Introduction: Faith and Culture

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'Have they not travelled through the land?
Have they no hearts (or minds) to learn wisdom,
or ears to hear the Truth?'
Quran, 22: 46

*'The arts (*al-adab*) belonging to fine culture are ten: Three*
Shahradjanic (playing lute, chess, and with the javelin),
three Nushirwanic (medicine, mathematics and equestrian
art), three Arabic (poetry, genealogy and knowledge of
history); but the tenth excels all: the knowledge of the stories
which people put forward in their friendly gatherings.'
Wazir al-Hasan b. Sahl, 9th-century Baghdad[1]

In a post-September 11 world where a prime image of the Muslim appears to be that of the *jihadi,* the warrior in the path of God, it is well to remember that the *hakawati*, the storyteller, looms far larger in the making of Islam's many civilisations. True, no tradition – whether secular or sacred – can exist without its narratives. How else are the aspirations, laments and identities that make (and remake) a tradition to be captured? In Muslim societies and communities, however, the place reserved for the narrator has been a very special one. The fables and sketches of wandering

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[1] Quoted in J.D. Dodds, et al, *The Arts of Intimacy: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Making of Castilian Culture* (New Haven and London, 2008), p. 229.

dervishes, seasoned sailors and coffeehouse entertainers vie for attention with the colourful accounts of court chroniclers and the parables of jurists and preachers. Even the trickster has his space, peddling yarns at the expense of inept officials and nobles of excessive wealth.

'Listen. Allow me to be your god. Let me take you on a journey beyond imagining. Let me tell you a story.' Thus begins Rabih Alameddine's *The Hakawati*, a celebration of a cultural institution that includes memories such as this:

> It is said that in the eighteenth century, in a café in Aleppo, the great one, Ahmad al-Saidawi, once told the story of King Baybars for three hundred and seventy-two evenings, which may or may not have been a record. It is also said that al-Saidawi cut the story short because the Ottoman governor begged him to finish it . . .'[2]

The *jihadi*, too, needs a narrative. But an exclusivist and puritanical tenor must compete with a lively mistrust that runs through Muslim cultural narratives when it comes to figures that flaunt their piety and loudly proclaim to know the will of God. There is also a stubborn cosmopolitanism that takes delight in the narratives of others, beginning with the Quran itself in its affirmation of Jewish and Christian stories as part of the foundational teaching of the Prophet Muhammad. The 'Abrahamic' tradition common to Christians, Jews and Muslims stands in the way of a zealous insistence on a God who plays favourites. Not surprisingly, that spirit is caught in Muslim narratives that range freely across Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian and African traditions, among others, in the unfolding of values in the real world. The *hakawati* is not about to let a fine tale go to waste merely because its earliest sources are Indian or Chinese.

Shehrazade makes this inclusive generosity familiar in the

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[2] *The Hakawati* (New York, 2008), p. 36. On the vital role of stories in Muslim culture and teaching, see Eric Ormsby's chapter, 'Literature', in Amyn B. Sajoo, ed., *A Companion to Muslim Ethics* (London, 2010), and John Renard, 'Heroic Themes', in Amyn B. Sajoo, ed., *Muslim Modernities: Expressions of the Civil Imagination* (London, 2008), pp. 51-72.

Thousand and One Nights, where she expertly spins her nightly tales from a stock of Perso-Indian fables to ward off the king's executioner. Still more universal in borrowing from an array of indigenous cultures are the stories of the *Hamzanama*, told not only in Arabic and Persian but also in Turkish, Urdu, Georgian and Malay. At the heart of the tales is Amir Hamza, named after the Prophet's uncle who, after his conversion around 615 CE, became a gallant supporter of Muhammad; but there are local 'Hamza' figures too, like the sixth-century Persian king Anushirwan, and Hamza b. Abdullah who fought the Abbasid ruler Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809). The *Hamzanama* has an exuberant energy: good and evil clash with relentless wit and humour on a cosmic plane that knows no bounds of gravity or time. Unlike the *Thousand and One Nights*, the *Hamzanama* was purely oral – until the commissioning of manuscripts in India, first in the mid-15th century, then in its grandest form by the Mughal emperor Akbar between 1557 and 1573.[3]

It may well have been the oral nature of the *Hamzanama* which gave it the fluid and ultra-cosmopolitan flavour that appealed to Akbar's famously pluralist sensibility. The *dastango*, as the storyteller was known in South Asian settings, could embellish each tale with local twists and turns: sorcerers travelled on flying urns rather than carpets, for example.[4]

But what distinguishes the Mughal court's contribution to the tales was a trove of paintings to accompany the stories, done in Central Asian, Persian, regional Indian and European styles. In fact, the actual texts are rather terse; the paintings, on the other hand, are graphic and far exceed the traditional Persian-miniature scale. This suggests that court narrators delivered the stories each time with fresh colour, unconfined by a tight script, while the paintings were displayed for the visual pleasure of the audience.

