NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Creating a Global Civilization that Nurtures Justice and Peace: *Sunan Kalijaga: International Journal of Islamic Civilization*

It is an honor to be asked to write this introduction. As a scholar of Ancient Greek civilization and culture, I have written extensively about Aristotle's classical virtues and how Greek culture was structured to try and cultivate those virtues. During my Fulbright Fellowship teaching Western Thought at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati in Bandung, Indonesia, I immediately recognized the compatibility between Aristotle's ethics and politics and Indonesia's *Pancasila.* In order for Indonesians to be good citizens within the democratic religious pluralism of *Pancasila,* they have to recognize the way all the world's religious traditions promote what I call the "classical" virtues that together constitute living wisely. Jesus, Muhammad, Confucius, Buddha, Rama and many other icons exercised those virtues. My essay in the first volume of this journal links the Islamic tradition in Indonesia with many types of "systems" thinking in all academic disciplines, and many types of "functionalist" thought based on quantum physics emerging in the 21st century.

The essays in this volume make a very important contribution to the creation of a global civilization. They explain why a legitimate understanding of Islamic civilization, its history, philosophy, theology, art, literature and architecture leads inevitably to the conclusion that Muslims who know Islamic history will seek out opportunities for intercultural and interfaith dialogues with people from other cultures who adhere to different ideologies.

The authors all make arguments for "what the paradigm of traditional religion may have to offer" (226) in the creation on a functional culture today. Specifically, they discuss some the "rich resources of the Islamic tradition as an example" of how all of these traditional, wisdom-based cultures may collectively provide a

foundation from which a new culture will emerge. This culture will not be "new" in the sense of "nothing like what came before." Rather, it would be part of the evolution of culture from less complex to more complex. This journal wants to guide these changes toward a civilization that weaves people together and leads to cultures that are stable, middle-class and diverse religiously and ideologically.

Lien Iffah Nar'atu Fina's article on Southeast Asian Art and Architecture gives a compelling argument for why "the abstraction of motifs is a more unified character of Islamic art than geometric designs" (218). The author notes the absence of calligraphy in Indonesian Islamic art and the architectural differences between some mosques in Indonesia and those in the Middle East. Fina links these examples to the broader, more important point about Islam made by Siti Mahmudah, "Islam came to perfect the Hanif religion, [and] continued to honor and respect the traditions of the Arabs at that time" (182). Fina rightly criticizes the architectural changes made by fundamentalist Muslims in Indonesia, "for the sake of 'Islamic authentication,' the Javanese Islamic art and architecture have been replaced by those from the older Muslim world." This change distorts the history of Islam, "In fact, if Indonesian Muslims want to continue the legacy of Islamic tradition, what should be developed is, instead, creating Islamic artistic works expressing a continuous dialogue between Islamic tradition and local tradition" (220).

"Najib Mahfuz's Thought: Approach to A Change of Role of Egyptian Women in Thulathiyah (Trilogy)" by Bermawy Munthe explains the importance and power of the literary arts in the formation of culture. As children grow up, they are formed by the norms and conversations within the home, especially the characters and beliefs of their primary caregivers, which are usually their mothers and grandmothers. This book review discusses three generations of women in Egypt. It shows how the lives of Egyptian women have changed, and changed radically, over the past three generations. It does what artists do: give vivid descriptions of types of people, in types of situations, making types of choices, for various types of reason, all following patterns that audience members could identify with. This is the kind of education ancient wisdom-based cultures use to educate the most important power of the human soul, the mind

(nous). Our minds are the source of our natural desire to understand. We try to find patterns in the natural world, in human affairs and in our own experiences of emotions, thoughts and choices.

Human beings are driven by beliefs about the meaning and purpose of human life. In the book, the patterns in women's lives are the result of beliefs about women's natural abilities and their appropriate place in any culture. The characters' experiences and beliefs are changing in understandable ways. The book is trying to educate Muslims living in societies where women have more opportunities than they have had in the past. In order to overcome fears and avoid a reactionary desire to return to an idealized past, the book shows how these changes can lead to better lives. The book gives cautionary examples also: what mistakes to avoid and why. The book presents each character sympathetically, so everyone can identify with them. Audience members can either "see" themselves in the characters or recognize people they know.

