has provided an excellent social and historical contextual view,<sup>74</sup> and Fedwa Malti-Douglas, who has provided an insightful exploration of the role of women in Arabo-Islamic discourse.<sup>75</sup> This is another example of how the intelligentsia—artists and intellectuals—fashion the mirrors in which we see ourselves and the windows through which we view the world. This aspect of cultural outputs, insofar as it helps to perpetuates women's present unsatisfactory status, needs to be subjected to careful critical analysis.<sup>76</sup> We will address this later. For the moment, we note that Muslim society's view of women and Muslim women's view of themselves are not particularly empowering.

Should this view be changed? Of course. Arguing from the interest of Muslim society as a whole, there is great benefit to be derived by im-

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<sup>73</sup>See 'Alī Wāfī, *Al Hurīyah fī al Islām* (Cairo: Dār al Ma'ārif, 1979).

<sup>74</sup>Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>75</sup>Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Mind: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>76</sup>This entails close study of specific contextual situations. See, among others, Sawzan El-Messiri, "Self-Images of Traditional Urban Women in Cairo," in *Women in the Muslim World*, ed. Lois Beck and Nikki Keddi, 1978, 522-40, and Soraya Al-Turki, *Women in Saudi Arabia: Ideology and Behavior among the Elite* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 152.

proving their status. Ample evidence shows that poverty is gender-biased<sup>77</sup> and that women bear inordinate burdens in periods of economic hardship.<sup>78</sup> It is equally demonstrable that significant improvements in social indicators can be achieved by improving female education,<sup>79</sup> by increasing their assets, and by increasing the returns to their assets.<sup>80</sup> That it is doable has been dramatically demonstrated by the brilliant success of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh.<sup>81</sup>

From the reading of doctrine I espoused earlier, it becomes the duty of those serving the public interest to actively promote improving the status of women, whose marginalization contributes significantly to perpetuating the poverty and misery of *the whole society*.<sup>82</sup> Their empowerment should be at the top of the reformist agenda of Muslims. This is not a call to adopt strident western feminism or its more sedate manifestations,<sup>83</sup> but a call to act in accordance with Muslim precepts of the public good and to promote the spirit of the fundamental equality—or equity—argued in the best of the Islamic tradition. Such actions are the true test of whether democracy and human rights in the fullest sense of those terms takes root in the Muslim world generally and the Middle East specifically.

<sup>77</sup>See, among others, Paul Collier, *Women in Development: Defining the Issues*, Working Paper Series No. 129 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1988), and World Bank, *World Development Report 1990: Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>78</sup>See Commonwealth Secretariat, ed., *Engendering Adjustment for the 1990s: A Report of a Commonwealth Expert Group on Women and Structural Adjustment* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat Publications, 1989), and Paul Collier, *Women and Structural Adjustment* (Mimeograph, Oxford University, Oxford, February 1989).

<sup>79</sup>Lawrence H. Summers, "Investing in All the People," Policy Research Working Paper WPS 905 (World Bank, Washington, DC, May 1992).

<sup>80</sup>See *Bangladesh: Strategies for Enhancing the Role of Women in Economic Development*, World Bank Country Study (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1990), *Women in Pakistan: An Economic and Social Strategy*, World Bank Country Study (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1989), and Leela Dube and Rajni Palriwala, eds., *Structures and Strategies: Women, Work and Family* (New Delhi: Sage, 1990).

<sup>81</sup>For a detailed review of the Grameen Bank experience, see Mahabub Hossain, *Credit for Alleviation of Rural Poverty: The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh*, Research Report no. 65 (Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute; Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, 1988), and Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Bank Credit for Rural Women: Report on Study Tour of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh* (Thailand: United Nations, 1985).

<sup>82</sup>See, among others, Price J. Gittinger et al., *Household Food Security and Role of Women* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1990), and Paul T. Schultz, *Women's Changing Participation in the Labor Force* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1989).

<sup>83</sup>Janet K. Boles, "American Feminism: New Issues for a Mature Movement," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. 515 (May 1991).

