THE CASE OF JERUSALEM FROM A CIVILIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE[1]

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This paper is an attempt to evaluate an international political problem from a philosophical perspective in order to see its actual place within a civilizational phenomenon. How Muslims view Jerusalem and how it is to be viewed from historical perspective are the main issues to be evaluated. The historical approach shall attempt to provide a framework for treating the problem. This framework includes the concept of civilization and the phenomenon of the rise and fall of civilizations. Certain historical facts may lead us to clues for unraveling our perception of the Jerusalem issue today. We shall then begin our treatment of the problem from evaluating the concept of civilization.

The idea of civilization was first introduced by the French thinkers in the eighteenth century in order to distinguish between barbarism and a civilized society.[2] Three main criteria was introduced then to distinguish between a culture (a primitive society) and a civilization (a civilized society); 1. settled vs. nomad, 2. urban vs. rural, 3. literate vs. illiterate. If this is the case, then a civilization cannot be defined conclusively because the French approach seems to concentrate on how to distinguish the civilized from the uncivilized, whereas a culture may perfectly be civilized without being a civilization. Therefore, we need a definition of civilization which is broader in its scope. If we examine past civilizations we will see that it is externally hard to distinguish them from cultures except that they are much broader and include more than one culture; hence, a civilization is in fact "a universalized culture." This means that a civilization is in the true sense a culture which is no longer limited to its local and national confines. As such it begins to include within its boundaries many sub-cultures,

all of which are very much colored by the foundational culture that has become an all-embracing culture, namely a civilization. It is possible to find such a culture in the ultimate analysis of every true civilization. Our definition of a civilization enables us to distinguish the following criteria for civilizations: universality; multi-culturality; having an official language that characterizes its literature, whether scientific or artistic. If a culture does not have these characteristics it cannot be called 'civilization'. It is clear that the most important aspect of a civilization is its universality; and in fact all other aspects can be reduced to this one. That is why we have tried to give our definition of civilizations in terms of universality alone.

What is it that renders a culture universal? There are primarily two phenomena that may elevate a culture to the level of universality: one is religion, the other is science or scientific activities. Depending on the foundational culture, either one of these or they both together may render a civilization universal. In case of Islamic civilization, for example, it is primarily the religion that has universalized the Arab culture into a universal status. Of course it is not the scientific achievements of the Early Muslims that eventually rendered Arabic as the official language of this civilization, but rather the fact that it was the language of Revelation. As a result of this, all scientific and literary activities were also carried out in this civilization in Arabic; whether the author was an Arab or not was irrelevant. Because the Islamic civilization began to include, as a result of its universality, many other national cultures, the original Arabic culture which was universalized in the form of a civilization began to lose its Arabic character, it was thus blended with a universalistic color that made up the Islamic civilization. Since we are not dwelling upon the characteristics of the foundational Arabic culture that was universalized in the form of Islamic civilization, there is no need to point out here that this foundational culture was modified greatly by the revealed religion Islam.

In case of the Aegean civilization, on the other hand, it is primarily the scientific activities that rendered it universal. Since the original foundational culture of this civilization was the Greek culture, all scientific and literary activities were carried out in this language, which then became the official language of this civilization until its fall. The Western civilization is, on the other hand a more complex phenomenon which

requires more historical analysis that may force us to modify certain aspects of our definition.[3]

If there is a foundational culture which gradually becomes a universal culture called 'civilization', then there is a process that can be identified as the 'rise of a civilization'. On the other hand, just because there are civilizations in the past that has fallen, we may infer on the basis of the rise of civilizations that there must be also a process that can be identified as the 'fall of a civilization'. In this context I am more concerned with the dynamic principles which lead to the rise of a civilization. If these principles are identified correctly, there is no reason to look for such principles for the fall of a civilization, because the fall must follow upon the lack or insufficiency of the dynamic principles that lead to the rise of it. We shall argue, moreover, that although the course civilizations take for their rise and fall may vary greatly, it is possible to discern general law-like principles from their histories that govern their rise and fall. In this context, without much argument I will try to cite a few of these dynamic principles in order to utilize for pinpointing the place of the Jerusalem issue within a civilizational context.[4]