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[3] See John Seyller, *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India* (Washington, DC, 2002), the most detailed account of the surviving manuscripts and accompanying depictions.

[4] William Dalrymple, 'Eat Your Heart Out, Homer', *New York Times*, January 6 (2008), on the new translation by M.A. Farooqi of Ghalib Lakhnavi and Abdullah Bilgrami, *The Adventures of Amir Hamza* (New York, 2008).

After all, the point of such an orchestration was to entertain and edify much like a modern cinematic or stage performance.

Two examples of the pictorial *Hamzanama* appear in this volume, on the cover and in Plate 1. The former depicts an episode in which the wily Mahiya, disguised as a fruit vendor, is accompanied by the spy Zambur as they search for Prince Ibrahim's kidnapped spouse, Khwarmah. Along the way, they encounter an unhappy medicine woman, Ustad Khatun, whom Mahiya promptly befriends, seeing her as a cover as well as a possible lead in her search. Although the painting is filled with architectural and street detail, it is the action that matters: the women occupy centre stage, with their expressive motions and gestures. The same is true of the episode in Plate 1, where Prince Farrukh-Nizhad responds to a pair of villainous brothers who had just taken hold of the front and back legs of an elephant, defying the 'God-worshippers' to match such strength. In response, Prince Farrukh-Nizhad comes forward with the retort, 'Two people, one elephant . . .?', and seizes the beast all by himself. The brothers are suitably chastened by this display and promptly submit to the Prince's faith, Islam. A cartoon-like thrust marks the paintings, consistent with their function; yet there is a delicacy to the keen appreciation of nature in the plentiful trees and grasses as well as the vivid animals.[5]

This relishing of graphic humour and ridicule in such full measure surely has a message for our times. Orthodoxies that imagine an austere and unitary Islam are reminded of the manifold cultural expressions that have always shaped its lived experience and meaning. Nor will it do to reduce the complexity of *political* conflicts to 'Islam' as a faith, or as a single civilisation. A case in point is the controversy over the Danish media cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in 2005. The vocal distress of Muslims had much to do with the bigotry directed at their faith in the guise of free expression,[6] rather than a supposed cultural inability to grasp the nature of satire.

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[5] Seyller, *Adventures of Hamza*, pp. 165, 186.

[6] John L. Esposito and Delia Mogahed, ed., *Who Speaks for Islam?* (New York, 2007), pp. 142-144, drawing on a worldwide Gallup sampling of opinion among Muslims as well as non-Muslims.

Failing to understand this merely feeds the myth of a 'clash of civilisations', in which the cultural distance between Islam and the West is thought to provide a decisive explanation of all manner of ideological differences. Even before our age of globalisation and mass migration, it is the *overlapping* nature of cultural traditions that marks the history of civilisations. Narratives of denial in this regard must contend with the evidence presented in this volume from the far-flung domains of the Muslim world.

'If God had willed, He would have made you a single community'

As Islam's founding figure, the Prophet Muhammad (570–632 CE) was tasked not only with conveying the Revelation but also with putting into place its ethical framework. This was as true in the realm of duties toward God (*ibadat*) as it was in the details of social relations among the faithful (*muamalat*). Muhammad's dual role is fully evident in the 'Constitution of Medina' (c. 622 CE), the concluding part of which affirms him both as a 'messenger' and as 'protector' of the faithful covenanters.[7] A defining aspect of the ethical framework at large were the 'pillars' of the faith: bearing witness to God and his prophet, ritual prayer, alms-giving, fasting and pilgrimage. The body of normative guidance that grew out of the original framework, during and after the time of Muhammad, came to be called the sharia (from *shar*, 'the way').