The story shows that change does not necessarily lead to moral decline; a refusal to change is often itself a moral flaw. Bermawy Munthe describes how the story reflects three approaches as women make the transition from traditional roles to the way of life of the Egyptian new woman: the evolutionary and gradual approach, the assertive and persuasive approach, and the education process approach.

The character of Susan Hammand is presented as a model for the successful new Egyptian woman. She has adapted to new opportunities in the social and political world while also being part of an extended family and successful at constructing meaningful relationships. Readers should use the story as a model of what to pursue and what to avoid and what sort of obstacles to anticipate throughout their lives. The novelist, Najib Mahfuz, knows that the changes in women's lives affect all aspects of culture. He emphasizes the importance of education as women emerge into the public sphere. His book is itself an important contribution to the kind of education that will enable women to enter public life without unnecessary disruption.

The next step into the formation of a meaningful civilization is described in the article, "Fostering World Peace through 'Cultures of

Meaning: A Case Study of Shaykh Hamdi Ben Aissa and the Sanad Collective" by Omar Edaibat. The article's goal is to "explore the idea of a 'culture of meaning' as an avenue for positive change from within the paradigm of traditional religion and the rich resources of the Islamic tradition in particular" (252).

Edaibat is rightly critical of the West's attempt to impose its culture and ideas onto the rest of the world. Western culture is itself collapsing because the ideas of the Enlightenment detach individuals from any common sense of meaning and purpose and from their natural desire to live in close-knit communities. Edaibat agrees with Rajani Kanth that, "'Euro-Modernism' seeks to destroy our 'tribalist Mammilian nature'. . . consisting of 'close-knit, affective ties,' turning us instead into "Post-Human Reptiles: cold, canny, uncaring and calculating.'" I agree with Edaibat's criticism of modern Western pseudo-culture and its inadequate understanding of "reason," including John Rawls' contractarianism.

Edaibat presents Shaykh Hamdi Ben Aissa and his wife Ustaza Shehnaz as one example of how educated Muslims are trying to recreate or preserve authentic Islam in the places where they live. First, he describes Aissa's intellectual and cultural background, indicating once again that those who take the history of Islamic civilization seriously will live as religiously tolerant Muslims in a multicultural society. Aissa's father was a Zaytuna-University trained Imam; Aissa studied in Tunisia and Yemen and Shehnaz in Syria with internationally respected Muslim scholars.

The couple moved to Canada, where they set up a multi-dimensional Islamic culture that is integrated with the local culture, as Islam has always been. Intellectually, Hamdi live-streams classes that "respond to the many inherited notions, mistranslations, and inadequate conception of a modernist, reactionary, and overly-politicized Islam, favoring instead a more nuanced exploration of the rich spiritual resources of 'traditional Islam'" (244). The couple set up two non-profit community bookstore-cafes where anyone can come and be part of the community. The Centers' rituals, cultural events and opportunities for dialogue aim for an inner, spiritual transformation and commitment to live for the sake of something greater than oneself. Community members engage in all sorts of

community service. The ancient classics are integrated with modern classics and stories, weaving together an authentic culture where ancient wisdom and the classical virtues become part of a life that offers guidance in the process of adaptation to continual cultural change.

Edaibat is describing the kind of culture of meaning he hopes will become more common in every nation. It could be founded in any religious tradition, as long as that tradition recognizes the most basic needs and way of life that every human being seeks and rejects any one ideological description of the underlying patterns in human nature and culture.

