Islamic Humanism vs. Islamism:: Cross-Civilizational Bridging

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# Islamic Humanism vs. Islamism: Cross-Civilizational Bridging

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*Abstract*

Some prominent discussions of contemporary Islam focus on the tradition of Shari'a reasoning. This is not without reason. Not only is this tradition important in understanding militancy; it has re-emerged in connection with the Arab Spring. The present article, however, seeks to revive an alternative tradition—namely, Islamic humanism. The importance of distinguishing this alternative is not only a matter of clarifying the intellectual heritage of Islam. Reviving Islamic humanism has social-political consequences. It makes possible a view of the modern state that is more democratic and pluralistic than the Shari'a state envisioned by Islamists.

## Introduction

Complexity and diversity are basic features of Islamic civilization, which means any analysis that hopes to come close to reality must begin with a specification: which Islam does one have in mind? For example, in the medieval period, two competing traditions developed. One was identified with the term *fiqh*, or "jurisprudence," while a second was identified with the term *falsafa*, "philosophy." The first has been discussed at length in the recent work of John Kelsay (2007), who characterizes the set of practices associated with *fiqh* (responding to questions about right behavior by means of consulting approved sources, the point being to comprehend the Shari'a or guidance of God) as "Shari'a reasoning."

The second involves a search for wisdom by means of reason, and will be characterized in this essay as a kind of "Islamic humanism."[1] As Kelsay's analysis shows, Shari'a reasoning is not simply a matter of historical interest. It provides a framework for understanding a number of contemporary developments in which Muslims claim the mantle of the tradition even as they put it into contexts their medieval forebears could not have imagined. One could say these believers "invent" the tradition to which they appeal, particularly in connection with modern ideas about the organization of states. As I hope to show, it is possible to invoke Islamic humanism in a similar way, so as to understand some neglected aspects of modern Muslim thought. If those who develop Islamic humanism also create new inventions, they are no more blameworthy for this than their competitors.

In the context of the movement that began in Tunisia in December 2010 and has since spread across the Arab world (that is, the Arab Spring), Islamists claiming the mantle of Shari'a have come to the fore. These people claim not only to represent a particular tradition of thought. In their view, to wear the mantle of Shari'a is to represent true Islam. Leaning on the work of the late Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, the present essay questions this claim. I argue that the medieval or classical competition between the advocates of Shari'a and the advocates of humanism is being reborn in the encounter between the ideas of al-Jabri and the Egyptian Hasan Hanafi (see al-Jabri and Hanafi 1990). In presenting this competition, I wish to provoke those who see the need to build bridges between the West and Islam into addressing the question: which Islam holds promise for a reduction in tensions, so that conflict between civilizations may be less violent (see Tibi 2012a, esp. chaps. 4 and 5)?

One can see the import of this question by considering some aspects of the Arab Spring. The various movements—in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere—began as protests against authoritarian regimes. Much of the rhetoric included references to Islam, which is not surprising. But in view of the way things developed, it is important to distinguish appeals to Islam as a religious faith and the presentation of Islam as a political ideology—what I have elsewhere described as the religionized or even Shariatized politics associated with Islamist movements (Tibi 2012b). The Arab Spring was not "made" by Islamists; early on, the most articulate among those involved spoke in very

different terms, mixing appeals to Islam with the language of democracy and human rights. Nonetheless, no well-informed observer can overlook the fact that Islamist movements were crucial to the success of the protests. This had to do with the political capability possessed by well-organized movements that survived authoritarian rule by means of secrecy, hierarchical structures developed to enforce discipline, and the undertaking of clandestine action. Such factors enabled Islamists to play a strong role in the protests. They also suggested (and suggest) that these movements should be viewed as the most likely candidates to take over state power.

The point is that the fall of authoritarian regimes heralds a change of world-historical significance in the Arab world and the world of Islam at large. In this context, Western democracies can no longer downplay Islamism as a rudimentary "radical Islam." Even as the West is now challenged to "do business" with the emerging power of Islamism, its representatives cannot dispense with looking for alternatives. The Muslim alternative to Islamism is humanist, civil Islam. Muslims who yearn for a genuine democracy can find—and are finding—a way of speaking about their hopes through this alternative tradition. In the present war of ideas one should not be intimidated, and scholars as well as policymakers should insist on the right of thinking about the import of distinctive traditions.

Just how important is it to revive the tradition of Islamic humanism? To understand the issue well, one needs to place Islamic humanism in a civilizational context. In the first portion of this essay, an overview of the history of civilizations reveals how humanism connects civilizations to one another.[2] Theorizing about civilizations is presented by some as a novelty, yet the history of humankind has always been a history of competing civilizations (Braudel 1994). For educated people this statement may sound like a rehash of common sense, but in the recent past it has become a risk to express this civilizational view of history. One reason for this is in reaction to the debate over the "clash" of civilizations outlined by Samuel Huntington (1996). In my view, there is conflict, but this need not become a clash.[3] A conflict can be solved, but the rhetoric of a clash contributes to a polarizing essentialization. There are better sources for thinking about civilizations than the book by Huntington; one example is the work of Raymond Aron (1962), who developed the notion of the "heterogeneity of civilizations."[4] As Aron put it, the subdivision

of humanity into diverse civilizations reflects social and political facts. The basic differences between civilizations relate to values and worldviews. Civilizational awareness can be a source of conflict, but a tradition of humanism can tame any intercivilizational conflict.