## Criticism of Cultural Output

But what of the mirrors and windows that the artists and intellectuals are constructing right now? Will they provide the means and the symbols of this liberating and empowering future, or will they perpetuate the myths and images of the past? To address these questions we must again advocate the creation of a *space of freedom* for expression and debate and sharpen our critical analysis of art and intellectual output to focus on cultural expressions from the perspective of gender-sensitive criticism.<sup>84</sup>

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

Again, this is not a call for Muslim scholars to adopt the ideological constructs or the positions of western feminism generally<sup>85</sup> nor of western feminist art criticism specifically.<sup>86</sup> Rather, it is an appeal to broaden our own intellectual criticism and art criticism, which has already made its own contribution in recognizing the profound problems of cultural continuity and authenticity as important elements that must be asserted in the

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<sup>84</sup>The rest of this part is taken from Mahfouz and Serageldin, "Women and Space in Muslim Societies," 89-91.

<sup>85</sup>On feminism generally, see Janet K. Boles, "American Feminism: New Issues for a Mature Movement," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. 515 (May 1991).

<sup>86</sup>For an excellent survey article of the subject, consult Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (September 1987): 326-57, especially 346-57. Showing that there are no monolithic views on the subject, that excellent survey article was poorly reviewed by Cassandra Langer, "Feminist Art History: Critique Critiqued," *Women Artist News* 12, nos. 5-6 (Fall/Winter 1987): 38. For a scholarly compendium of essays, see the anthology of American work given in Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, eds., *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982). For a review of significant recent works, see Ellen Handy, "Women, Art, Feminism," *Arts Magazine* (May 1989): 25-31. For a recent anthology, see Arlene Raven, Cassandra Langer, and Joanna Frueh, eds., *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*, Icon ed. (New York, Harper-Collins, 1991).

face of a "historical rupture" that has torn the cultural fabric of Muslim societies. It is now pertinent to expand our concerns and recognize the needs of women, as well as their unique contributions to building society, in a Muslim world in the throes of rapid change.

Such gender-sensitive criticism would have certain characteristics. The key is to transcend the mere recognition that female intellectuals and artists exist and give them due recognition, which hitherto has been lacking. In other words, it should not just be the same old criticism with women added. What is required is to go to the heart of present critical thinking in art (as well as other forms of cultural expression) and to "question the universal validity of those very myths and values and cultural assumptions that, in the past, have automatically excluded from the domain of Art the experiences of half of our population."<sup>87</sup> Or, as Carol Duncan pointed out, "The value of established art thinking and how it functions as ideology must be critically analysed, not promoted anew."<sup>88</sup>

In bringing to the fore the need to develop gender-sensitive criticism, we underline the need to analyze the modern tools of critical analysis, to deconstruct the discipline of criticism itself,<sup>89</sup> so as to rebuild it anew, informed, and enlightened by the process of critical deconstruction itself. To rebuild it with new insight that will not just be beneficial to establishing a place for women in Muslim art and society, not just to liberate their expressive and talented contributions as women, but to transcend feminism and, through this rethinking of criticism itself, contribute to liberating the evolving cultures of Muslim societies—to liberate them from insisting on defining themselves in negative terms of how they differ from the rejected western Other, to where they can define themselves in the positive terms of their own achievements and fulfillment.

## Concluding Remarks

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

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<sup>87</sup>Norma Broude, "Review of Germaine Greer's *Obstacle Race*, Munro's *Originals* and Loeb's *Feminist Collage*," *Art Journal*, no. 41 (1981): 182.

<sup>88</sup>Carol Duncan, "When Greatness Is a Box of Wheaties," *Art Forum* (October 1975): 64.

<sup>89</sup>For such a consistently radical position on methodology, albeit from a narrow western feminist perspective, refer to Griselda Pollock, "Women, Art, and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians," *Women's Art Journal* (Spring/Summer 1983): 42-44.

authenticity.<sup>90</sup> Few issues have affected contemporary Muslim societies as deeply as the sense of loss of identity<sup>91</sup> and the corollary search for cultural authenticity. These are seen by many as a return to the fountain-head of Islam in order to redefine Muslim culture in its essential terms, thereby purging it of the "extraneous elements" that history, western hegemony, and geographic realities have introduced.<sup>92</sup>

This essay rejects that approach as too narrow, overly romantic, and fundamentally nonhistorical. Instead, the proposed approach recognizes the need to understand thoroughly the past and to decode its language through contemporary eyes that can sift the relevant from the timebound. The arsenal of contemporary analysis must be brought to bear on the reality of Muslim history and of contemporary Muslim societies. We must deal with the historical rupture characterizing the evolution of Muslim cultural development<sup>93</sup> and, by better understanding it, transcend it.

