



Working Paper 30

Islam in the Civilizational Complex

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Abstract

This working paper examines Islam as a civilizational phenomenon from a perspective that rejects both essentialist reductions and Eurocentric or Orientalist views. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Arnold Toynbee, Norbert Elias, and especially Marshall Hodgson, it proposes understanding Islam as a dynamic civilizing process that integrates a normative dimension (*Islamic*) and an expressive one (*Islamized*). This duality makes it possible to articulate spiritual unity (based on faith in Allah, the Prophet, and the Qur'an) with the cultural, ethical, aesthetic, and political diversity of Muslim communities throughout history. The concept of *supra-culture* is introduced to explain how Islam transcends specific social configurations without annulling them. The text examines key moments of expansion and crisis such as the fragmentation of the caliphate, the Mongol invasion, and the rise of Sufism to show that the boundaries of the civilizing process are also opportunities for renewal. It also analyzes Islam's influence on the European Renaissance and the shaping of Western modernity, dismantling Eurocentric narratives. Finally, it discusses the notion of a *transcivilizational ecumene*, where the logic of difference and coherent contradiction helps explain phenomena such as Sufi shrines in India or the diversity of practices in Indonesia and Morocco. The article concludes that Islam is not an immutable essence but a rhizomatic network in constant resignification, whose vitality is evidenced by its global growth and adaptive capacity in the 21st century.

Resumen

Este texto aborda el estudio del islam como fenómeno civilizatorio desde una perspectiva que rechaza tanto los reduccionismos esencialistas como las visiones eurocéntricas y orientalistas. Partiendo del marco teórico de Arnold Toynbee, Norbert Elias y, fundamentalmente, Marshall Hodgson, se propone entender el islam como un proceso civilizatorio dinámico que integra una dimensión normativa (lo “islámico”) y otra expresiva (lo “islamizado”). Esta dualidad permite articular la unidad espiritual (basada en la fe en Allah, el Profeta y el Corán) con la diversidad cultural, ética, estética y política de las comunidades musulmanas a lo largo de la historia. Se introduce el concepto de “supracultura” para explicar cómo el islam trasciende las configuraciones sociales concretas sin anularlas. El texto examina momentos clave de expansión y crisis tales como la fragmentación del califato, la invasión mongola y el auge del sufismo para mostrar que los límites del proceso civilizatorio son también oportunidades de renovación. Asimismo, se analiza la influencia del islam en el Renacimiento europeo y en la configuración de la modernidad occidental, desmontando así, narrativas eurocéntricas. Finalmente, se discute la noción de “ecumene transcivilizatorio”, donde la lógica de la diferencia y la contradicción coherente permite explicar fenómenos como los santuarios sufíes en India o la diversidad de prácticas en Indonesia y Marruecos. El artículo concluye que el islam no es una esencia inmutable, sino una red rizomática en constante resignificación, cuya vitalidad demuestra su crecimiento global y su capacidad de adaptación en el siglo XXI.

Islam in the Civilizational Complex

Moisés Garduño García¹

Introduction

In the context of the study of civilizations, the prevailing knowledge is that their members' responses to challenges are indicative of their ability to survive and thrive. This framework has been proposed and revisited on multiple occasions by intellectuals such as Arnold Toynbee (1961) or Norbert Elias (1997). In this sense, Islam can be regarded as a historical, religious, and human phenomenon, capable of producing multiple cultural, philosophical, psychological, and epistemological manifestations. As such, it may be considered a grouping of cultures that share a common consciousness in order to fulfil their communal commitment to God. However, it is important to avoid the risk of limiting it to reductionist biases that essentialise its multiplicity, a tendency often observed in Eurocentric and Orientalist circles that are interested in imposing their own idea of what Islam is or is not (Said, 1978).