In a debate with John Kelsay and a number of colleagues commenting on his work, I suggested we view the tradition of Islamic humanism as an alternative to the contemporary invention of tradition by Islamists, in particular with respect to their equation of Islam and the Shari'a state. Kelsay's response was this: "I do think that the vision of a state governed by divine law does not fit well with important features of contemporary societies. . . . I agree with one of the central points made by Bassam Tibi. . . . I also think it is important to say that [the Islamists'] vision is probably wrong and to do so on the grounds set forth by Muslim democrats" (2011, 79–82). In so arguing Kelsay concedes the existence of two competing directions within Islamic civilization: one is a revival of a "Shari'a reasoning" in a new construction based on an invention of tradition; the other is Islamic humanism represented, for example, by the group contributing to a collection of essays entitled *The Other Muslims: Moderate and Secular* (Baran 2010). I identify with this latter group, and thus wish to present Islamic humanism as a viable alternative to Islamism. In doing so, I wish to push Islamic thought in directions that channel global conflict through means of intercivilizational bridging. As *fiqh* and *falsafa* presented distinctive religious, social, and political alternatives in the past, so Islamism and Islamic humanism do in the present.

### Humanism and Civilizations: An Overview

Civilization is a called *umran* in classical Islamic philosophy of history. Among the many flaws of the recent Western, Huntington-focused debate on civilizations is that it ignores the work of the founder of *ilm al-umran* ("the science of civilizations"), Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), who claimed in his al-Muqaddima (*Prolegomena*) to lay down the foundations for this new discipline. One can draw a line between the fourteenth and twentieth centuries, pairing Ibn Khaldun and Mohammed Abed al-Jabri as advocates of a specifically Muslim humanism; at the same time, their account suggests that Islamic civilization shares a grammar of humanism with all other civilizations.[5] In the

classical heritage of Islam this grammar established values that were shared, even universal.

Building on the reception of Hellenistic philosophy, Ibn Khaldun, al-Jabri, and others developed a way of thinking that is pertinent for the present, not least because it undermines both the binary or dualistic elements of the Islamist worldview and Huntington's self-fulfilling prophecy of a clash between the civilizations. At the same time, it is important to note that humanism does not go to another extreme, namely, the denial of conflict characteristic of proposals about an "Islamo-Christian civilization." There never existed in any period of history such a thing as envisioned by those who speak this way. The fact that Muslim humanism, as the humanism familiar to Western scholars, drew on Hellenistic sources does not make two civilizations into one. Rather, it suggests the possibility of shared values that promote intercivilizational bridging and may contribute to solving intercivilizational conflict. Each civilization has its own values, but there is a grammar of humanism that can be shared by all.[6] The ascertainment of multiple civilizations is compatible with the idea that diversity both enriches and (at the same time) generates tensions and value conflicts. Humanism addresses this, building bridges and taming tensions. Stated in a nutshell: in an age when structural globalization and cultural fragmentation seem to occur simultaneously, a narrow focus on particularism, and thus on the importance of diversity, can generate conflict (Tibi 2011). There is a real place for shared, humanist values. This is the concern of al-Jabri's project, and of my own.

Al-Jabri strives to revive Islamic rationalism. In a dispute with the Islamist thinker Hasan Hanafi, al-Jabri argues that rationalism provides an Islamic way of accommodating modernity, and he develops a critique of Hanafi's (1989) major work on *usuliyya* or "fundamentalism." It is worth noting that the exchange between these two very important figures (al-Jabri and Hanafi 1990) seems to be unknown in the West, even to Western scholars who read Arabic. I have never seen the matter referenced, for example, in works on Islamic studies in the United States.

Al-Jabri is positive about the accomplishments of modernity insofar as these are based on a combination of rationalism and humanism, and hold out the possibility of universal or shared values.[7] Interestingly, al-Jabri's view is not only opposed to Islamism; referring to Western trends identified with

postmodernist forms of relativism, he suggests one might speak of an uneasy Islamist–postmodern alliance. In this sense, al-Jabri's view is reminiscent of the late Ernest Gellner, who also argued in favor of a Western and Islamic enlightenment based on humanism. As Gellner argued,

> Logically, the religious fundamentalists are of course also in conflict with the relativists. . . . In practice, this confrontation is not so very much in evidence. The fundamentalists notice and despise the . . . relativism so pervasive in Western society, but they do not take much interest in its philosophical rationale. The relativists in turn direct their attack at those . . . non-relativists within their own enlightened tradition, but play down . . . religious fundamentalism. (1992, 85)

In my own academic discipline of international relations, one reads, for instance, the following, as seen in the entry article on international relations theory in an established encyclopedia: "Postmodernists reject . . . the assumptions of the French Enlightenment about . . . modernity. . . . More subversively, postmodernists reject the idea that modernity . . . is necessarily the best or only one way to order things" (Vasques and Henehan 2004, 865). In this manner postmodernists also dismiss the major assumptions of humanism.

In his lifetime al-Jabri chose not to waste his time with these Westerners. For him, humanist thinking can be traced back to the classical Hellenism admired by Muslim philosophers (Watt 1962). This tradition was suppressed in Islamic history by the advocates of *fiqh*-orthodoxy. Nevertheless, it is not a simple construction of modern Muslims; it has historical roots. As well, it is worth recalling that Europeans received the Greek heritage from Islamic sources, in a process of intercivilizational encounters and cultural borrowings. The tradition al-Jabri admires thus has already served in one setting to provide a bridge between the civilizations of Islam and Hellenism. In his view, it may do so again. I want to join al-Jabri and adopt his project. I think the grammar of humanism in Islam matters with respect to relations with the West. It also matters with respect to the project of democratization represented by the Arab Spring. By contrast, contemporary Islamists engage in a politics of polarization. In the name of purity and authenticity, they reject al-Jabri's project. In doing so, they promote ways of speaking that block creative encounters with

the West; as well, the Islamist discourse promotes an order that works against the ideals of the Arab Spring.

