

Re-Emerging Islamic Civilization – Book Review

Review by Jim Miles

(From Postmodernism to Postsecularism – Re-Emerging Islamic Civilization. Eric Walberg. Clarity Press, Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. 2013.)

In his introduction, Eric Walberg states, “The main purpose of this book is to help the reader to understand the alternative map which Islam offers.” This is both a literal and figural map, an alternative to the imperial and neo-colonial boundaries that divide the Islamic world, and an alternative viewpoint to that of the imperial driver of capitalism. This offer includes “realigning ourselves with Nature, and rediscovering humanities’ spiritual evolutionary path...without abandoning the vital role of reason.”

This path along this alternate view is created strongly, with an obvious sympathy for the parts of Islam that are little known to the capitalist imperial view. It is a fully comprehensive path, leading the reader through time and through not just the Middle East, but on into Northern Africa, the Sahel, South Asia and Southeast Asia.

The path always interacts with the imperial capitalist landscape ranging from the original European nationalist empires of France, Britain, Spain, and Holland on through to the hegemonic empire of the United States that has subordinated the previous empires into its fold. This has been done through military backing of corporate enterprises and many financial maneuverings that have – up until now – managed to stretch this empire into a full global span.

The first chapter “Islam, Christianity, and Judaism” explains the nature of the Koran without the political prejudice

brought on by imperial reaction (blowback) to occupation and creation of the 'evil' other. Following that, it presents a broad history of Islam up until the era of the First World War. While the interactions with Christianity were often violent, Islamic expansion eastward generally tended to be accomplished more peacefully through trade and missionaries – the latter of course being against the military corporate interests of the west.

A concise but broad history of Islam from “independence to independence” – from Ottoman independence to putative democratic-capitalist independence fills out the modern history in “The Genesis of Re-emerging Islamic Civilization.”

The third chapter, “The Theory of Islamic Renewal” examines the philosophical impetus towards renewal, as always against the backdrop of nationalism, capitalism, and militarization. Three threats are broadly outlined. The first are the ideas generated by the “accommodationists” and “nationalists” who essentially remain subject to western influence. ANother threat is seen with the Saudi Wahhabi sect that has “compromised Islam as a religion” via its collaboration and accommodation with the west, its sterile culture, and its intolerance (and concealed violence). In general Islam is viewed in contrast to “globalization” as having a “wealth of social experience” that is “a treasure to be rediscovered by the West as the emptiness of its materialism is expired.”

Imperialism and its financial controls take up a large perspective through this journey. Tunisian Ghannouchi criticizes the

“total stripping of the state from religion [which] would turn the state into a mafia, and the world economic system into an exercise in plundering, and politics into deception and hypocrisy ... This is exactly what happened in the western experience, despite there being some positive aspects. International politics became the preserve of a few financial

brokers owning the biggest share of capital and by extension the media, through which they ultimately control politicians.”

From Malaysian Chandra Muzaffar:

“Western powers try to maintain the ‘secular state vs Islamic opposition’ scenario to keep the umma divided, weak, at their mercy, with Muslim ruling elites ‘wallowing in vulgar opulence and indulging in crude extravagance—helped by their oil wealth ... They have kept huge segments of their people poor and ignorant while they feed their fantasies with all that money can buy.’ The global capitalist system is prejudiced against Muslims and its interests are inimical to Islamic notions of human dignity and social justice. ‘The world today is a whole system of political, economic and cultural relationships which have grown out of the 200 years of western domination of the planet.’”

From Egyptian Bashir Musa Mohammed Nafi (b. 1953) criticizing western culture,

“as ‘imbued with a Darwinian view of the world: the belief in the sheer value of power, domination and the superiority of western civilization.

“Imperialism inflicted profound damage, not only on the cultural, economic and social life of the colonized peoples but also, more so, on the moral well-being of the colonizers themselves.”

The sum of this chapter in particular emphasizes several theoretical views. Islam is against both capitalism and communism; it is obviously anti-imperialist; it is, contrary to western mythologies, pro-democracy in relation to the voice of the umma, the collective will of the people. Despite western media presentations of Islam as irrational, it contains a strong element that is pro-education and pro-science, a much more modern outlook than many of its detractors in the west.

From this philosophical perspective, Walberg journeys into current events and what is actually occurring with Islam through the different regions of the world. in Chapter Four, Modern Islam in Practice. Here the previously explained beliefs are contrasted with the reality of what is happening within the Muslim world within current events. No surprise that oil, money, imperialism, and despotism are widely presented; along with that is the concept that current violent and militant actions are really a reaction to this imperial over-reach and suppression.