The objective of this paper is not, of course, to deny the existence of a normative Islam that has played a role in the civilizing process. On the contrary, we argue that such a normative Islam is indispensable, serving as the necessary boundary against which

¹ Este texto también se inserta en el marco de los trabajos del proyecto de investigación: “La reconfiguración política del Medio Oriente tras la crisis en Gaza”, PAPIIT IN300226, por DGAPA-UNAM, a quien se agradece el apoyo y la financiación.

the behaviour, emotions, ethics, practices, and devotion of its legal subjects are manifested. It can be further proposed that the normative and the overflowing represent two distinct yet interrelated expressions of the same socio-cultural facet of Islam. This facet may be treated as a coherent analytical unit, provided it remains connected to its spiritual-cosmic dimension. This idea is invoked by the element of faith, language, ethnicity, ideology, culture, or legal school through which believers express themselves and to which they belong.

A comprehensive understanding of the historical Muslim perspective on divine revelation is essential for elucidating the reasons behind the adoption of diverse ethical, aesthetic, philosophical, scientific, and theoretical values within Islam. This comprehensive framework has given rise to a multifaceted network of expressions that, despite their diversity, coalesce around a unified conception of existence and the connection with Allah. This intricate unity exists alongside, on the one hand, those who assert dominion, on the other, those who repudiate it as a historical entity within space-time. Thus enables the notion of Islam as a form of hybridization that absorbs and produces diverse cultures simultaneously; establishing a form of universality with which Muslims perceive themselves as the embodiment of an ideal. In this sense, as Gómez (2019) and Reda (2011) argue, Islam is *din wa hadara*, a system that engenders a uniform attitude towards God, human beings, and the world, which is ensured, paradoxically, through the diverse forms of organization that language, history, and the condition of the Muslim body permit. Consequently, Islam is both spiritual and earthly; divine and human; oxymoron and eloquence.

Is there such a thing as an Islamic civilization?

As a civilizing project, Islam encompassed some two billion followers in 2025, a result of the interplay of diverse spaces and temporalities (Hackett *et al.*, 2025). Among the faithful, it is widely held that Allah is God and that Muhammad is His prophet. The city of Mecca is commonly regarded as the birthplace of Islam and as the pre-eminent centre of pilgrimage. However, it should be noted that, over time, other significant pilgrimage centres have emerged in Iraq, Tunisia, Egypt, and Southeast Asia. Perhaps the most striking element of the Muslim faith is that Muhammad proved to be the chosen vessel for a message of pure monotheism, a message that would be reproduced through countless multitudes, encompassing rich and poor, Arabs and non-Arabs, men and women, across vast provinces that had long been Christian, Jewish, or Zoroastrian. In some cases, these populations continued to coexist sublimely with the rhetoric of the Qur'an as the foremost evidence of the divine message, without ceasing to be what they had been (Ruiz, 2002). Despite the existence of communities that recognise prophecy as being analogous to the concept of the imamate, the existence of such views is indicative of a form of trans-scriptural Muslim exegesis that transcends specific linguistic and cultural boundaries. This exegesis serves to authenticate certain Shia doctrines, yet it is important to note that these doctrines invariably commence with the recognition of Muhammad as a prophet.

Islamic civilization could be understood in the sense of the German term *supra culture* (*über kultur*). While close to the notion of civilization, originated by French thought, *supra culture* differs from it

by referring to something that goes far beyond the social configurations with which we interact (Grunebaum, 1986). In Islam, the concept of *supraculture* is theorised as a constitutive category that marks a moral position with Allah. This is analogous to an increasingly tall building, with each floor representing a different way of maintaining its standing, all with the objective of fulfilling the divine drive of life and death.

The civilizing process in Islam can be better understood by studying the terms *islamic* and *islamized*, which almost always occur and reproduce in an intertwined manner throughout history. However, when analysed separately, these terms can offer interesting insights into what is meant by Islam, in accordance with the words of the renowned American Islamologist Marshall G. Hodgson (1977). From this standpoint, the Islamic faith is associated with spirituality; encompassing notions of divine proximity; personal devotional practices; and the concept of *tawhid*, the oneness of God. This notion represents the most intimate dimension of Muslim spirituality and faith. In this sense, *tawhid* bears a striking resemblance to the numinous phenomenon described by Rudolf Otto (2009): it is characterised by its enigmatic nature, its non-rational and non-sensory qualities, and its transcendence of conventional identity categories. In short, given its status as a sacred reality, this notion may be considered Islamic.