### Islam and the Concept of Humanism

Humanism is a concept that places human beings at the center of the universe. It attributes to them the capability of recognizing the world through human reason and thus to change the globe in accordance with human needs. The concept is therefore secular. It is not atheist, but it does replace the absolutist mindset of many religious positions. In addition to this basic claim, one ought to say that modern humanism is embedded in a culture that rests on the "principle of subjectivity." This formula of Habermas is not to be confused with subjectivism. Prior to his invention of a "post-secular society," Habermas spoke about the principle of subjectivity in this way: "Religious faith became reflective; the world of the divine was changed in the solitude of subjectivity into something posited in ourselves" (1987, 17). This is in fact the exact meaning of humanism identified by Habermas as "the principle of subjectivity [that] determines the forms of modern culture. . . . The *moral concepts* of modern times follow from the recognition of the subjective freedom of individuals" (17). It follows that humanism humanizes the universe by dissociating it from the sacred, though without thereby requiring atheism.

As suggested earlier, today this understanding of humanism (that is, as secular and modern) is contested not only by religious fundamentalists, but also by postmodernists. Cultural relativism combined with the notion of "a postsecular society" dismisses the type of humanism shared by Islam and the West.[8] By way of contrast with such scholars, the theorist and historian of civilizations Leslie Lipson (1993, 63–66) established in an amazing manner the continuity between European and Islamic humanism. Both traditions share a rationalist view of the world and related philosophical thought based on reason-based universal knowledge.

As noted, the roots of humanism in both Islam and the West are to be found in Hellenism. Here the work of the German foremost historian of classic Greece, Christian Meier, is most useful. Meier identifies humanism with a German term that is very difficult to translate, the notion of *Könnensbewusstsein* (1983, 484–99). This notion combines two words, each indicative of an

aspect of the ability to shape one's own destiny. The verb *können* (to be able) is combined with the noun *Bewusstsein* (consciousness) so as to indicate that human beings have the cognitive and physical ability to act as a subject. In turn, the notion of *Könnensbewusstsein* rests on the combination of two classical Greek concepts: *episteme* (ability of recognition) and *techne* (technical capability). Human beings, while created by God, are nevertheless in a position to recognize the world by their human intellect, and also to shape it by their *techne* to make it meet their own needs. As Meier has it, the notion of *Könnensbewusstsein* determines the substance of humanism. The combination of the humanist worldview and the handicraft of artisans led to the emergence of modern science in Europe. In this process, some borrowing from Hellenized Islam was involved.

Meier's account reminds us of the importance of the way that humanism made possible a kind of cultural borrowing or sharing between Islam and the West.[9] Unfortunately, however, the career of humanism in Islam was not a prominent one. The conflict between *fiqh* and *falsafa*, which was understandably also a conflict between humanism and theocentrism in Islam, ended with the defeat of humanism in Islamic civilization. When humanism waned, Islamic civilization declined, while Renaissance humanism laid the foundations for progress in Europe. Lipson describes this process succinctly in this most impressive phrasing: "The difference in the West before and after the Renaissance . . . can be summarized in one sentence: . . . the main source of Europe's inspiration shifted from Christianity to Greece, from Jerusalem to Athens. Socrates, not Jesus has been the mentor" (1993, 62). As to the role of Islam, Lipson's poetic description is also worth quoting: "Aristotle crept back into Europe by the side door. His return was due to the Arabs, who had become acquainted with Greek thinkers. . . . Both Avicenna and Averroes were influenced by him. When the University of Paris was organized, Aristotle was introduced from Cordoba" (1993, 62). Of course, European and Islamic humanisms differed, but they shared the substance of humanism and its reason-based worldview. In my view, this history suggests that the emphasis on universal values, human capacities, and the role of reason is most pertinent to our current situation.

The modern age heralds a mapping of the world by structural globalization. The spread of values embedded in cultural modernity create new

conditions for all. In this context, Muslims are exposed to a number of options. And this is not only a matter for those living in the historic heartland of Islam. Today, the civilization of Islam comes to Europe via global migration.[10] To date, an estimated diaspora of 25 million Muslim immigrants are involved in Europe's projects. In many countries, these immigrants constitute a kind of an enclave, and are not well integrated into the new setting. The shift of Islam from the southern Mediterranean border to the heart of Europe will strongly affect the future of Europe.[11] If we could revive the shared tradition of humanism, the transition would be easier.

## The Options: Islamic Humanism or Shari'a Islam

In the recent past one encounters notions of a "war of ideas" between humanism and Shari'a within Islam and beyond—that is, between Islam and the West. But this is an incomplete picture. With respect to Islam there are different sources for thinking. One source, *falsafa*, represents a tradition of humanism, while another, based on revelation, is Shari'a reasoning as described by Kelsay (2007). Only *falsafa* rationalism inspired Europe at the eve of the Renaissance.[12] Shari'a reasoning did not. This is not simply a matter for purely academic inquiry: the knowledge that emanates from humanism has import for political relationships. One is reminded of Ernst Haas's (1990) statement "Knowledge is power." This insight is not only restricted to academicians. It is sad that many politicians dismiss this specifying of knowledge and about what cultural borrowing happened "as an academic concern."