A commonly-heard narrative about the sharia is that it stands for the 'divine law', and hence binds Muslims everywhere for all time. In support of this universalist view is invoked the Quranic verse, 'Now we have set you on a clear religious path, so follow it' (45:18). Yet the 'path' here, or 'the way' of the sharia, is clearly an ethical compass – which came to give birth over time to the Muslim legal tradition or *fiqh*. Precisely because the Quran is *not* a book

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[7] See Said Amir Arjomand, 'The Constitution of Medina: A Sociolegal Interpretation of Muhammad's Acts of Foundation of the *Umma*', *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 41 (2009), pp. 555-575, notably at p. 570.

of laws; human endeavour has been required to construct the *fiqh*. The stock of Quranic commandments that the legal tradition could build on was actually fairly small. 'If divine guidance is needed, it is for the purpose of setting human life in good order', notes the eminent sharia scholar Wael Hallaq, 'not to control or discipline, the two most salient missions of modern law and the modern state that commands it.'[8] Indeed, there is continuity from pre-Islamic practice in many of the Quran's norms on a whole range of matters, both sacred and secular; it is the moral content of the Revelation that injects fresh meaning into the practices. The pilgrimage to the Kaaba, for example, took an established pagan practice – which gave Mecca its particular significance as an urban hub – and transformed it into one of Islam's pillars.

What was distinctive about these transformations was the community or umma as the ethical and social context in which they were located. Time and again, the Quran invokes this collective ideal (e.g. 3:104), one of both solidarity and a common under-standing with regard to what is entailed for the individual Muslim. Just as the cultural practices of pre-Islamic Arabia and beyond were appropriated into 'Islam', so, inevitably, were the cultural realities of the growing Muslim world becoming part of how the umma experienced solidarity and shared its understanding. Quranic values, in all their universality, had to find practical expression in the particulars of various cultures. Modesty as a teaching might fit into a local practice of veiling, or more radically into a full face covering or *niqab*, or simply an avoidance of ostentatious display. The *masjid* as a space for prayer could be encased within minarets and domes in the Middle East, pagoda-like structures in East Asia, and turreted earthen buildings in West Africa. Charity as a core scriptural value found expression in many societies through the *waqf* or endowment for public benefit, to which there is no reference at all in the Quran.

What are often thought of in the West as peculiarly 'Islamic' features of the faith are no more than local cultural choices that

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[8] Wael Hallaq, *The Shari'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 84.

have been adopted far and wide. Muslim names, for instance, are almost always derived from Arabic and Persian roots; no theology requires this, any more than it requires breaking the Ramadan fast with dates, in affectionate memory of the Prophet's practice. Or consider the punishments attached to 'sharia offences' like murder, theft and adultery; lashings, amputations and stoning are said to be proper responses in keeping with what is required by the Quran or foundational Islamic practice. Yet these *hudud* punishments are part of the cultural milieu of antiquity in which Muhammad's Arabia was situated, with its patriarchy and codes of justice.[9] One may sacralise either the punishments, insisting that cultural practices are fixed for all time, or the teaching that says the offences are serious violations of one's covenant with the divine. The idea that specific practices are the *only* way to express the underlying ethics is belied by the fact that societies habitually leave behind practices that are now deemed to violate the cherished values that they were once felt to uphold. Examples include public executions, castrations, and incarcerating people with mental disabilities; more broadly, all societies undergo shifts in expectations with regard to modes of governance, communication and social etiquette.

Diversity and change rather than a rigid uniformity is the norm within the Quran itself and in the outlook of Islam's foundational phase, including the nascent legal tradition. After all, the new Revelation was presumed to renew and refresh the traditions of the 'People of the Book' (Jews and Christians). Lest Muslims take this to mean a license to impose their understanding of the faith upon others, the Quran warns, 'If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you' (5:48). Constancy may be a mark of one's faith; but fixity, in human interpretation of divine guidance, was not the natural order of things. Salvation is not the exclusive preserve of Muslims, according to the Quran: 'All those who believe – the Jews, the Sabians, the Christians – anyone who believes in

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[9] See the chapters by Reza Aslan and Azizah al-Hibri in Amyn B. Sajoo, ed., *A Companion to the Muslim World* (London, 2009).

God and the Last Days, and who does good deeds, will have nothing to fear or regret' (5:69).