Concurrently, the social, cultural, and aesthetic expressions which the above mentioned intimacy manifests itself permit the articulation of Islamized repertoires in the realms of art, literature, politics, and architecture. In Hodgson's (1977) terms, these records are regarded as records of self-declared meanings or patterns. While not

entirely separate from Islam, they are certainly intended to be contemplated by human beings. It is evident that the socialization of religion is facilitated by aesthetic displays that embody the community's piety and faith. These displays serve to underscore the nature of personal experience with the divine, thereby reinforcing the notion that religious encounters are inherently subjective and individual. This argument finds support in pilgrimage. As a collective and multitudinous act in which global Islam contingently converges in a single time and space. The performance of Islamization is as visible and palpable as it is impossible for us to ascertain each Muslim's personal connection to God while observing the Kaaba at that very same moment.

Hodgson provocatively articulates the civilizing process of Islam as an ongoing, interwoven phenomenon that, while constantly occurring, is rarely questioned as a distinctive pattern by either Muslims or non-Muslims. However, with regard to the search for civilizing elements necessary to support our central argument, Hodgson posits that Islam as a civilizing process operates within specific spaces and times (termed "*Islamdom*") where particular practices are reproduced across defined territories. At the core of this process lies piety towards Allah, which in turn generates an impulse to translate religious devotion into the cultural realm, enabling negotiation with the political and ideological obstacles presented by various interlocutors. *Islamdom* thus offers a compelling theoretical proposition, framing Islam not merely as a civilisation but also as a trans-civilisational ecumene. It is noteworthy that some civilisations are capable of engaging in this interpretative discourse, while others are not yet prepared to do so.

In this context, it is crucial to observe the triad of faith, culture, and power; characteristic of *Islamdom* as a process that does not adhere to the Western concept of a separation between religion and the socio-political body where human collectives are organized. Instead, it fosters the establishment of extensive networks of connection based on a form of mystical propulsion towards God. Consequently, Islam engenders a social paradigm that manifests in its own appellation, encompassing myriad facets of human existence with one objective: establishing a heterogeneous and self-sufficient society perpetually consolidated around the cosmos and the constraints imposed by Allah.

Crisis and expansion: the edges of Islam

What would the world have been like without Islam? From the moment Islam was born, the conditions of the Arabian desert already provided sufficient elements to promote a cosmopolitan consciousness. The time and place in which Muhammad's message was delivered was neither inhospitable nor hermetic, but rather one more place in the series of *commercial nodes* that constituted the trade routes attracting many travellers from various parts of the world, from China to the Mediterranean, with two regional powers in Europe and Persia extremely worn down by endless wars. It is evident that Muhammad occupies a pivotal role in the historical development of Islam. However, the community he led was characterised by significant heterogeneity due to its polytheistic beliefs, as well as its multilingual, multi-ethnic, and ideologically pluralistic nature. These factors would manifest over time in the diverse forms of Islamic

thought, practice, and dissemination outside the Arabian Peninsula (Hourani, 1993). In line with the reverence in which Muhammad's life of wisdom and leadership is held, his companions and followers established a symbolic canonization, whereby each individual retained a distinct narrative of the prophet, accompanied by a unique recollection and biography. However, these individual accounts were consolidated into a unified meta-narrative through their collective designation of him as the seal of the prophets.

As posited by the film *The Message* (Akkad, 1976) "the messenger died, but the message remained," thus disseminating the tenets of Islam to the far reaches of a world to be Islamized. This dissemination occurred through merchants, soldiers, and teachers; giving rise to the first doctrinal disputes that even questioned the eternal or uncreated nature of the Qur'an itself. This phenomenon emerged from the earliest Mutazilite currents, signifying the initial encroachment of Greek philosophy and science into Islamic thought. This development, initiated by Hassan al-Basri, precipitated a crisis that gave rise to free thought within the Islamic community, a remarkable occurrence in its own right.