In the politics of the twenty-first century, proper knowledge matters. Today, Islamists pursue an agenda of Islamization based on their notion that Shari'a and Islam are equivalent entities. In contrast to this agenda, I see in a revival of the grammar of Islamic humanism a better perspective for civilization. Greek humanism was embraced by Muslim *falsafa* rationalists, and for this reason they were in conflict with Shari'a Islam. This conflict in medieval Islam between humanism and *fiqh* orthodoxy maintains its pertinence throughout history and up to our present. Today, the conflict assumes the shape of a contest between Shari'a Islam and civil Islam in historically Muslim countries, and between Euro-Islam and Ghetto-Islam in the European diaspora.

The revival of humanism is undermined by thinkers who see civilizational differences in the context of politicized religion. The foremost thinker of political Islam (Islamism), Sayyid Qutb, established distinguished civilizational fault lines before Huntington ever thought of such a thing. Qutb maintained "it is out for Europe," and he added that Islam is ready to take over. Qutb's prose sounds, as the following quote suggests, like a declaration of a civilizational war on Europe:

> Today, humanity is at the brink. . . . Western Europe lost its values and democracy is in a state of bankruptcy. . . . The leadership of the world by the West is about to vanish. . . . Under these conditions only Islam is in possession of the values needed. . . . It is the turn of Islam to take over. (1989, 5–7)

The Islamist trenches established by Qutb are inhabited today by Qutb's heir, the Muslim Brother Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who is dubbed "the global Mufti" because he speaks out his *fatwa*s weekly on al-Jazeera television. Celebrated by some as the alternative to the official Arab television stations, the network must in the end be classed as every bit as imbued with "propaganda" as its rivals. The difference is a matter of direction and content. Qaradawi revives the Shari'a-based antihumanist tradition in Islam against what he labels as the "*hulul al-mustawradah*" (imported solutions).[13] The "Islamic solution" presented by Qaradawi rejects democracy with the argument that it is alien to Muslims due to its Greek-humanist sources. This global Mufti ignores or even erases a centuries-old tradition in which Hellenistic sources played a leading role (see Rosenthal 1992). I have argued that Muslims of today are challenged to revive this heritage as an authentic Islamic tradition. It is thus sad how knowledge approved by this Islamic tradition is dismissed by the Muslim scholar Ziauddin Sardar (1985) as "epistemological imperialism." These Muslims who look at Cartesianism, one of the pillars of European humanism, as "epistemological imperialism" do not build bridges between Islam and Europe. They rather dig trenches that deepen the cultural fragmentation between the civilizations. What we need is an effort at "preventing the clash of civilizations," not defensive cultural identity politics of self-victimization.[14]

In contrast to the heritage of Hellenization in Islam, a tradition that dominated for some centuries—basically from the ninth to the twelfth centuries—and led to an Islamic humanism, Shari'a Islam creates fault lines. I quote again the late Moroccan philosopher and humanist Mohammed al-Jabri's call for a revival of the Islamic rationalism of Avicenna and Averroes as the humanist tradition in Islam. In this pursuit al-Jabri states in the strong phrasing of "to be or not to be" that the future of Islamic civilization depends upon its capability to breathe life into this forgotten Islamic heritage of humanism. As al-Jabri ascertains: "Contemporary Arab-Islamic thought . . . ill-poses the problems . . ." For him, the way out of this impasse is "the survival of our philosophical traditions. . . . [I]t can only be Averroist." As he states, classical Islamic humanist rationalism is characterized by "universality and historicity. . . . The Averroist spirit is adoptable to our modern era, because it agrees to . . . rationalism"—in other words, to humanism (1999, 121, 124, 128). This is an authentic Islamic option that competes with Shari'a Islamism, not only in the world of Islam, but also in the Islamic diaspora of Europe.

The political philosophy of this Islamic tradition of humanism can be found in the work of the great political philosopher of Islam, al-Farabi.[15] Farabi argued for a rational order of the perfect state, *al-madina al-fadila*, not based on Shari'a. Ibn Sina/Avicenna (980–1035) and Ibn Rushd/Averroes (1126–98) continued this humanism. In this context, the epistemological accomplishments of Muslim philosophers, for instance Ibn Rushd's teaching about the *haqiqa al-muzwadawja* (double truth), were shared by the European Renaissance. This particular insight differentiates between philosophical (reason-based) knowledge and religious beliefs based on divine revelation. This idea paved the way for establishing modern rationalism. In contrast to the Islamist invention of Shari'a tradition, a true revival of the tradition of *falsafa* rationalism with its humanist implications can actually be helpful to Muslims in the context of modernity. This humanism is the primary alternative to Shari'a Islam.

### The Positive Legacy of Humanism and the Need to Revive It

The cross-civilizational humanist discourse claims universality, a claim accepted by Islamic humanism as a legacy or a heritage. In al-Jabri's project an effort is made to revive this discourse in the contemporary world of Islam.

The attraction of Muslim Cordoba and Toledo to the West in terms of "*La fascination de l'Islam*" was based on this discourse (Rodinson 1980). Today, Muslims need this discourse in a dialogue with the non-Muslim other as means of peaceful conflict resolution. This is also the understanding employed by the contributors to President Herzog's volume aimed at "preventing" a "clash." In contrast, Islamists dismiss all cross-cultural foundations of humanism; the related intercivilizational fertilization is disregarded as an "intellectual invasion" (*ghazu fikri*) (see Jarisha and Zaibaq 1978).