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

We hope that the integrity of this approach will separate this search from the doomed attempts to escape a chaotic and unsettling present by a headlong flight into a romanticized past<sup>94</sup> or the equally shortsighted ap-

<sup>90</sup>See Ismail Serageldin, *Space for Freedom: The Search for Architectural Excellence in Muslim Societies* (Geneva: The Aga Khan Award for Architecture; London: Butterworth Architecture, 1989), 54-58.

<sup>91</sup>This manifests itself in many ways, some modernist and thoughtful. See, for example, Ḥusayn Aḥmad Amīn, *Al Islām fī 'Ālam Mutaghayyir* (Cairo: Madbūlī, 1988), and Muḥammad 'Ammārah, *Al Islām wa Qaḍāyah al 'Aṣr* (Beirut: Dār al Waḥdah, 1980). On the side of art and architecture, see Ismail Serageldin, "Architecture as Intellectual Statement: Modernism in the Muslim World," in *Criticism in Architecture* (Geneva: The Aga Khan Award for Architecture; Singapore: Concept Media, 1989), 16-30; and Ismail Serageldin, *Al Tajdīd wa al Ta'sīl fī 'Imārat al Muḥtam'āt al Islāmīyah: Dirāsah li Tajribat Jā'izat al Aghā Khān li al 'Imārah* (Geneva: The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1989).

<sup>92</sup>See Muḥammad al Ghazālī, *Mushkilāt fī Ṭarīq al Ḥayāt al Islāmīyah* (Cairo: Dār al Shurūq, 1983), especially 10-12.

<sup>93</sup>For a discussion of these issues, see Mohammed Arkoun, "Current Islam Faces Its Tradition," in Serageldin, *Space for Freedom*, 241-46.

<sup>94</sup>This romantic flight can lead to delinking from society and even violence. See 'Adil Hammūdah, *Al Hijrah ilā al 'Unf* (Cairo: Sinai, 1987). Contrast this with Abū al Majd, Hīwār lā Muwājahah, especially the two introductory statements at 5-22.

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

The pursuit of cultural continuity by maintaining the fragile links with a society's past requires special effort if it is to avoid falling into populist kitsch or ideological stereotyping. Critical scholarship is needed to understand the past's legacy, to decode the historical symbols, and to see them through contemporary eyes. This enhances both the understanding and the appreciation of the heritage and makes it more accessible to a modern public suffering from a rupture in its natural cultural evolution. This is essential if the transition from theoretical to practical ethics is not to be too distorting. Along with this deepening of understanding of self and society, the intelligentsia must make a major effort to expand the space of freedom within which discussion and debate can take place in order to broaden the awareness of the public, public officials, and decision makers. Sociologists, anthropologists, economists, philosophers, artists, writers, journalists, and politicians are all part of the contributing intelligentsia in this all-important task of maintaining this space of freedom within which artists and intellectuals can fashion the mirrors in which we see ourselves and the windows through which we perceive the world.<sup>95</sup> For it is by these contemporary mirrors and windows that we redefine the boundaries of the mind, and the future of the Muslim world is—even at this moment—being invented in the crucible of our minds.

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<sup>95</sup>The struggle to link identity and worldview is at the heart of the intellectual debate among Muslims of different persuasions. My personal view is set out in Serageldin, "The Justly Balanced Society." Others have articulated their views, ranging from the most liberal, such as Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd, *Ru'yah Islāmīyah* (Cairo: Dār al Shurūq, 1987), to the more conservative, such as Sayyid Quṭb, *Khasā'is al Tasawwur al Islāmī wa Muqawimātuhu*, 11th ed. (Cairo: Dār al Shurūq, 1989).