Ibn Muqaffa, a Persian convert and secretary to the last Umayyad caliph, translated the royal chronicles and some court manuals of Sassanid Iran right in the midst of the crisis that was ravaging the succession of the Umayyad family of Damascus (al-Muqaffa and al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1989). This work was highly influential in the formation of an elegant style of prose in the Arabic language, which would later be refined with the first studies of grammar by another Persian intellectual, Abu Bishr, better known as Sibawayhi. These interweavings contributed to the Arabic language acquiring a level

of eloquence sufficient to facilitate the reading and recitation of the Qur'an, which imbued the language with structure and continuity throughout the polysemic Arab world. The Arabic language also began to encompass other content such as the popular fables of India, including *Kalila wa Dimna*, which contained highly sophisticated political content aimed at individuals in positions of governance (Garduño, 2012). In addition to the Sassanid translations, the Byzantine art of governance was also introduced into Islam, thereby effecting a radical transformation in a system of government that was engaged in deliberations regarding the legitimate right to rule in the aftermath of the schism between the Sunnis and the supporters of Ali. The literary output of authors such as Muhammad Ibn Zafar in Abbasid Sicily would, over time, serve to bring about the flourishing of what became known in Europe as the mirror style for princes.

Subsequently, under the rule of Harun al-Rashid and his son al-Ma'mun, Islam experienced a resurgence of Platonic and Aristotelian studies under the patronage of the House of Wisdom. Where, among many other things, the development of Islamic jurisprudence and the recognition of the methods of induction and deduction beyond Baghdad was promoted. From Central Asia to the Mediterranean, a number of scholars, physicians, and scientists contributed to the greatest advances in medicine, mathematics, astronomy, literature, and philosophy of that era. Examples of these figures include Avicenna, Al Jawarismi, Fatima al-Fihri, Al Kindi, Al Ghazali, Al Farabi, Averroes, and Omar al Jaiyyam. The conflict between revelation and reason intensified, causing the fields of philosophy and theology to merge. Furthermore, the theological, philosophical, and mystical currents converged in a debate that continues to the present day

with so-called orthodox Islam. It is important to note that this period of relative political and cultural stability occurred despite the crisis that led to the fragmentation of the Islamic political unity, caliphate, into multiple centres of power. By around 929 AD, three significant centres had emerged: the Abbasid centre in Baghdad, the Andalusian centre in Cordoba, and the Fatimid caliphate in Cairo.

Conversely, it is noteworthy that while scholars such as Bernard Lewis (2004) regard the fall of Baghdad in 1258 AD as a devastating calamity for Islam, scholars such as Hodgson himself perceive the Mongol invasion as a catalyst for civilizational rejuvenation. Whereas, Hourani (1993) contends that this is not the case, and that it is possible to understand how, despite the significant destruction wrought by the Mongols, Islam entered a period in which profound verses on love were written by Jalal al-Rumi and even the foundations of modern sociology were established through the thinking of Ibn Khaldun. These texts and ideas formed a significant turning point in the civilizational project of Islam as a result of the encounters that, for example, the Maghreb thinker had with Tamerlane around 1400-1401 AD.

Other notable exponents of this intellectual rejuvenation include Nasir Din Tusi, a prominent proponent of the doctrine known as *hikmat-i amali* (practical wisdom), who is widely regarded as one of the most eminent scholars of the 13th century within the Islamic world. It is notable that his contemporaries in the West included such figures as Thomas Aquinas and Roger Bacon. At the Mongol court, for example, Tusi witnessed the fall of the Abbasid caliphate and, after a while, secured the trust of Hulegu, the Mongol leader. When Tusi was entrusted with the administration of the finances of

religious foundations (*awqaf*), his primary concern was to combat the abuses of authority by the Mongols, to save the lives of innocent scholars, and to establish one of the most significant centres of learning in Maragha, in north-western Iran. The compilation of the text *adab-i sharab-khwurdan* (ways of drinking wine) is one of his most translated writings after several centuries:

When one attends a wine gathering, one should never remain while becoming intoxicated. If a person does not tolerate wine well, they should drink sparingly, dilute it, or leave the gathering early. He should not be allowed to engage in the conversation of drunk men or be allowed to mediate between them; however, where things happen in hostility, they should be prevented from attacking each other... If he is overcome by discomfort, let him struggle in the midst of the assembly in such a way that his companions do not notice it, or let him leave without delay; once he has vomited, he may return to the party (quoted in Shahab, 2017).

