

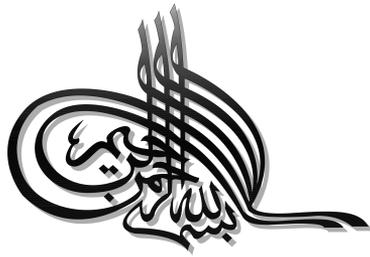
**Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri**

# **HERITAGE AND IDENTITY**

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# Introduction

The relationship between heritage and identity is a subject that is becoming increasingly important amid the growing risks arising from a globalization that is eroding peoples' cultural and civilizational specificities, as well as from the incessant international changes impacting ideas, perceptions, opinions and positions expressed by human cultures and civilizations, however their multiple backgrounds and diverse sources. This is particularly true at this critical moment in human history where identities run the risk of melting in the dominant sweeping identity, and human heritage faces distortion campaigns aimed at playing down its importance and undermining its effective role in protecting human societies' right to cling to their own set of values and historical identity, which are the backbone of their moral, cultural and civilizational character.

Heritage is not the past alone, with all the progress recorded in all areas and the successive events it witnessed throughout ages, but it also includes the present with all its changes and the future with all its prospects. Heritage extends to our lives and moves us into the future; it is part of us and we cannot detach ourselves from it. Heritage therefore is an intrinsic element of identity that conditions all other elements.

Heritage is not limited in time. In fact, the historical works of intellectuals, scientists, scholars, philosophers, poets, historians and authors in various fields of knowledge are an intellectual, cultural and scientific heritage. Thus, heritage lives in our minds, hearts and souls and is part of our collective memory. It is not only the past, but the present and the future alike.

A fundamental characteristic of Arab Islamic heritage is that it is alive, linked to the uninterrupted history, and interacts with changes impacting human life, in both directions, without losing its originality and singularity. Rather, its roots are still deep in the ground, omnipresent in the various fields of knowledge: language, history, culture, law, literature, monuments, religion, morals, wisdom, philosophy and science. These roots, deeply anchored in the past, cannot, for instance, be described in the manner of the Greek heritage.

On the basis of this objective, methodological and realistic concept of heritage, taking pride in, and preserving, heritage as the embodiment of identity is a responsibility, a mission and a duty. If the past falls down and collapses, it will be impossible to restore it. Indeed, the most horrid of all crimes that Man can commit is to ruin what they inherited from their ancestors. Heritage preservation is not to be taken as an emotive, reactionary attitude, but rather as a natural human disposition.

There is no conflict at all between looking forward to the future and conserving past heritage. Rather, the focus on heritage should be seen as the basis on which to clearly and vigorously shape the future.

I have once read a deeply significant and fair statement of the famous French thinker and orientalist Jacques Berque, which I want to quote in this introduction: *“The future of the Arabs lay with their revival of the past, for the future, in many cases, in the past or present brought to life.”*

In the spring of last year, 2010, I was invited to make a lecture in Damascus on "**Heritage and Identity**" before distinguished intellectuals and media figures. I talked about the various facets of this issue which has taken a global dimension and attracts

public attention as a result of the repercussions caused by the dangers exacerbated by a globalization that is sweeping identities, erasing specificities and obliterating heritage. In that lecture, I stressed the need to safeguard identity by preserving heritage. I highlighted the relationship between the preservation of identity, by making it an inspiration, bringing it into motion and taking pride in it, and the protection of heritage by drawing on its underlying great wisdom, cultural values and civilizational symbols.

In this context, I want to underline that the (battle of ideas) waged by those who developed the (creative chaos) theory is based on the blurring of peoples' national identities so that there remains only one identity, theirs. Their objective is to break the link between people and their heritage, to cut their off from their historical roots and the heritage they are proud of. Therefore, clinging to identity and taking pride therein is essential to preserve the legitimate historical rights of nations and peoples passed on from generation to generation.

And I was keen to publish my lecture on heritage and identity, with the English and French translations in one edition along with the Arabic text, hoping to depict to researchers and readers, especially Westerners, how the Islamic civilization views the concept of identity and the significance of heritage.

May Allah guide us to the Straight Path.

**Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri**  
**Director General of the Islamic**  
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**Cultural Organization**  
**(ISESCO)**

This year, 2010, the Muslim world is celebrating Tarim, a historic town situated in the Hadhramaut Valley of South Yemen, as the Arab region's capital of Islamic culture. Four years before, in 2006, Aleppo was elected as the Islamic culture capital for the Arab region. It so augurs well that the forum (**Tarim Cultural Wednesday**) is held in the beautiful city of Damascus, known as the cradle of Arab Muslim cultural heritage and the bastion of Arab Muslim identity.

It is not surprising, as Damascus is the crown jewel and shining pearl of Arab Muslim history. The city tells you all about the history of the Arab Muslim world.

In his passionate ode to Damascus, against the backdrop of violence which swept the Druze region in the early 1920s, Ahmed Shawqi, Prince of Arabic Poetry, wrote:

*May the Lord of Majesty and Honour reward you, O! People of Damascus,  
The Power and Glory of the Mashreq is in Damascus,*

And how excellent were the lines great Damascene poet Nizar Qabbani wrote in description of Damascus:

*Deep in my heart perch the shining moon, nightingale, spikenard and  
the domed shrines of Damascus,*

*In Damascus the white blossoms of Arabian jasmine thrive and to the  
rest of the world they exude their fragrance,*

*There, everywhere in Damascus, water springs out and in spawning  
streams it flows,*

*From Damascus cavalry set out for resounding victory,  
And in Damascus the Arab character takes its perennial shape.*

## Heritage: A linguistic definition

In this atmosphere redolent with the fragrance of old times, I shall attempt to identify the full scope of, first, *turath* (heritage) and, then, *huwiyyah* (identity).