First of all, when we examine the process for the rise of a civilization, we shall clearly see an element that universalizes the foundational culture of that civilization. If, therefore, in case of the Islamic civilization, for example, that universalizing element is the religion Islam, then it can be identified as a dynamic principle for the rise of this civilization. Islam as a religion, on the other hand, includes many things and as such it is a complex phenomenon and therefore, it would be evading the problem to just point out to a complex phenomenon without analyzing it as a dynamic force for the rise of a civilization. It must be certain principles which Islam brought that played the role of these dynamic principles for the rise of Islamic civilization. In fact, when one examines the Qur'an, one can find certain implications for the existence of such principles within a society that are identified as *'social laws'* (sunnatullah).

Secondly, the universalizing element is able to give a dynamism to the society into which it is born. This dynamism takes place at different planes; of which two are extremely important: first is the social plane, which causes certain unrest and stirring within the society as if the whole structure of the society is re-shaping itself and thus every social institution is affected by this dynamism; but most importantly, the political

and educational institutions are re-organized as a result of this unrest; second is the plane of learning and it is this dynamism which causes a lively exchange of ideas on scientific and intellectual subjects among the learned of the community. How this dynamism itself as social laws is produced remains a very complex phenomenon which must be studied more carefully in relation to each society.

For instance, in case of Islamic civilization we explain how it was internally generated by the thought of the Qur'an through its dissemination within the first Muslim community. But here what we are trying to look for is whether there are any universal rules governing the generation of that dynamism, because we are trying to apply it to an international conflict of our time; the Jerusalem issue. I shall now try to show that these dynamic forces within the foundational culture are *natural* phenomena and therefore they are deeply rooted within the human personality. It is for this reason that we have included them in the meaning of the Qur'anic concept of social laws.[5]

Accordingly, we distinguish so far two fundamental phenomena as corresponding to what we term 'the universalizing elements' as the basis of social mobility in the original foundational culture: the first one can be conceived here as moral dynamism, and the other as intellectual dynamism, both of which fall within the domain of social law. This is what we shall now demonstrate.

With respect to moral dynamism it is possible to divide the members of a given society into three groups: 1. morally sensitive people, 2. the common mass, 3. selfish or morally insensitive people. Among these three classes usually the first and the third group are dynamic. For the former class struggle to restore morality and good order in a society, whereas the selfish class remain indifferent to this end by spending their dynamism to their own ends. The masses, on the other hand, are driven to either sides. In the midst of these chaotic struggles the emergence of certain intellectual activities is almost inevitable, as both the moral and the selfish sides will try to justify their ends rationally in order to draw more supporters. But since for the selfish the end is more important than the means, they will definitely try use other attractive means to draw supporters. Therefore, in this struggle it is still the morally sensitive that is primarily intellectually and spiritually productive. This leads to an immense intellectual dynamism. By the 'intellectual dynamism' we mean the 'dynamism inherent within

originality and novelty' (of ideas and doctrines) such that the foundational culture had never seen of their like before.

Since we empirically know that there are in every society without exception morally sensitive people, the masses and the selfish, we need not prove their existence as social laws, i.e. natural. But the fact that originality and novelty inherently possess dynamism may not be so easily accessible and in fact this is the main problem with the Islamic civilization today; hence we must show that intellectual dynamism is also a social law. In order to do this we need only to refer to some previous cases in civilizations where this was demonstrated. In the Aegean civilization, for example, we claim that if there were not in each case a new and fresh outlook, the intellectual dynamism would have not flourished and thus the flair of Greek intellectualism would have died out long before Plato. Moreover, just because there is hardly any original theory and doctrine after Aristotle, the Greek intellectualism began right after him to decline. The same is also true for both the Islamic and Western civilizations, but the way this intellectual dynamism, as social laws, is manifested in all these civilizations of course vary.