Meanwhile, Hafez of Shiraz, an Iranian mystic, wrote poems celebrating the pleasures of wine, hunting, and love at the court of Shiraz. A more profound level of analysis reveals that the memoirs also reflect the subject's absolute devotion as a mystical Muslim, dedicated to the pursuit of union with the divine. Furthermore, the author satirised the perceived hypocrisy of Muslim religious leaders by employing straightforward and emotive language. This was done in order to highlight his own love for ordinary people and to demonstrate the relationship between everyday life and the search for eternity. For a significant number of intellectuals, Hafez of Shiraz is re-

garded as the intellectual and spiritual bridge from the Middle Ages to what Hodgson refers to as the phase of *migration and renewal*. This perspective has guided those interested in Islam to recognise that the boundaries of the civilizing process are also opportunities for expansion in themselves. These boundaries, however much crisis they may engender at their edges, do not disrupt the spiritual experience that Islam asserts for itself, but which it also shares with all its interlocutors inside and outside its institutions. Poetic expression is identified as one of the preferred vehicles for this endeavour.

The rise of the West, or what Hodgson calls the *Great Western Transmutation*, is a period of profound cultural change that stands in stark contrast to the agrarian era. This transformation, as described by the American author, is characterized by a newfound technicalization, a process that enabled certain Western societies to thrive by adapting to their environment, much as Islam had done during the agrarian stage. In other words, the existence of the West, as we understand it today, would be unfeasible without the accumulation of conditions existing in the Asian-European environment. Similarly, the emergence of Islam would not have been possible without the Iranian-Semitic conditions in which it first saw the light of day.

Technicalization and mystical blossoming

During the period known as the Renaissance, which Eurocentric historiography considers to be the origin of the rise of Europe as we know it, there was a global climate similar to the one we have today. The assertion that Europe transitioned from a state of primitiveness and obscurity to modernity, thereby attaining its political and cul-

tural dominance through its colonial endeavours, is demonstrably inaccurate. Indeed, the East and West sustained vigorous commercial and cultural relations that profoundly influenced people's daily lives, along with the exchange of ideas and encounters that elicited perplexity, fascination, and delight. A prime example of this phenomenon can be found in the episode in which the Queen Elizabeth I of England, established an alliance with the Ottoman Empire in 1578 aiming to stimulate trade and to seek military support against Catholic Spain. This alliance exerted a direct influence on English drama and literature of the time, as evidenced by the works of renowned authors such as Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare. These works served as a source of inspiration for the individualistic works of scientists and thinkers such as Copernicus and Galileo (Brotton, 2002).

The influence of Islam on the financial reality was even more surprising considering the knowledge of 9th-century Muslim mathematicians such as Al-Khwarizmi and his work *Kitab al-Jabr wa al-Muqabala*. The replacement of the European numbering system (based on Roman characters) with the Indo-Arabic numbering system by Fibonacci was a significant development. The latter system was highly popular and its advantages facilitated financial transactions as well as profit and loss calculations in commercial operations. Furthermore, it incorporated the signs for addition, subtraction, and division, which had not been utilized in Europe until the mid-15th century. The benefits of mathematics were such that they reduced the complexity of drawing plans and maps, thereby enabling great travellers to undertake major expeditions designed to prove the theory that the Earth was round. The first documented globe in Europe, which

excluded America, was made by the German Martin Behaim (Brotton, 2002). This signified European interest in the East, as it captured the European desire to reach the East Indies and not the American continent where the Spanish finally arrived.