In light of current concerns vis a vis Saudi Arabia and Iran, Walberg says,

“the impulse for terrorism in the Muslim world comes not from Shia, but from Wahhabi and Neo-Wahhabi sunnis, to say nothing of U.S/Israel instigated false flag operations fingering/targeting Muslims.”

Concerns are expressed about Iran, “now the most powerful regional player”, joining with the western powers via the IMF/Washington consensus. Walberg’s argument is hedged in his own footnote,

“US sanctions targeting Iran have ironically further undermined the dollar, as China, Japan, India, Russia and Turkey now are forced to trade with Iran using their own currencies, Iranian rials and/or gold. South Korea uses barter. Vietnam, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and others are eager to join this non-dollar trade club.”

Contemporary Issues in Islam are discussed in the fifth chapter. Four main problem areas discussed. First is the concept of jihad vis a vis terrorists. Next are the Hadd Laws – the penalties prescribed for breaking laws, which generally have “symbolic value far in excess of their practical value” – which reminded me of the effectiveness of all the U.S. drug laws, the death penalty, and the forced servitude of the

largest prison population in the world (apart from Gaza).

A third area of discussion that gets much media attention in the west is that of the role of women – and thus converts – within Islam. The argument is presented that,

“The importance of the family, the careful regulation of male-female relations, the sacralization of all aspects of life, and Islam’s strong rational side ‘makes it the most convincing religion as compared to the other monotheistic options’ for many women.”

With two thirds of converts being women, there is support for the statement.

The fourth area of contention is economics, emphasizing the Islamic ideas of social justice, no usury (which would cripple the debt laden capitalist system), its innovations such as profit-sharing and shared risk which minimize the “moral hazard” of employee/ownership relations.

A mix of philosophy and the its application is presented in the sixth chapter, Postmodernism, Muhammad and Marx. In sum, Islam was the closest rival to Marxism, but with its ‘defeat’ with the collapse of Soviet communism, capitalism has risen to the fore. The view here is positive for Islam, as

“cyber grassroots activism picking up steam in the West and with the continued renewal of Islam around the world, this will eventually lead to a coalition of forces determined to bring morality and ethics back into the world. The major stumbling blocks are the unholy pact of the Saudi/Gulf monarchies with imperialism, and the continued colonial enterprise of Israel. Overcoming these will depend on when the US dollar loses its hegemony and how the US will adapt to the collapse of its empire.”

The latter reference I find very interesting, almost thrown out as a teaser for what is to come. If current reactions on

the stock market associated with all the manipulations of the Quantitative Easing combined with the daily ongoing rigging of the price of gold and silver continues – and then add in the collapsing emerging market currencies which force money back into the dollar – of which there are now trillions and trillions backed up by nothing but hundreds of trillions of dollars of debt of all forms – and yes, the dollar could well lose its hegemony which means its collapse into near worthlessness and thus collapse the empire. Except for maybe a last gasp violent reaction from the military.

Refer back to the footnote I quoted earlier. Perhaps Iran is no longer so much forced into seeking other forms of currency, but are working actively pursuing it along with China, Russia, India, South Africa (with all its underground gold) and Brazil. Whether this leads to a stronger Islamic umma, or a conversion to other powers' control remains to be seen, but it will be a journey – probably coming soon – that will be interesting to watch. As the current markets continue to tumble, the 'new world order' may not be quite what was anticipated.

The final section of the work reiterates a positive outlook for Islam and highlights its features that are in contrast to western military/financial imperialism:

- human life and nature are sacrosanct
- war, while 'human nature' is strictly circumscribed
- usury outlawed
- distribution must be equitable (no "too big to fail, too big to prosecute" banks
- cultural restraint within moral ethical order
- ends do not justify the means (no democracy from a gun-barrel)
- umma, as a whole, must enjoin what is right

It would seem that Islam will emerge from the imperial yoke, ridding itself of the western imposed

nationalism/financialism/militarism that now overrides them. Today's violent political Islam is the product of imperialism, and a product of the collaborations of the Saudis with the U.S./Israeli empire. and their al-Qaeda affiliates through the Middle East and Northern Africa.

FROM POSTMODERNISM TO POSTSECULARISM – Re-Emerging Islamic Civilization presents many thought provoking ideas, and a well-documented historical and philosophical perspective on Islam. It will be a difficult read for westerners with their isolated media view, but at the same time it is an essential perspective to look vis a vis changes that are already underway in the western world.

– Jim Miles is a Canadian educator and a regular contributor/columnist of opinion pieces and book reviews for The Palestine Chronicle. Miles' work is also presented globally through other alternative websites and news publications. He contributed this article to PalestineChronicle.com.