Numerous instances from Muhammad's life and that of his earliest successors speak to an acute sensitivity to cultural diversity and change in the practice of the faith. The Constitution of Medina required only that the city's various religious and tribal communities pledge loyalty to shared civic principles and to Muhammad's authority as the overseer, with no 'Islamic' test for membership in an inclusive umma. On the contrary, a host of non-Muslim practices in matters such as the direction of prayer, dietary constraints and taxation were adopted by the Prophet; he also encouraged Muslims to marry Jews, and did so himself. In a fine appreciation of the difference between values and forms, the caliph Umar (r.634–644) agreed to a request from Christian communities to have their poll tax (*jizya*) referred to as the Muslim *zakat* (alms-giving) on grounds of dignity; earlier, Muhammad waived the *jizya* altogether for non-Muslims who were felt not to merit the burden.[10] For the caliph Ali (r.656–661), a primary truth to be faced by all governors was the need for familiarity with the actual ways of the governed, each of whom was 'either your brother in religion or your like in creation'.[11]

That such a pluralist spirit is in tension with the preference for the particulars of one's own cultural ways is evident in the histories of all faith traditions. For Muslims, whose heritage is born of civilisations that have spanned Asian, Afro-Arab and European domains, the tension is undeniable. The cosmopolitanism that runs through the articulation and expressive practice of the faith immediately raises for some the need for separateness. Indeed, Muhammad's openness to the ways of Christians, Jews and others has sometimes been taken as evidence of a lack of originality, and worse, as leading to the triumph of ideology over a lean theology.

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[10] Khaled Abu El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston, 2002), p. 22, noting that the tax was clearly not a theological matter but a rather a pragmatic one, 'in response to a specific set of historical circumstances'.

[11] Ali's Instruction to Malik al-Ashtar: Letter 33, *Nahj al-balagha*, tr. Sayid Ali Reza as *Peak of Eloquence* (New York, 1996), pp. 535, 544.

It is true that there have been phases in Muslim history when narrow cultural preferences in law and theology have stifled rich discourses in ethics and philosophy. A prime example is the traditionalism of the Asharites, on whose behalf al-Ghazali (1058–111) wielded potent influence against the liberal rationalism of the Mutazilites.[12]

Some might see echoes of that tide in our own time, especially in the rise of absolutist tendencies in the name of a unitary Islam. But these conservative assaults are sparked by the firm embedding of the theological and ethical traditions in diverse cultural realities – wherein is their enduring strength.

'That you may know one another'

The attachment to particular forms of religious expression as 'distinctive' points to a key aspect of the relationship between faith and culture: the demands of identity. Religions, after all, seek to offer responses to questions such as 'Who are we?' and 'What gives meaning to our lives?' Answers that categorically embrace a single, exclusive view of the world have an instant attraction, just as they do in a secular context such as nationalism. Defining oneself or one's outlook *against* those of others has the appeal not only of clarity, but also of allowing the opportunity to cast one's own side as superior in merit even as a victim more deserving of justice. In this vein, cultural forms that lend themselves to supporting a well-defined and exclusive religious identity will trump less distinctive forms. The symbolic value of a minaret or *hijab*, like that of a cross or *yarmulke*, is as obvious as that of a national flag. All serve as markers of identity, staking out their particular ways of being in and seeing the world.

These symbols are important in fostering solidarity, a prized ethical value in faith traditions such as Islam. As the work of Bryan S. Turner and Robert Putnam on religion and civil society has shown, such solidarity has been a strong source of social capital

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[12] George F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge, 1985), notably pp. 98-166.

with which to develop empathy and a civic sensibility. Yet this binding can also spur social polarisation and 'enclave' communities with inward-looking 'rituals of intimacy', especially in migrant communities.[13] Like secular nationalism, faith traditions may appeal to the best and the worst in the human quest for identity, with cultural symbols serving as handy tools of mobilisation. Much has been written about the waves of globalisation that wash over local traditions, both secular and sacred, in matters ranging from commerce and social taste to political preferences. The ensuing revolt of the local against the global, or 'localism', has also been noted the world over, whether in politics or cultural life; it is a reminder of the human attachment to indigenous particulars.

Far from being a modern sentiment, the stubborn preference for what is regarded as 'one's own' is, of course, a deeply rooted impulse. The very term 'rootedness' speaks to the positioning of individuals and communities in their native soil. A poignant reminder of this sentiment comes from a 12th-century observation by Hugo of St. Victor, a monk from Saxony:

> The person who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign place. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong person has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his.[14]

By the same token, finding the homeland of others as sweet as if it were one's own patch also draws an admonition. When the all-conquering Alexander inquires as to why his territorial gains in fourth-century India fail to impress the local philosophers, Jain thinkers tell him: 'King Alexander, every man can possess only so

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[13] See especially Bryan S, Turner, ed., *Religious Diversity and Civil Society* (Oxford, 2008), notably at pp. 49-71; Robert Putnam (with David Campbell), *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, 2010).