What we are showing here is the idea that originality inherently possesses dynamism, and as such it can contribute essentially to the rise of intellectualism which gradually leads to the advancement of scientific and literary learning, i. e. elements that are universalizing factors within the foundational culture. Thus without it no culture can be universalized; but with it alone it is not possible for the foundational culture to emerge as a civilization as there are other conditions to be met in this process. One should not, therefore, interpret our claim with regard to the intellectual dynamism that even if there is a lively exchange of original and fresh ideas, theories or doctrines it may still not lead to the emergence of the foundational culture as a civilization. For it is possible that there may be originality without necessarily leading to a civilization, because as we have already pointed out, we are examining the causes of intellectual progress individually, namely without reference to the other universalizing factors. But within the foundational culture these factors produce the desired end only when they are altogether present.

All these dynamisms, either together or one after another will yield what I shall call 'institutional dynamism'. When these universalizing dynamic forces are at work, a

tremendous social mobility in the foundational culture begins. It is the dynamism of individuals working together to lead the society as a whole to a morally better situation that we call 'social dynamism'. On the other hand, these social activities will gradually lead to the re-organization and betterment of social institutions including the political and economic ones as well. For social dynamism is reflected necessarily onto the social institutions. How can, for example, an intellectual who is active in educating the individuals of his society not attempt reforming his educational system upon observing that his work somehow is not effective and realizes that this is because of the structure of his educational system? It is this re-formative and enlightened efforts at all organizational levels that we call 'institutional dynamism'. It is clear that all these dynamisms are indeed the universalizing factors of a culture. When all these universalizing factors are active together, then the foundational culture is necessarily set into a scientific progress that follows upon intensive intellectualism that is present within the culture. Of course besides these universalizing factors, different societies may exhibit some other different universalizing factors; such is the case with Western civilization which has Islamic influences also as a cause for the rise of Western intellectualism. Whereas in the Islamic case, the causes are found only within the foundational culture in which a tremendous social mobility is produced as a result of the newly emerging religion.

Institutional dynamism as a universalizing factor takes place at the level of social institutions; the most significant of these being the educational institutions, a great reform and re-organization in accordance with the knowledge produced by the intellectual dynamism is required of all the educational institutions. Usually there seems to be a relation, although not a necessary one, between the political body and the educational reform. Either the political body brings about the educational reform at the request and directions of the intellectuals, or intellectuals themselves take the initiative and produce educational dynamism, which may in turn lead to a re-organization of the political body and thus produce a great political mobility within the political institutions. These activities which also includes the legal undertakings can be called 'political dynamism'. Among these institutional dynamisms as universalizing factors we must mention also economic activities. Similar reformations take place in the economic

institutions yielding thereby to improve the prosperity of that society and thus can be called 'economic dynamism'.

We have thus distinguished three kinds of universalizing factors for the emergence of a civilization out of its foundational culture:

1. The initial universalizing factors which are necessarily prior to the rest of the factors, and they are two;

   a) the moral struggle, and
   b) the original intellectual activities;

2. Social dynamism;

3. Institutional dynamism, which is the last step of the process for the emergence of the foundational culture as a civilization and they are primarily three:

   a) educational dynamism,
   b) political and dynamism;
   c) economic dynamism.

The last three dynamisms include within themselves with a varying degree of intensity all the universalizing factors explained above, and as such they are the ones that produce culture. As soon as the universalizing factors are at work effectively within the original society, then the foundational culture is no longer what it was before. To give an example, the *Medinan Muslim* society and the *Jahiliyyah* culture, which is in fact the foundational culture of the Islamic civilization[6], but as it was in its original state it could have never lead to the rise of a civilization. It was, therefore, greatly modified by Islam which started a sufficient social dynamism in that society to lead it to the emergence of a civilization.. Hence, if a culture retains its dynamisms as a result of these universalizing factors long enough such that the foundational culture no longer becomes restricted to one society and region, then it turns into a civilization. Therefore, cultures