The "principle of subjectivity" is among the pillars of any humanism. For a positive interaction between civilizations in the post-bipolar age at the beginning of the new millennium, humanism is essential. One should, however, distinguish between realistic and wishful thinking. Therefore, one is challenged to ask questions about the feasibility and potential of a revival of the grammar of Islamic humanism. It is acknowledged that the present conditions are not favorable to this project. Islamism, not Islamic humanism, is thriving. There is a bleak outlook for intellectual encounter between Islam and the West in a spirit of humanism. One of the basic issues of the existing conflict is the secular nation-state versus the divine order of *hakimmiyyat Allah* as a Shari'a state. Also, one must consider the claims for individual human rights against those for religious duties (*faraid*) in the Shari'a (see Tibi 1994). The place of humanism in the prevailing worldview of contemporary Muslims is among the issues that have to be addressed with honesty and candor. If this task can be accomplished, then there can be a rational approach to the challenge of "how to deal with the differences." A mindset based on humanism could help cross the dividing fault lines. In the spirit of establishing commonalities based on reason and a human-centered view of the world, the heritage of Islamic rationalism, with its roots in the Hellenization of Islam, ought to be revived by Muslims themselves. It cannot be repeated enough that there is no single Islam, but a variety of competing Islamic options. One of these is the Islamic legacy of humanism.

Now one has to raise the question of why the values related to humanism unfolded by the rational *falsafa* were not enduring in Islamic civilization. Islamic rationalists lacked the power to institutionalize their school of thought and thus to protect it against the *fiqh* orthodoxy. The *ulema* had power over the educational system (the *madrasas*); therefore, they were in a position to prevent the spread of the values of humanism. Cultural analysis teaches that

new ideas and worldviews cannot endure if they are not related to a cultural institutionalization. In the past *fiqh* orthodoxy prevented this process.[16] At present this is happening again. An education in humanist democracy is hampered both by political Islam/Islamism and by *fiqh* orthodoxy (see Tibi 2004; 2005, 167–85; 2008, 216–34). Islamism acts against the value system of humanism. It is clear that values determine the civilizational worldview of peoples. The values of humanism bridge, while those of binary Islamism undermine any cross-cultural morality based on humanist values.

To understand the grammar of Islamic humanism in the context of Islamic–Western relations, we must look at history. The Islamic position in the Mediterranean compels Europeans to be concerned about Muslims' choices. Traditional forms of wisdom are barely useful for a proper grasp of the diversity of cultures and civilizations that are in our century moving to center stage. The resulting challenges cannot be well understood with the earlier prevailing evolutionist schemes of change from tradition to modernity. The theory of modernization assumed a smooth transition from traditional to modern societies.[17] In this thinking, values were considered to be either traditional, modern, or those of the passing societies. There was no place for the concept of humanism in this discourse. Today, under conditions of the cultural fragmentation that is taking place alongside the processes of globalization, one can state with Hedley Bull that "the shrinking of the globe . . . does not in itself create a unity of outlook. . . . [H]umanity is becoming simultaneously more unified and more fragmented" (1977, 273).

It follows that the model in which Westernization and modernization were equated did not work. The spokesmen for this model were caught in an evolutionist mindset and never cared for a culture of humanism. Helmuth Plessner drew attention to the fact that it was not humanism, but rather a kind of instrumental reason that dominated the export of the European model to non-European cultures. This pattern continues to affect Islamic–European relations. The humanism of Hellas was accepted in medieval Islam, but the idea of Europe is rejected at present. Why? The explanation is to be sought in the different settings. Culture is meaning and it can be neither exported nor reduced to tradition or modernity.[18] In his book on Germany as "*Verspaetete Nation,*" while living in Dutch exile during the Nazi rule, Plessner wrote the following precious statement: "In a mindset of Europeanism [*Europäismus*]

Europe conquered the world. . . . The European expansion was based on the instrumental use of science as an apparatus, not on the humanism and its ethos that Europe once unfolded" (1974, 33–34). Under these conditions anti-hegemonic Muslim attitudes are confused with antihumanism. In contemporary Islamic civilization the old tradition of humanism is suppressed, with the result that cultural modernity of Europe is perceived negatively in a colonial encounter. Technical modernity, meaning science and technology, and cultural modernity are distinct. The first, science and technology, has been embraced by Islamists, while the second is rejected (see Tibi 1993b; 2009b, chap. 11).

While I dissociate my thinking from that of Huntington and Qutb, preferring to draw on Ibn Khaldun and al-Jabri, I do see a return of civilizations to center stage, yet in a different shape and, of course, under radically different conditions. The "return of history" heralds a revolt against the value system of Western civilization, not only against its hegemonic power (Bull 1984, 217–28).[19] I do share the criticism of the oversized power of the West, but I argue for humanism in the pursuit of cross-civilizational bridging. To be sure, every civilization has its own worldview. This can be viewed as a *Weltanschauung* based on the values of the people belonging to each of these civilizations. No prudent scholar would dispute that these worldviews and the related values are different from one another. In this sense, intercivilizational conflict seems to be quite natural. The present war of ideas illustrates this kind of conflict. In a contribution to *Debating the War of Ideas* I maintain that humanism can serve as a bridge that promotes a "peace of ideas" (Tibi 2010a).

As an international relations scholar I engage in a study of values in the context of a debate on humanism in the twenty-first century so as to argue that there should be a pursuit of an intercivilizational dialogue. I view this dialogue as a strategy for averting the "clash of civilizations," which is rather a war of ideas and of worldviews waged among the civilizations in post-bipolar politics.[20] In contrast to religionized politics, humanism ensures a peace between ideas.