[14] Quoted in Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993), p. 335.

much of the earth's surface as this we are standing on . . . You will soon be dead, and then you will own just as much of the earth as will suffice to bury you.'[15]

The twin perils of parochialism, a smallness of self in the world, and of triumphalism, an undue enlargement of the self in relation to others, are opposite sides of the same coin. For the medieval historian Ibn Khaldun, the power of communal attachments or *asabiyya* – was best on display in small kinship groups and tribes – in the absence of which civilisations lost their cohesion and underwent decline. Only religion could trump *asabiyya*, though without denying it; rather, it did so by reconfiguring it in the shape of the umma, whose bonds are not defined by kinship but by ethical commitments. Telling Muslims that solidarity was a favoured value in the eyes of God, as the Quran repeatedly urged, clearly required navigating between parochialism and triumphalism. This was all the more critical with the swift and extraordinary growth of Islam as faith and empire. And the moral balance is signalled in the Quran itself, in proclaiming diversity as part of the divine plan:

> O mankind! We created you from a single man and a single woman, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). (49:13)

Pluralism in culture and identity is cast here not as a passive reality, but as a project: human communities are expected to 'know each other' as a fulfilment of the covenant with God. The expectation is explicitly aimed at all of mankind, not a particular community. *Asabiyya* is recognised as part of the warp and woof of human society – then treated as an opportunity and a duty to widen horizons. In keeping with the sense of a project, this vision fits into the constant Quranic urging to pursue knowledge; there is even gentle mocking of those who fail to get around and use their eyes and ears in understanding their world (22:46, quoted in the epigraph to this chapter). Cultural pluralism, in other

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[15] Peter Green, *Alexander of Macedon, 356-323 B.C.: A Historical Biography* (Berkeley, CA, 1992), p. 428.

words, does not just happen; it is an outlook that requires cultivation. The challenge begins with the very first revelation, where Muhammad is told to 'Read in the name of thy Lord . . . Who taught by the pen . . . Taught man that which he knew not' (96:1–5). He soon launches into a long and intense dialogue with Christians and Jews as to the implications of this and what is to follow, since the teaching is but the latest phase in a long history.

This embrace of a Muslim identity that was pluralist in the making laid the foundations for a complex narrative. How could it be otherwise in the unfolding of an umma whose member-groups spanned all of the Middle East and Mediterranean, the Balkans, vast tracts of Asia and much of sub-Saharan Africa? Arabic, the language of the Quran, is spoken by less than a quarter of the world's Muslims. Local custom or *adat* has deeply influenced how a Muslim, whether Shia or Sunni, actually puts into practice the norms of theology, ethics and law, including the very 'pillars' of the faith. Spiritual orders, to which millions of Muslims belong, mostly have a regional identity, from West Africa to Central Asia. Western China and Indonesia have been radically different environments for centuries-old Muslim communities – no less than contemporary France or the United States. 'Diaspora identity' is hardly a modern idea; its novelty can only be asserted in a narrative which ignores Islam's pluralist reality from the outset. In each locale, the social relationship between Muslims and other communities has had a formative role in how identity is constructed.

Modernity has made identity more sensitive than ever to competing claims, because the globalised world we inhabit makes us more aware of the multitudes in our midst; and the demands of civic membership today (from citizenship to civil society) require us to 'belong' in more places than one. In principle, this pluralist narrative of identity is at one with the outlook professed by the earliest umma: the inclusive thrust of the Constitution of Medina was premised on civic as well as religious membership, not to mention clan affinities. Yet the challenge of accommodating the multiple identities that stem from today's national and global landscapes is acute, and not for Muslim societies alone. A useful point of departure might be to acknowledge that modernity itself

is the outcome of varied journeys. The western tussle of Church and State in the Enlightenment that began in the 17th century is one narrative that looms large, but there are others.

Muslim journeys to modernity share similarities and differences with the western one. The place of religion in public life, for example, fits into an enduring Islamic narrative of balance between the secular and sacred for individuals and communities. This frames how modern technology is perceived and applied, with its ethical implications; it is also true of cultural products such as art and, in varying degrees, music. Individual human rights, the rule of law and accountable governance are a vital part of this picture – as the world witnessed in the 'Arab Spring' of 2011, which will doubtless run its course for some time to come. Seeing Muslim identities as traditionalist and closed to the modern world finds little resonance; on other hand, both Muslims and non-Muslims hold strong negative stereotypes about one another, especially with regard to attributes of violence, arrogance and selfishness.[16] The social intimacies of modernity alone can offer no assurance that pluralist attitudes will readily prevail; there are yet more stories to be told in the unending quest to 'know one another'.