are usually restricted to a certain span of time and region or society. But civilizations cannot be so restricted. But if a civilization does not retain its dynamism, then all institutions begin to deteriorate and as a result dynamism to the opposite direction begins to take place; first, the selfish gains the majority of the masses and intellectuals become corrupt, then the moral struggle gives in. The civilization thus collapses and all of its institutions gradually become corrupt; a phenomenon which can be observed both in the Ancient Greek civilization and Islamic civilization of today. If we examine the bygone civilizations of the past we shall see many similarities between them and the present Islamic civilization. In fact, today there is no more a civilization that deserves the name Islamic civilization. A culture can be called civilization only if it is dynamic morally in the first place and intellectually (namely, scientifically) in the second place.[7] In case of the Islamic civilization both dynamisms were propelled by the religion; this leads us to infer that the collapse of the Islamic civilization must have come upon the collapse of the religion, namely misinterpretation of the religion or its mythologization which eventually led to the ineffectiveness of Islam within the civilization. This gradually led to the downfall of all institutions, including the military and political ones.

At this juncture we can ask the question concerning our conflict today: is the Jerusalem issue an isolated, individual case; or is it a civilizational case? It seems that most Muslims today handle it as an individual problem, in which they do not pay attention to the civilizational problems surrounding this issue. The problem cannot be solved in this manner. The best lesson is again provided by the history; when the Crusades, for example, started the conflict took place again around Jerusalem. But at that time Islamic civilization though was politically scattered mainly by the brute force of other cultures, its dynamic structure was able to handle the problem as an individual isolated case; hence Jerusalem ultimately remained in the hands of Muslims. But today the Muslim World faces certain civilizational problems; moral decadence, mythological understanding of our religion which lead to the weakening of Islamic principles in individual and social life and finally intellectual decadence which leaves no creative scientific activities. How can we then solve the Jerusalem issue? I would like to pose another question in order to demonstrate rather indirectly how we may approach this international conflict from the civilizational framework.

What happens if a civilization dies? The most important factor in Islamic civilization is of course religion, but in order to generalize this to all civilizations, we shall pose the fact that the moral dimension dies within those societies that are included under that civilization. Selfishness rules supreme, individuals think of their own ends only; as a result, social institutions do not function properly. Everyone thinks of himself rather than the ideal end, which was the ideal cause, in the Islamic civilization . Everyone prefers himself over his fellow citizen ; ideal principles such as all believers are united in a brotherly love become simple words of mouth with great meaning but with no application in real life. Then, intellectual life also becomes corrupt, because educational institutions, as we have seen, are integral part of a civilization, once they are corrupt no serious intellectual will be produced; as a result scientific activities will no longer be creative. This will yield inefficiency to deal with social problems; and no new concepts will be invented to express new interpretations of meaningful phenomena in human life and culture. These concepts may be borrowed from other civilizations and lead to confusion as they will not cover all aspects of human existence within that civilization. The scientific downfall will lead to technological backwardness which will lead to military weakness. Every other people around that civilization will try to get their share from the falling civilization. The people and the geography of the falling civilization become like a dead corpse of an animal upon which vultures and many other scavengers rush to get their share. It seems that this is what has happened to the Islamic civilization and the Jerusalem issue cannot be evaluated without a look into the rise and fall of civilizations. If my presentation seems realistic, then this problem cannot be solved without a comprehensive outlook. This my dismal presentation of the state of Islamic civilization is historically realistic. This requires us to look into the Jerusalem problem and in fact the Bosnian, Azeri, Burmese Muslims, The Iraqi and all other even international political problems from this perspective. Islamic Civilizations has lost the official language, as well as its identity and integrity. Losing of geographical areas is not such a significant issue as compared to these civilizational losses.