Siti Mahmudah's article, "Islam and Local Traditions: The Study of the Thinkings of Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009) and Khalil Abdul Karim (1930-2002) an Indonesian and an Egyptian Perspective," describes in some detail two more examples of well-educated Muslims with the highest levels of Islamic education who joined the Muslim Brotherhood but realized that the Brotherhood's way of life, Islamism, was not what Muhammad wanted and not what Islamic civilization has been. They both reject literalist, absolutist and authoritarian ways of understanding the Qur'an and Islam. Instead, they embrace the "liberal" tradition of "using the faculty of reason where the meanings of the texts in the Qur'an are open to interpretation and re-interpretation (*ijtihad*)" (183). Further, even though Muhammad's original revelation occurred within Arab culture and "the Arab tradition was a source of a variety of laws, norms, systems, customs and traditions" that Islam adapted, this does not mean that "Islam and the sharia are identical with the Arab tradition and must remain in the form of the Arab tradition" wherever it spreads. Rather, the integration of Islam with Arab culture should be a model for how Islam should be integrated with every culture as it spreads around the world.

Siti Mahmudah claims that "Human beings must act independently to find the spirit or the essence of true Islam in order to establish a new Islamic civilization" (198). He promotes ecumenism in religious belief, "A democratic spiritual structure which does not distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims, men and women should be generated, because Allah does not make any

preference" (198). This is the only way to build meaningful friendship bonds between people around the world. He recommends Gus Dur's *Pribumisasi Islam,* one aspect of *Islam Nusantara,* as a way forward for Indonesia in particular. *Pribumisasi Islam*, says Mahmudah, is "contextual," "adaptable," "progressive" and can be "a trigger for conducting a creative response" as Muslims live out their lives in changing circumstances within very different cultural contexts throughout the world. Liberals everywhere, including liberal Muslims, are dedicated to addressing "the problems of humanity universally regardless of religious and ethnic differences" (201).

The article "Conflict and Its Resolution in Indonesian Islam: A Case Study of a Javanese Muslim Society in Riau," is an important, extended case study about how to make Islam less absolutist and more adaptable and progressive in the rural villages of Indonesia. The story applies everywhere around the world. Every nation has a gap between its urban and rural populations. Urbanites tend to be internationalists politically and either liberal in their religious views or embrace secular philosophical positions. Rural populations tend to be more nationalistic and absolutist in their understanding of the religious traditions they grew up with. The case study shows patterns that undoubtedly occur everywhere.

The villagers were looking for someone to be the village religious leader and the role model of someone who honors Allah in every aspect of life. The villagers were especially concerned about the youth being corrupted by the "negative impacts of modernization," and they wanted someone to "provide moral guidance" (164). This is understandable; every conscientious parent ought to have these concerns. Billions of dollars of advertising targets children and youth; the corruption of their emotions and desires is a very effective way to sell products and make money. However, the article makes clear that there are better and worse ways for educated people who want to work with villagers. Their common goal should be to lead their people in the process of adaptation to global cultural changes without losing a strong commitment to Islam or whatever religion the villagers identify with.

Many aspects of this particular conflict which seem to have been unique to that particular place, time and the individuals brought

in to fill this role. However, the conflict between those who identify with Muhammadiyah and those who identify with Nahdatul Ulama is one example of a pattern that must be occurring everywhere. The first group was raised and educated locally; their approach to the Qur'an was to be as literal as possible and to seek out the one and only best way to apply the teachings of Islam in every aspect of life, year after year. The second group was focused on contexts, on being adaptable, progressive and ecumenical. They agree with Gus Dur's approach of *Pribumisasi Islam*. The elite class in the village preferred the "old fashioned" approach; the university graduates who attended secular Western schools were seen as trying to undermine the village, both its way of understanding Islam and the way power was exercised in the community.

University-educated Muslims who want to become prominent religious and political leaders in small villages need to be aware of the culture they are moving into. They must be willing to integrate the old with the new in all aspects of the culture. They have to win the trust of the local people. The practice of Sufism, a purified inner life, is necessary before daily problems can be resolved and changes made. Change agents need to be patient and know that if they really want to promote the well-being of the villagers, they have to avoid conflicts that only make the villagers less willing to change. This only hurts them in the end, which ought to be the primary concern of anyone who wants to promote a more progressive and adaptive way of living out Islam.