This *Companion*

Ancient deserts and today's urban landscapes may echo with the same call for upliftment, but in voices that come from very different everyday realities. Culture shapes every aspect of the relationship

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[16] See respectively the Pew Research Centre reports in the 'Global Attitudes Project' on opinions about democratic life and aspirations in Muslim-majority countries (Washington, DC, May 2011; accessible at http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1997/international-poll-arab-spring-us-obama-image-muslim-publics); and in the 'Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life' (Washington, DC, October 2007; accessible at http://pewforum.org/Politics-and-Elections/Widespread-Negativity-Muslims-Distrust-Westerners-More-than-Vice-Versa.aspx). See also Pankaj Mishra's review of a spate of 'mainstream' literature that feeds into the post-September 11 paranoia, notably in Europe: 'A culture of fear', *The Guardian*, 15 August 2009 (accessible at http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/aug/15/eurabia-islamophobia-europe-colonised-muslims).

between God and the believer – as well as among believers, and
with those beyond the fold. Fasts, prayers and pilgrimages are
attuned to social rhythms old and new, no less than the designs
of mosques and public gardens, the making of 'religious' art and
music, and ways of thinking about physical wellbeing. Scripture
itself, as Muhammad knew, is ever seen through a cultural lens;
language and what it says are intimately tied to the context. The
cosmopolitanism that runs through Muslim history from the
beginning recalls T.S. Eliot's remark that culture is 'that which
makes life worth living', a space where human flourishing occurs
in all its intricacy.[17] It is where the deepest religious values are
understood and practised: Muslims have never been content with
an easy separation of faith from daily life, public or private.

What are the implications of this holistic view in a diverse
world of Muslims and non-Muslims? How do core ethical values
interface with the dense particulars of local cultures, especially
when gender and the social order are affected? The answers, at a
time when secular and Muslim identities often seem to be locked
in conflict, are explored in the chapters that follow. They treat
neither culture nor the identities that emerge from it as fixed –
mindful too that the world's 1.6 billion Muslims belong to a myriad
of cultures. Earle Waugh brings this home in his colourful survey
of 'everyday piety' not only around the Quran but also Muhammad,
the Shia Imams and saintly figures whose tombs can be places of
uniquely evocative practises. Secular culture may also serve religious
ends in highly non-traditional ways, such as when 'Muslim rap'
makes the music charts. Objects like rosaries or, in Egypt, the eye
of Horus, can acquire a sacred quality through use in rituals.
Waugh regards popular piety as engaging key aspects of how we
see ourselves and our solidarities; as such, it becomes 'an essential
part of the journey of modernity'.

But if religious expression is to extend into the public domain
where it must coexist with secular (and other religious) identities,

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[17] T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London, 1948), p. 27;
T. Bennett, 'Culture', in T. Bennett, et al, ed., *New Keywords: A Revised
Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 63-69.

what is the proper role of the state? Abdullahi An-Naim's chapter revisits the common understanding of the sharia as an institution embedded in the cultural evolution of Muslim societies, and its relationship with modern constitutions as the framework of the state. While the ethical tenets of the sharia make it the 'passageway' into the faith, he distinguishes sharply its interpretive heritage, of which the legal tradition (*fiqh*) is a part. There is 'certainly more to Islam than the sharia, which is only part of the rich experience of being a Muslim', notes An-Naim. The individual's *voluntary* submission is of the essence in the theology of the sharia itself, and it is impaired by any coercion. Claims by the state to be its enforcer are exercises in secular politics, and violate the civic pluralism to which both Islamic and contemporary human rights principles hold the state accountable. An-Naim recognises that this outlook requires a struggle for 'cultural legitimacy' in each society; the prize is genuinely equal citizenship as the basis for religious freedom.