It is well documented that the Indies constituted the ultimate destination for numerous European merchants, whose interest lay in the abundant spices and exotic goods that were to be found there. Among the most notable goods were black pepper, nutmeg, cinnamon, opium, ginger, almonds, tulips, cotton, silk, velvet, porcelain, and other textiles found along the route that passed through the bazaars of cities such as Cairo, Aleppo, Damascus, Acre, and Tabriz. The majority of these spices first appeared in 15th-century European cookbooks, as did the new pigments in ultramarine blue, vermilion and cinnabar, which were utilized by renowned Renaissance painters such as Albrecht Dürer, Botticelli and the Bellini brothers.

A further reason behind the European countries' admiration for the East, in addition to pigments, sandalwood aromas, wood, tiles and precious stones, was gold. This metal was sourced from the depths of the Sudanese mines, traversing intricate trade routes that passed through North African cities. The passage through the African continent unveils a dismal chapter in the annals of the Renaissance, marred by the purported exploitation of enslaved individuals in the transportation of the coveted metal. As Jerry Brotton (2002) asserts, it is futile to emphasise the extent to which the economies that financed the great cultural achievements of the Renaissance profited from the trade and exploitation of slaves.

The veracity of the aforementioned aspects can be ascertained through an exhaustive analysis of the most emblematic work

of the European Renaissance, namely Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (Brotton, 2002). This renowned painting, dating back to 1533, provides a meticulous and precise depiction of a world inhabited by two Renaissance figures: an ambassador and a bishop. These individuals, who represent modernity, civilization, and European power, stand as symbols of the era. However, a more thorough examination of the image reveals a series of objects surrounding the main characters. The artefacts on display include rugs and curtains with oriental designs, an arithmetic book for merchants, a globe, a collection of sundials, and an instrument for determining the position of ships at sea; most of them created by Arab astronomers and thinkers. Alongside printed books on humanistic subjects like geometry, music, and astronomy, the aforesaid artefacts highlight the importance of the printing press at that time and, in turn, reveal the different facets of the Renaissance as something not only European.

In addition to Holbein's work, another painting that aligns with this artistic tendency is exhibited. *The Preaching of Saint Mark in Alexandria*, painted by Gentile and Giovanni Bellini between 1504 and 1507, exemplifies the European fascination with Eastern culture, architecture, and communities. The painting features a remarkable array of characters that could easily be integrated into European society. The characters depicted in the work include Turks, North Africans, Egyptians, Persians, Tatars, and Ethiopians set against the spectacular landscape of the city of Alexandria, alongside a Byzantine basilica with a large dome in the background surrounded by several houses with Egyptian mosaics and tiles.

During the period spanning from the 13th to the 16th centuries, the advent of firearms in Europe, the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid

Empire, and the Mughal Empire resulted in the aforementioned political, cultural, and commercial interactions. Concurrently, these regions witnessed the emergence of highly sophisticated hierarchical systems of governance in prominent cities such as Istanbul, Isfahan, and Agra. Simultaneously, Islam experienced a period of flourishing intellectual culture, marked by the rise of Sufism. This spiritual movement posed a significant challenge to the prevailing orthodoxy, contributing to the dissemination of new ideas and the development of a vibrant intellectual culture. In numerous locations, a lodge or brotherhood (*zaouia*, *khanqah* or *tekke*) would be bestowed through a pious foundation in perpetuity (*waqf*) to function as a meeting place for adherents of the *path of light* and to engage in a series of rituals that served as a hospice to assist the impoverished and encourage them to engage with texts, libraries, and various methods of connecting with God. It is an established fact that no significant domain of Islamic civilization remained unaffected by Sufism during the period of global exchange, as evidenced by both popular texts and research conducted by scholars from the most prestigious universities in the world.

Sufism was a significant contributing factor in the historical dissemination of Islam and the establishment of regional Islamic cultures, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These regions leveraged the prevailing material, political, and commercial conditions to facilitate their expansion. Recent academic work on these topics has focused on the role of Sufism in the creation and spread of Islamic culture as a tool of resistance to European imperialism in North Africa and South Asia and, in more recent times, to forms of authoritarianism and dogmatism by some dictators in the region, in

the case of Syria and Turkey, or even against extremist movements in Iraq and Afghanistan (Renard, 2004).