The final article discusses the best way to structure government programs that promote human development in all aspects of life. It talks about the changes in women's lives and roles and their opportunities for education, which carries with it the need to structure a way for them to balance family and work responsibilities, "The aim is to increase coordination within and between healthcare, community and social services, and educational systems" (260). The article recommends "Family Studies" as a new way to structure the connection between government and people's personal lives. A restructuring encourages "innovative policy, practice and serviced approaches" that "span traditional disciplinary boundaries and organizational siloes" (261). While the previous articles focused on

cultural issues, this one focuses on detached, organizational structures. Both are important; neither will work without the other. The article makes clear that there are many, many aspects of the emerging Islamic civilization throughout the world that can be and will be included in future issues of the *Sunan Kalijaga* journal. There is clearly a need for the articulation and widespread dissemination of this story of the past, present and future of Islamic civilization around the world.

For me, the most fascinating aspect of participating in your project is all of the obvious analogies with my own experience. I was born in 1953 in the USA, when America was just emerging as the world's ˇ 1 economic powerhouse. My father's generation grew up during the Great Depression went to war, came home victories in what they thought of as a clear struggle between good and evil with the good-guys winning, and then began earning more money than they ever imagined. Unions were strong and taxes were paid for programs that aimed to develop a stable and large middle class. Slowly, Europe's economy came back and the developing nations began developing. Manufacturing jobs went abroad; America began to falter. Americans began to worry that they children could not expect to be wealthier than they were. After 9/11, politicians stoked fear and directed it toward the "liberals" and radical Islam. American history was completely distorted to serve the purposes of the Republican Party, whose leaders had been committed to building an economic empire since the 1960s.

My father was a Methodist minister. The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, focused on purity of heart rather than religious doctrine, "If your heart is as my heart, give me your hand." He was educated at Oxford in the tradition of the union of reason and faith. His sermons were analyzed by scholars who found the pattern of the "Wesleyan quadrangle," the union of Scripture, tradition, experience and reason as the sources from which to figure out how to live. Parishioners met in small groups during the week in order to "work out your own salvation with diligence." When I was eight years old, my father told me "Well, Martha, you will have to work out your own theology someday." I am still working it out.

My father was a major leader in the Ecumenical Movement, which arose out of Vatican II. We lived in a town that was 85% Catholic and a worldwide center for ecumenical community-building. My father marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma, Alabama in 1965, which I remember well. They he was very outspoken against the Vietnam War. Our family supported environmental protection and a sustainable lifestyle. We worked for a freeze on nuclear weapons during the Cold War. Everyone I knew, including Muslims, was either a secular humanist or had a contextualized, adaptive and progressive understanding of their religious traditions.

In 1996, I moved to a small town in rural Arkansas, in the most conservative area of the United States. Then 9/11 hit. The Republican Party decided they would use whatever rhetoric it took to motivate Southerners to change from voting Democrat to voting Republican. Their strategy has worked extremely well. Today, as the only Philosophy professor, among many other things, I teach the tradition of religious humanism. I compare it with the many other types of secular and spiritual humanism. My students are mostly Biblical literalists, convinced that the liberals, whether religious or secular, are the source of corruption in our nation, the reason God allowed 9/11 to happen to us.

Even though I live in the nation with the most scientists and technocrats, over half of Americans do not accept evolution. They belong to religious traditions that interpret the Genesis story literally. It is frightening to think about how emotionally immature and culturally backward we are while also being so sophisticated technologically. We are not the only nation with such problems, but we might be the most visible and dangerous.

For all of these reasons, then, I applaud the efforts of the journal and its many contributors. I know how important it is to create a written history of what I would call humanistic Islam around the world. I look forward to many years of being enriched by reading your journal and comparing Islamic civilization with Greek culture and the West. I was honored to be able to write this introduction.

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