### European and Islamic Humanism in Light of Globalization

European and Islamic humanism are related to each other through historical records of mutual cultural borrowing. Western and Islamic values are quite different, but these differences are exacerbated today due to the effects of

structural globalization. One may cite the view that the twentieth century was, as Eric Hobsbawm states, an "age of extremes." This has continued in the twenty-first century with value conflicts between civilizations. At this point I present the revival of humanism as a solution. To be sure, the European expansion was basically an expansion of modern economic structures. For reasons of convenience and legitimacy European powers related their economic expansion to the claim to culturally Westernize the world in the course of a sweeping modernization. The reader is reminded that the "Europeanism"—the term coined by Plessner—exported to the rest of the world was not humanism, but instrumental reason. These insights were blatantly missing in the Western debate.

The earlier conceptualization of culture in terms of tradition and processes of change in terms of unilinear development directed toward more progress were based on a misconception. The claim to universal validity of all Western assumptions has been an impediment in the way of better, more accurate knowledge about non-Western civilizations. An accurate understanding is needed. As Aron (1962) put it, people belong to cultures and civilizations with their own worldviews and values. This insight underpins my idea of the simultaneity of globalization and cultural fragmentation resulting from processes of modernization on a global scale. The existence of cultural and civilizational diversity does not disappear through the shrinking of the world to an assumed global village. In fact, this process has led to an unprecedented mutual awareness and interaction among peoples of different cultures and civilizations, but it could not "in itself create a unity of outlook and has not in fact done so," as Hedley Bull rightly argued (1977, 273). The mutual awareness on global grounds has not led to cultural standardization, but rather to the opposite: an awareness of being different. Thus, the result has been an assertive awareness of the values of one's own civilization, taking the shape of identity politics that disconnects.

Instead, values and norms of humanism could bridge between East and West in an intercivilizational conflict. Unlike the early anticolonial revolt against the West in which the upheaval made full use of Western concepts (such as popular sovereignty and the nation-state) to legitimize the drive to national independence, the present "revolt against the West" is directed against Western values as such, above all against their claim to universality. The formula "*Krieg der Zivilisationen*" (war of civilizations) used as a title for

my book (1998) on this subject matter addresses exactly this issue as a reality viewed by some today as "the war of ideas." Since 9/11 and since the assaults of 2004–7 in Europe, the "war of civilizations" assumes a dimension of jihad-ist violence. To be sure, as Huntington contends, civilizations have no armies and cannot revolve around a core state to compete for the position of a world power. My interest revolves around worldviews and values and a search for grounds for value sharing. The tough question is how to do this. I believe the answer is to be found in humanism as a grammar for all humankind. There is a variety of this humanism in Islamic history that Muslims could revive if they wanted to end "Islam's geo-civil war" (Brenkman 2007, 165), which is burdening international society and alienating Muslims from the rest of humanity. Let it be repeated: Islamic humanism bridges, while contemporary Shari'a reasoning leads to fault lines.

### Future Prospects for Humanism in Islam

The contention of a tradition of common grammar shared by European and Islamic humanism is not based on the wrong idea of a single and discrete civilizational universalism imposed on all. In contrast, I argue for a humanism with different grammars that could be the grounds for a consensus but is not a holistic concept for the entirety of humanity. Humanism is instead a concept of international morality based on cross-cultural and also cross-civilizational grounds. It serves as a platform for a consensus regarding basic values. To be sure, this international morality is not the self-gratifying "world ethos" coined by Westerns theologians.

I do not view humanism in a utopian manner, but rather place it in the real conditions of simultaneous globalization and cultural fragmentation. This situation requires some universalization, but without falling into the trap of acculturation and of Westernization of the world within the framework of Western universalism. The contemporary drive toward counter-acculturation and de-Westernization compels us to look for other solutions. There are two points to underline.

First, despite their distinctiveness, the awakening of premodern cultures such as Islam, Hinduism, or Confucianism is embedded in the very same context. It is a context for which the established terms "world time" and the

"global village" have been coined. However, globalization is basically different from universalization. Global structures do not lead to universal values.

Second, those structures that have been unfolding in Western civilization are globalizing. In a time span of five centuries the European expansion established a framework for globalization. At the same time, the values of European civilization have not been successfully universalized. This distinction is not well understood. Therefore, the simultaneity of structural globalization and cultural fragmentation, as seen in the coexistence of global structures and dissent over values, is beyond present comprehension.

While keeping in mind the conditions of a simultaneity of unifying structures and fragmented outlooks, I see a decline in consensus. This affects a shared humanism. The existing heterogeneity of civilizations compels us to engage in mediation between these often conflicting entities. It is imperative to avert a clash for the sake of a world peace based on humanism.

The plea for a shared humanism is based on the search for common values and for establishing a value consensus in terms of international morality. This process is addressed as a shift from universalism to an effort of cross-cultural underpinning for bridging between competing rival, and thus potentially clashing, civilizations. My work on individual human rights and democracy in Islamic civilization in the pursuit of cross-cultural bridging presents an alternative to sweeping Western universalism. An Islamic grammar of humanism would underpin this indigenization of individual human rights that have emanated from European humanism.