Ecumenism as the limit of the differential pattern

But while Islam in particular has tended to make this kind of total demand on life, are there limits to its civilizational process? And if so, what are they? This point is raised in response to one of the most common criticisms of the approach proposed here, which regards civilizations as essentially timeless processes. The conceptualization of Islam's destiny, in this context, is challenging due to the extent of hybridization achieved not only by Islamized cultures but also by Islamic cultures in regions that, at times, deviate from an exclusive pious core with Allah, as Hodgson hypothesises in his initial premise. For instance, as cited in the works of Ahmed Shahab (2017) and Carla Bellamy (2011), respectively, where the study of Sufi shrines in India contends that the violent sectarian-religious division of British India following colonization resulted in Indian citizens grappling with the notion that only an exclusive and fixed religious identity was fundamental to achieving individuality and naming their identity in the modern world. However, the shrines of Muslim saints, known as *dargahs* (portal or threshold), attract a religiously diverse range of pilgrims who initiate certain healing processes for devotees. Both, Muslim and Hindu, through ritual and daily practices, giving and receiving services of medicine, teaching, and meditation. The interpretation of this example, as outlined by Hodgson, is rendered complex due to the observation that both Hindus and Muslims partake in religious activities. This observation suggests, on the one

hand, the presence of an Islamic element, yet, on the other hand, it compels the classification of Hindu involvement as an Islamized phenomenon. The author posits that, as it cannot be classified as both, the dargah culture must be considered as neither Islamic nor Islamized, but rather as an independent phenomenon.

In Hodgson's approach, it is essential to understand that the notion that cultures and civilizations are dynamic rather than static responds to a continuous dialogue between their formative ideals, such that certain ideals may dominate at one point but fade away at another. Civilizations, therefore, are not predetermined by their intellectual characteristics (much less by essentialist interpretations), but are sustained by composite and interrelated cultures to the extent that they share accumulated traditions. However, given the difficulty of determining the civilizational affiliation of a particular cultural entity, Hodgson rightly observes that such questions cannot be resolved conclusively. Thus suggesting that such a designation is contingent on the social construction of the individual who names it as a civilizational process, its purpose and, above all, its recognition and repetition. From a number of perspectives, Islamic civilization can be regarded as a stretch of the Iranian-Semitic tradition. Nevertheless, from others, it is regarded as a radical departure from both of these traditions.

According to Shahab (2017), the challenge lies in organizing the multiplicity of forms in which Islam manifests itself, understanding them as a human range which, through its existence, demonstrates the presence of the starting point of the divine. The central argument is that the differences between Islam as the sum of the Islamic and the Islamized should not be addressed by eliminating nor exo-

ticising these differences or the pattern of distinction. Instead, the differences should be included as a coherent and systematic axis of study. This would open up an opportunity to explain, so far as possible describe, the fullness with which Muslims and non-Muslims experience Islam through time and space.

The logic of difference, or alternatively, the logic of contradiction enables the proposition of a definition of Islam as a means of interpreting the world that is not reduced to the interpretation of the Qur'an. Rather, it is defined as a broader commitment to the reality within which the Qur'an was revealed. In his work *What is Islam?*, Ahmed Shahab introduces the concept of the *Pre-Text of Revelation*, which he defines as the period preceding the establishment of the *umma*. This concept encompasses a wide range of interpretations and practices of faith, extending from the historical context of Muhammad's Arabia to the contemporary global landscape. It also explores the diverse methodologies employed in the production of meaning, underpinning the formation of our contemporary understanding of Islam. To illustrate this point, it is pertinent to consider the manner in which literalist mechanisms are employed to establish a set of norms as exclusively Islamic. This mode of interpretation, upon its inception, rejects all that does not align with the established norm. Consequently, it engenders opportunities for novel means of accepting or rejecting these laws, as well as the potential for the emergence of alternative authorities and interpretive frameworks. In this vein, it is important to note that all these modes of interpretation are capable of being both exclusive and inclusive simultaneously. It is evident that they possess the capacity to engen-

der divergent orthodoxies and canons, which in turn give rise to their own distinct forms of exclusion and inclusion. These various forms of interpretation are in a constant state of re-signifying each other.