That freedom is vital not merely in public expressions of faith but in spiritual life as well. And it is about more than political freedom alone, as Carl Ernst shows in his chapter on the extra-ordinarily varied expressions of spirituality in Islam's past and present. Sufi traditions that celebrate the inner experience of faith are found everywhere in the Muslim world, but though rooted in the Quran (and Muhammad's own practice), they have run afoul of orthodoxies that seek to regulate worship, sometimes forcibly. Ironically, it is modernity that has generated some of the fiercest puritanism, including Protestant forms in the West, in the name of an egalitarian ethic that opposes the saintly hierarchies and veneration of Sufi orders. Yet there has always been a place in religiosity for what Ernst calls 'spiritual athletes, who through a combination of effort and divine grace have achieved special status' as 'keepers of the gate on the path to the inner sanctum'. This extends to cultural expressions such as art and even cinema, where the appreciation of beauty is cast as an integral aspect of the spiritual unity of creation. An-Naim would argue that the safe-guarding of all these forms of religiosity is what modern consti-tutionalism is about, in keeping here with Islam's inclusive ethos.

Perhaps nowhere is the influence of culture on 'religious' identities as robust as when the status of women is concerned. From the earliest days, as Elena Caprioni and Eva Sajoo note in their chapter, the tension between the ethical and social voices in Muslim society has gendered faith and its practice – part of a global reality in which women have been 'used as ideological markers by political and religious groups, from Soviet Communists to Christian fundamentalists'. Caprioni and Sajoo find that women in Afghanistan and China's Xinjiang region often apply those markers to themselves, affirming social stereotypes believed to have the support of the Quran (despite its assertion of the moral equality of the sexes). 'Firewood serves for winter, a wife serves for her husband's pleasure', and 'Allah is God for a woman, the husband is half God' are proverbs heard among Uyghur women in Xinjiang. Similar sentiments prevail under the *pashtunwali*, a patriarchal code that binds Afghanistan's largest ethnic group, the Pashtun. While communist and western ideologies may seem to offer the best prospect of equality, many have looked to the emancipatory 'models of womanhood' within Islam. The interplay of faith and culture, it turns out, 'cannot be reduced to a simple choice between identity and freedom'.

The choices can be at least as difficult for women and men alike in the face of new reproductive technologies, with their promise of fertility treatments in settings which also cherish traditional forms of kinship. Morgan Clarke finds that the availability of in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) in the Middle East since the 1980s has enjoyed the blessing of the religious and political establishment, sympathetic to the needs of infertile couples. But what of the public at large where legitimacy for such choices, including with regard to donor eggs and sperm, is ultimately determined? With its array of faith traditions, Lebanon is an especially rewarding testing ground: distinctive stances are taken even within Christian, Jewish, Shia and Sunni communities. As the technologies and their social implications have shown themselves to be increasingly complex, Clarke traces the shifts in official and public responses – and reveals how innovative religious perspectives can be, notably among Shia clerics who have generally

been the most permissive in their rulings. That 'Islam is not opposed to science and biomedicine as the secularist stereotype would have one believe' is a commonly held view among scholars, Clarke reports, harkening back to an age of outstanding scientific achievement in the medieval Middle East.

Heritage and modernity make similar claims in the built environment of Muslim cities, old and new, where civic and religious identities are tightly interlocked. Hussein Keshani's exploration of the role of architecture in shaping the everyday life of communities draws out an ethos at play from Samarkand and Isfahan to Fez and Zanzibar; here, stylistic grace and functionality know no easy barriers of secular and sacred. While the focus is on the civic environment – palace communities, urban fortifications, bathhouses, bazaars, public squares, gardens – there are recurrent themes that overlap with religious architecture. Wide reliance on arches, courtyards, pillared halls and elaborate screens (*mashrebiyya*s), for example, creates an 'ever-evolving group of aesthetic identities' around shared tastes. But as such local preferences are displaced by western tastes brought in by globalisation, is there a future for a 'Muslim' architecture? Keshani finds inspiration in the Historic Cities initiative of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, which since 1988 has evolved an approach to heritage that eschews both traditionalism and western imitation. Among its finest accomplishments is Cairo's Al-Azhar Park (Plate 9), now a model for civic projects in Asia and Africa. Meanwhile, the Trust's Award for Architecture is an ambitious bid to revive the creativity of modern building in the Muslim world.