At this juncture it seems useful to me to introduce a basic differentiation used in the study of international relations for understanding the structural unity and paralleling disunity or fragmentation in the realm of values. The systemic linking of the different parts of the world to one another in the context of the globalization of the European institution of the nation-state has resulted in the emergence of the *international system of the states*. This system is, however, no more than a systemic interaction between the different units creating its whole. Unlike this international system of formal interaction, an international society of states "exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values . . . conceive of themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another" (Bull 1977, 13). No prudent observer would deny the existence of universal rules in

the international system even though the relations between the states forming this system are more or less based on formal interaction. It follows that our world is a mixture of an interactive system and a norms- and values-centered society, even though the two cannot be equated with each other.

The findings of the present analysis can be summarized by stating that there are different grammars of humanism based on diversity. They do, however, resemble one another; this resemblance underpins the concept of cross-cultural international morality. One can connect the international system of states to an international society that shares common values in a changing world of tensions and conflicts. This bridging between the system and society on the grounds of humanism could bring people of different civilizations closer to one another. The imperative of honoring the natural and historically developed subdivision of humanity into local cultures and regional civilizations leads, in the realities of international relations, to viewing groups of states as civilizational state communities. In so doing, I do not follow Samuel Huntington (1996), who replaces the earlier existing state blocs of the bipolar world with the envisaged new state blocs of civilizations. It is extremely difficult to identify one or more core states in each civilization eligible to function as a leading power. In Islamic civilization this is quite impossible. Civilizations are too diverse in their inner relations and thus may not allow such a structure as that envisaged by Huntington. However, in their external relations, civilizations emphasize their common values. The place of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in post-bipolar world politics and value conflicts between civilizationally divergent communities is a case in point.

Having stated the issue and analyzed it, the question remains: what are the future prospects? One must at first acknowledge the diversity of humanisms in tune with the diversity of civilizations. Humanity is embedded in a "heterogeneity of civilizations." To avoid a clash between them, the idea of a core of values based on humanism could lead to a consensus on secular democracy and individual human rights to be shared by all of humanity.

The concern to establish cross-cultural human rights based on humanism was the driver of the reasoning of cross-cultural scholars acting at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. Their thinking was continued at the Norwegian Institute for Human Rights.[21] It is related to an idea of an Islamic grammar of humanism. This concept provides a cultural underpinning for democracy

and human rights in the world of Islam. This is a strategy for bridging the civilizations that concedes that an ethical potential of humanism is available for an agreement on basic values to be shared.

The assumption of cross-cultural bridging acknowledges the differences between local cultures and regional civilizations. Political correctness and cultural nihilism, in contrast, deny these realities. In fact, these political correctness–driven attitudes of blinding oneself vis-à-vis cultural differences are a highly risky and self-defeating way of dealing with realities in which cultures and civilizations are moving to center stage. In a very important Islamic–Western dialogue held in Karachi, the basic formula for this dialogue was "how to deal with the differences." In order to further pursue this goal, one needs first to be in a position to acknowledge these differences. Finding ways of dealing with differences that generate tensions should be the substance of the dialogue to avert a clash of civilizations. It follows that any denial of differences not only results subsequently in damaging a fruitful dialogue, but also undermines efforts at establishing a cross-cultural humanism. Do not be mistaken: the differences in value systems generate conflict. These differences do not result from a cultural misunderstanding, as some would like to believe. Their belief is merely an effort aimed at bypassing the pending issues to evade a hot-button debate.

### Conclusions

The bottom line is civilizations are diverse, and each has its own model and value system. When they compete, cultural tensions arise, leading to conflict. Intercultural bridging is the remedy. The current pattern of globalization generates great challenge and compels one to rethink old wisdom and to develop new insights. The idea of various grammars of humanism that are supposed to exist in a variety of civilizations—such as Islam and the West—suggests the existence of universal core values that can be shared by diverse cultures and civilizations even though these differ from one another. It is argued that humanism is the embodiment of these core values and therefore could serve as a connection between the civilizations in the search for commonalities.

The twenty-first century is a time of radical change toward a more intensifying globalization. This process affects the centrality of Europe. Does it imply a demise of Europe and its humanism in favor of other models in the name

of overcoming Eurocentrism? Among the existing future prospects one finds the prediction that some non-Western countries (such as China and India) will move to the fore. There is also the American belief in a standardized McWorld culture. The sense that our world is "McDonaldizing" (in other words, culturally standardizing) is not only based on a misperception, it also implies that the American culture of consumption is its central meaning. It is silly to view the revolt against the West as a "Jihad versus McWorld"; Benjamin Barber's (1996) book of this title expresses American naïveté, not the substance of the conflict. We need to acknowledge the reality Aron addressed in 1962 as "heterogeneity of civilizations" as a precondition for the unfolding of an international morality based on humanism. In this understanding, an Islamic revival of *falsafa* rationalism as the source of the Islamic grammar of humanism could provide a connection to the European variety of humanism and even share with it a common history, that of the adoption of Hellenism.

In a situation of competing rival civilizations and their religions, a reference to the earlier encounters between the West and Islam based on humanism also has policy implications. To point out a "common heritage" of both civilizations is to provide a good starter for a dialogue that should not be fearful of addressing points of difference. They have to be acknowledged. However, difference should not be essentialized. Indeed, cultural difference and humanism can be combined to accommodate diversity. However, if "difference" contradicts humanism, then one must have the right to veto any cultural particularism. The mindset of cultural relativism that prohibits this veto results in "anything-goes" thinking and is therefore self-defeating.