In this type of interpretative analysis, the fragmentation process actually enables the creation of a corpus, a large rhizomatic network about what Islam is or is not: its discourses, its practices, and its contingencies. Ahmed Shahab termed as *Pre-text of Revelation* the entire accumulated lexicon of media and meanings about Islam that have been historically generated and recorded to the present day. It is, of course, incomplete and subject to reinterpretation, but it does approximate the civilizational dynamic described by Hodgson.

The phenomenon of *coherent contradiction* facilitates comprehension of the assertions made by Muslim and non-Muslim leaders, such as French President Emmanuel Macron and Moroccan intellectual Yasir Qadi, who contend that Islam is undergoing a period of decline, despite the fact that institutions in the United States, including the Pew Research Center, have identified Muslims as the fastest-growing religious group in the world, constituting approximately 24% of the global population and surpassing both Christianity and Hinduism (Lipka & Hackett, 2017). Moreover, in contrast to prevalent assumptions, the majority of the global Muslim population (62%) is concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region, which includes substantial communities in Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, and Turkey. In contrast, the countries of the Middle East and North Africa together represent merely 20% of the worldwide Muslim population. As might be expected, the *umma* encompasses transnational, cross-border, and cross-cultural domains, thereby conferring upon it a distinctly cosmopolitan character.

From a spiritual perspective, the contemporary global Islamic movement also can be viewed as a multifaceted phenomenon characterised by a lack of a single unified authority. This complexity, evident in the diverse cultural and socio-political manifestations of Islam, challenges the notion of a unified Islamic identity or a singular centre of political, spiritual, or artistic influence within the Islamic world. For example, the manifestation of Islam in Indonesia is not congruent with its expression in Morocco. Furthermore, the notion of a uniform Islamic identity across the north, centre, and south regions of Morocco, is not applicable to Indonesia. It is noteworthy that even within the context of a contemporary Muslim family, Islam can be expressed in diverse forms, thus suggesting the potential for its conceptualisation not only as a *transcivilisational ecumene* but also as a manifestation of ecumenical principles within the intimate domain of the family.

According to Hernan Taboada (2017), the analysis of Islam does not take the binary approach of simply being or not being Muslim. Instead, he proposes that Islam should be considered as a multifaceted identity that can coexist with other identities. This methodology is further exemplified in the works of scholars such as Gustave E. von Grunebaum (1986), who conducted a comparative analysis of the characteristics of Muslims in North Africa and those in Java. In Clifford Geertz's seminal study (1976), the author observed the religious phenomenon across a wide geographical range, from Morocco to Indonesia, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the subject. This perspective is further elaborated in other studies, such as *Knowledge of God in classical sufism: Foundations of islamic*

mystical theology by John Renard (2004), who employed a comparative analysis between Morocco and Malaysia. As posited by Ahmad Shahab, this phenomenon may also be observed in his own work, which he has termed the *Balkan-Bengal complex*. With the exception of Taboada's work, studies on the subject in Latin America remain a pending task but are constantly developing and promising as a fertile field if one thinks through the identification of new cultural, gender, and religious markers in an era where new technologies have disrupted our way of thinking and accessing testimonial information around the world.

All the arguments mentioned through this work represent merely a fraction of the extensive body of evidence that underscores the intricacy of analysing Islam as a civilization. This complexity stems from its historical interaction with numerous interlocutors, who have exerted a profound spiritual, cultural, and political influence on it. Undoubtedly, these interactions have played a pivotal role in shaping the evolution of Islam from its earliest forms in the seventh century to its contemporary manifestation, which serves as a pivotal factor in its ongoing survival and expansion in the twenty-first century.

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