What does the civilizational outlook give us? Civilizational outlook should not be taken as a portrait of a hopeless case. It rather assigns us more serious duties. We must first of all obey the social laws and try to see the universalizing factors within a culture and try to utilize these factors in order to revive the Islamic civilization. We

must know that nothing can be solved by sheer military force, nor by acquiring nuclear power or other technological achievements. These achievements are after all acquired through following strictly the creative universalizing factors within a society. Every individual should question himself rather than questioning others; this supreme moral principle was ingrained in the minds of early Muslim who are lesson-laden for us. In fact the early process for the emergence of Islamic civilization is a good example for us to see the universalizing principles of the social laws at work. Of course the aim of early Muslims was not to establish a civilization, but they aimed at clearing their souls from evils of human interests and thus perfecting the human self, which became a foundation stone of a great civilization. Individuals must aim at ridding ourselves from the evil intentions of our passions; all other problems, including the Jerusalem issue, will gradually be solved through time; and time is also a requirement of the principles and laws governing society. One must realize that such civilizational problems cannot be solved over night. Patient struggle, i. e. *jihad*, in the way of human betterment will lead us to the happiness of this life as well as the one to come.

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[1] A previous version of this study has been presented in the conference on "The Jerusalem Issue in Contemporary Discourse" May 12-14, 1998, Zarqa Private University, Zarqa, JORDAN

[2] Samuel P. Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 40.

[3] If we take Christianity as the main element in the rise of this civilization, it is possible to identify the Roman culture as its foundational culture, whose language, Latin, became its official language for the first phase of it. Although in the second phase of this civilization, through the rise of nationalism the Latin language was given up, English began to take its place as the official language of this civilization. Although Christianity is the main element of this civilization, the date for the rise of Christianity cannot be taken to be the date for the rise of the Western civilization. Perhaps, the conversion of the first Roman Emperor into Christianity can be taken to be the official date for the rise of this civilization. But still the religion by itself was not able to universalize the Roman culture; it was the scientific activities in the Middle ages which universalized only the Roman heritage, since by that time the Roman culture was very much diversified into many European cultures in the form of Christian customs.

[4] For a somewhat more treatment of this subject see the present author's "Yeni Dünya Düzeni Arayislarinda Islam Medeniyetine Ne Oldu?", (What Happened to the Islamic Civilization in the Quest for a New World Order), paper presented to the "Kutlu Dogum Haftasi I. Uluslararasi Ilmî Toplantisi, 21-

23 Nisan 1994, Ankara"; published in the *Türk Yurdu,* 14: 8 (1994); and "The Conceptual Foundation for the Emergence of Islamic Civilization", <u>Seminar on Islamic Civilization: Present and Future Challenges</u>, 29-30 August 1994; Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; published in the *Proceedings* of the Symposium.

[5] Here by "natural" we mean "a characteristic or a trait given by God", referring thereby to nature as "something that is created by God". It is in this sense that we must use the Qur'anic term *sunnatullah* to express any universalizing elements in the foundational culture.

[6] We need to provide an explanation here; Islam can never see itself as a continuation of the *Jahiliyyah* society, which is true. Our claim here is only an anthropological explanation, or rather an historical one. It does not therefore amount to saying that Islam is actually a continuation of the Jahiliyyah belief and customs. The fact is that historically a civilization needs a foundational society which is gradually transformed by the moral struggle into a society other than what it was before; otherwise how could it emerge as a civilization if it remains the same? For if it was possible for it to emerge as a civilization, before Islam it should have emerged as such.

[7] In this respect we classify civilizations into dynamic ones, stagnant ones and dead or bygone civilizations. Today there is only one dynamic civilization, the Western civilization; indeed a civilization by definition is dynamic and lively. Otherwise it does not deserve the name civilization. A stagnant civilization is the one that has died recently, such as the Islamic civilization, which died with the World War I. A dead civilization means a culture that is neither morally nor scientifically dynamic, such as the Indian, Greek and Chinese civilizations. Scientifically static does not mean that there is no scientific activity within these cultures. It rather means that there is hardly anything original produced by that culture that can be considered native to that culture. Most scientific activities today are carried out almost in every culture within the western terminology and creative work. This means that all other cultures are stagnant entities moved by the Western civilization. The situation is the same for Islamic civilization as well.