In the world of Islam there is a call for a return of history, reviving collective memories about Islamic glory. This glory could be defined in different ways. Is it the glory of Islamic *jihad* conquests? Or is it the glory of the grammar of Islamic humanism? This is a question of high pertinence for the twenty-first century. Due to inner-Islamic diversity, there are different Islamic options and therefore different answers to these questions. It follows that there are tensions between rival traditions within Islam itself: the grammar of Islamic humanism and Shari'a reasoning. In this article I argue for a revival of humanist tradition in Islam. In our present post-bipolar age of intercivilizational value conflict, humanism builds bridges. By contrast, claims to remake the world on the basis of Shari'a reasoning alienate Muslims from the rest of humanity. The Islamist

project of a "Shari'a state" also contributes to polarization also within the Islamic *umma*. In contrast, the revival of the tradition of Islamic humanist rationalism (as in al-Jabri's project) bridges contemporary Islamic civilization with the non-Muslim other in a context of pluralism (see Gelb and Roth 2012). John Kelsay (2011) is right when he dismisses Irene Oh's (2011) view that contemporary Shari'a promotes democratization. No, it does not. The conflict is within Islam: It is between the tradition of humanism and the invented tradition cited in the contemporary Shari'atization of Islam.[22] This inner-Islamic conflict matters to non-Muslims because Shari'a Islamism creates civilizational fault lines on a global scale, while the tradition of Islamic humanism provides a record of cross-civilizational bridging (see Tibi 2009a, 2012a).

### Notes

1. On these inner-Islamic traditions and the related competition, see Tibi (1993a, 87–174).
2. See Lipson (1993, 63–66). The German Jewish scientist Edgar Zilsch (1976, 49–61), who fled Germany in 1938, acknowledges the Islamic humanist contribution to the rise of a modern science in the West based on humanism. He traces the roots of modern science back to the combination of humanism and engineering.
3. On the significant difference between the analytical notion of "conflict" and Samuel P. Huntington's "clash," see Tibi (2012a, esp. chap. 1). In *The Clash of Civilizations* Samuel P. Huntington (1996) engages in binaries and distorts the basic issues. For a critique see the volume by Herzog (1999).
4. The German translation of this work was published in 1986 by S. Fischer in Frankfurt/Main. This historical fact of a civilizational heterogeneity contradicts the highly flawed contribution by Richard Bulliet (2004).
5. Al-Jabri started his career with the major monograph *Fikr Ibn Khaldun* (n.d.) and continued with dozens of highly influential books. For the present article, *al-Turath wa al-hadatha* (1991) is the most important one; see also al-Jabri and Hanafi (1990).
6. Humanism is a civilizational worldview. The terms culture and civilization are not used here interchangeably. By culture I mean a local social production of meaning, while civilization refers to a grouping of local cultures characterized by family resemblance. These cultures are related to one another through shared values and worldviews. On Islam as a civilization, see Hodgson (1974).
7. For an example of such a view of modernity, see Habermas (1987, 17). This modernity is based on Max Weber's notion of *Die Entzauberung der Welt* (the disenchantment of the world) (1964, 317).
8. The great German philosopher Ernst Bloch inspired me when I was an undergraduate when he in our first encounter gave me his book, *Avicenna und die*

*Aristotelische Linke* (1963), with a personal dedication. With it I began to study Islamic humanism. Bloch praised Islamic humanism and argued against the Islamic orthodoxy that he dubbed the "*Mufti Welt*" (Mufti world) of the *fiqh*.

9. On this subject see Duran on Averroes (1126–98) (1981, 47, 538, 539), and on Avicenna (980–1037) (1981, 537).

10. For more details see Tibi (2008, esp. chapters 5 and 6).

11. On the options see Tibi (2006, 2010b).

12. On *falsafa*, see the contributions included in *The Cambridge Companion to Arab Philosophy* (Adamson and Taylor 2005). On Islam and the European Renaissance, see Tibi (1999, chap. 5).

13. Qaradawi argues against civilizational borrowing with the defamation of *al-hulul al-mustawradah* (the imported solution). In volume 1 of the trilogy *Hatimiyyat al-hall al-Islami* ("The Islamic Solution") he contests the Greek origins of democracy and dismisses secular humanism altogether in his Islamist project of a cultural purification.

14. On the possibilities of preventing a clash of civilizations, see Herzog (1999), including my essay "International Morality and Cross-Cultural Bridging."

15. On the political philosophy of al-Farabi, see Tibi (1996, chap. 4). Farabi's (1985) seminal work *al-Madina al-fadila* is a rationalist alternative to the Islamist variety of Shari'a reasoning that culminates in the call for a Shari'a state.

16. On the meaning of the institutionalization of cultural innovations see Wuthnow (1987, chap. 8). On the exclusion of *falsafa* rationalism from traditional Muslim education, see Makdisi (1981, 75–76).

17. See the classic by Apter (1965).

18. See Geertz (1973), and also Tibi (1990, chap. 1), which employs the approach of Geertz.

19. In this context, the process described by Von Laue (1987) is being reversed to de-Westernization.

20. See Tibi (1998, chap. 7). To be sure, the notion "war of civilizations" is not about the "military," but about a war of ideas and worldviews.

21. See the published results in Deng and an-Na'im (1990, chapter 5). See also Schmiegelow (1997), which includes my chapter on Islam and democracy. See also the Oslo papers published in Lindholm and Vogts (1993).

22. See the chapters on Shari'a and democracy in Tibi (2012b) for my argument that the Shari'a state runs against real democratization and against those projects (such as al-Jabri's project) that lay cultural foundations for such a venture.

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