A civic building that could be found in historic towns and cities from Mali to the Malay peninsula was the library (*maktaba*), whose prestige as an institution speaks to the status of the written word in Islam. In Jonathan Bloom's account of how paper thrived as a medium before the advent of print, libraries such as those of Umayyad Cordoba, Abbasid Baghdad, Buyid Shiraz and Fatimid Cairo are heroic measures of just how sophisticated the culture of writing was in Muslim lands. Even private collections could outstrip anything that a European library could muster, including Paris's mighty Sorbonne with its meagre 2000 books in the 14th

century. It was Chinese paper, made efficiently and cheaply in the Middle East, which made all this possible; suddenly everyone from artisans and astronomers to calligraphers, map-makers, poets and preachers used paper. Bloom regards the shift from 'oral to scribal culture' as so effective that it stalled interest in printing, which Europe mastered in the 15th century after learning from the Middle East how to make paper. Although the resistance to printing doubtless had a negative impact on economic and scientific development in the Muslim world, the aesthetics of a culture of the pen that included calligraphy and Persian miniatures thrived long and splendidly (Plates 10–18).

Among the glories of a 'paper culture' was the rising popularity in the ninth century of cookbooks in Muslim lands; a surviving one by al-Baghdadi classed food as the noblest of all the forms of pleasure, ahead of clothes, music, perfume and sex. One suspects that this had as much to do with the subtle delights of how and where the food was served as with what was on the plate, judging by Mai Yamani's chapter on culinary culture. That food is a central aspect of the ritual and social life of Muslims is no surprise; but locating her appraisal in Mecca, Yamani links the city's special status in Islam to the meeting of global traditions of cooking and serving. Such is the emphasis on hospitality that even in households with large domestic staffs, the 'people of the house' (*ahl al-bayt*) personally serve their guests – plying them with more food long after their appetites are sated, as required by the rules of etiquette. Still, al-Baghdadi's insistence that food is the greatest of pleasures is challenged by the sensory joys of music and its setting, in Jonathan Shannon's recollection of a concert in the Syrian city of Aleppo. Master vocalist Sabah Fakhri entertains his audience in a *nadi* (clubhouse) evening that stretches over more than five hours, where folk, classical-religious and contemporary songs culminate in an ecstatic dance (*saltana*) that has everyone in thrall. In Fakhri's popularity among the youth, despite his old-style rendition, Shannon sees a hunger for 'authenticity' in the profusion of synthetic sounds in techno-pop music.

Authenticity comes in many guises, of course. Shannon tells us of the longing for integrity in vocal performance, the emotional

honesty that characterises the *saltana*. Fakhri's concert brings this integrity to borrowings from an array of regional musical styles, with the backing of instruments that span even more cultural traditions. Like the many national cuisines that have contributed to 'Meccan food', or the diverse styles of building that have melded into what are considered Islamic forms of architecture or art, or the pluralist customary and legal contributions to the sharia itself, there is no escaping the sheer variety of ways in which Muslim lives are experienced. Yet this reality impels some to look for authenticity in a return to historical or cultural particulars that are thought of as inherently Islamic. Karim H. Karim calls attention to this 'anti-cosmopolitanism' (and not only among Muslims), of which al-Qaeda and the Taliban are obvious exemplars with their version of cultural and religious integrity. These impulses, Karim observes, are at odds with the 'everyday cosmopolitanism' so typical of the lived reality of Muslims, and rooted in the 'fundamental openness of *din* [faith] toward *dunya* [the world]' which is Islam's heritage.

Shahzia Sikander is a *hakawati* of sorts, a Pakistani-American Muslim who tells her stories of modernity through paintings which adapt the Persian miniature in utterly contemporary ways. In 'Pleasure Pillars' (Plate 2), done after the events of September 11, 2001, she gathers symbols of technology, mythology and tradition in lush and painstakingly fine detail. The narratives that tie them together are neither singular nor straightforward, but layered and overlapping. Familiar images and tales are made the subject of Sikander's 'personal meditations on the larger issues of culture and identity, tradition and modernity, Islam and the West'.[18] It comes as no surprise that she has won acclaim as among the most gifted young Muslim artists. Hindu and western cultural borrowings are integral to her work, and traditional styles are subverted. With her fellow storytellers in cinema, dance, poetry,

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[18] Glen Lowry, 'Gained in Translation', *Art News*, 5 (Mar 2006; accessible at http://www.artnews.com/2006/03/01/gained-in-translation/). See also Holland Cotter, 'What does Islamic Art Look Like?', *New York Times*, Feb 26, 2006 (accessible at http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/26/arts/design/26cott.html).

photography and cyber-art, she fits into an ethos where not only cultural cosmopolitanism but also displacement and the power of memory are pervasive . . . far beyond the familiar modern story of Palestine. The narrators of the *Hamzanama* would surely applaud.

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