The first thing that comes to mind, when considering the meaning of the Arabic word (*turath*), is what Allah says in verse 19 of *Surat al-Fajr*: “***And you devour inheritance accumulating indiscriminately (between what is lawful and unlawful).***”

Allah is addressing those people who accumulate inheritance indiscriminately, either legitimately or illegitimately, all with greed.

The word (*turath*), as mentioned in the Quran, is totally different in meaning from that of the modern usage. It has expanded to include all the legacy, tangible and intangible, of our ancestors.

The word (*irth*), meaning inheritance, etymologically comes from the verb (*waritha*), meaning inherit. The words (*irth/mirath*), both meaning inheritance, refer to all that which people inherit from one another. Terminologically, the word (*irth*) means the legacy - religious, cultural, literary, folkloric, scientific, cultural and urban - a nation has left over generations.

*Turath* (heritage), in its modern usage, is all that we get from the accumulated wisdom, both tangible and intangible, of human history.

Nations possess each their own heritage - i.e., the fruit of their collective mind, and the outcome of their mental, spiritual and creative effort.

There is one important point I should like to first make in this context. It is that heritage, the product of the human mind, does not include the divine revelation. This is a very critical matter on which three schools of thought in today's Muslim world form a common judgment. These, though different in orientation and background, are represented by three distinct thinkers:

## **Heritage: A civilizational concept**

There is the Egyptian thinker and researcher Anouar al-Joundi who in his *Maalamat Al-Islam* (Edifice of Islam) says: *“The distinction should always be clear between (turath) heritage and (mirath) inheritance. And we equally must be able to completely differentiate between the terms (old, past and heritage), and their relationship with Islamic tradition. We also need to always be able to distinguish between Islam as a religion and a way of life, with the Holy Quran and Sunnah as its sacred sources, and the legacy of independent opinions by Muslim scholars (Ijtihad) consisting in the analysis of problems not covered precisely in the Quran and Sunnah, in order to best adapt to the needs that vary according to ages, circumstances, events and environments.”*<sup>(1)</sup>

There is also the Moroccan thinker Dr Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, May Allah have mercy on his soul, who in his book *Madkhal ila al-Qur'an al-Karim (Introduction to the Qur'an)* says:

*“We often have stressed that we do not consider the Qur'an part of heritage. This is something that we emphasize here again. At the same time we also stress what we have*

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(1) *Maalamat Al-Islam* (Edifice of Islam), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 2 (Beirut: Al-Maktab Al-Islami, 1982) 123.

*said on previous occasions: we consider as heritage, because part of human wisdom, all levels of understanding by Muslim scholars of the Quran, both as a phenomenon in the sense we have set here and as a set of divine commands and interdictions.”<sup>(2)</sup>*

The third is the great academic and intellectual Professor Dr Shawqi Daif, who in his invaluable book (***On Heritage, Poetry and Language***) expounded his theory of the (unity of religious and scientific heritage) of the Arab Islamic Ummah. Shawqi's is **a theory which emphasizes the integration of heritage in the context of a closely knit system.**

Shawqi says: “*Our Arab nation has one spiritual, mental and literary heritage. The Quran, the miracle of miracles, is the beacon of light which illuminates all spiritual matters in our life. It is the light which guides man to the straight path, taking them from the shrouds of darkness to the realm of light and divine guidance. There in the Quran are pure spiritual values which form the essence of the final, exalted divine creed, and acts of worship and virtues for man to purify their souls and hearts. The Quran also appeals to the mind seeking to help man deliver themselves from sorcery, soothsaying and superstition, thus allowing them to relish the enjoyments of knowledge and life. Through the Quran Allah teaches us observing the values of social justice and equity in rights and obligations for all Muslims.*”<sup>(3)</sup>

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(2) Madkhal ila al-Qur'an al-Karim (***Introduction to the Qur'an***), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 1 (Beirut: Arab Unity Studies Centre, 2007) 26.

(3) ***Heritage, Poetry and Culture***, published in the series 100 of the Literary Studies Library (Cairo: Dar Al Ma'arif, 1987).

The fact that this definition of heritage is in accord with the tradition of the said three schools gives us room to say that the contemporary Arab culture, in its general acceptance, does not adopt a rejection of the heritage of the Ummah. Even those who once represented the (*Min al-Turath ila al-Thawrah*) (From Heritage to Revolution) trend have come to approve heritage in its realistic concept and true significance. Even the Arab thinker Dr Mohammed Abed al-Jabri went back in his five-volume encyclopedic work (*Introduction to the Holy Quran*) on the ideas and opinions he advanced three decades before in his (*We and Heritage*).

In any case, the most distinguishing feature of the Arab Islamic heritage is that it has forever been vibrant and dynamic, closely interacting with the manifold aspects of life, in both directions, without losing its originality and distinctive features. One other outstanding trait about the Arab Islamic heritage is that it has existed since time immemorial, greatly influencing all spheres of human life: language, history, culture, legislation, literature, religion, manners. These roots, deeply anchored in the past, cannot, for instance, be described in the manner of the Greek heritage.

This means that great care must be taken to preserve heritage, as it cannot regenerate or be restored if destroyed. The most horrid of all crimes that Man can commit is to ruin what they inherited from their ancestors. Heritage preservation is not to be taken as an emotive, reactionary attitude, but rather as a natural human disposition.

There is no conflict at all between looking forward to the future and conserving past heritage. Rather, the focus on heritage should be seen as the basis on which to clearly and vigorously shape the future.

There is a famous saying by renowned French scholar and orientalist Jacques Berque which I always love to quote in this connection: *“The future of the Arabs lays with their revival of the past, for the future, in many cases, is the past or present brought to life.”*

As famous Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru once said, *“We have to earnestly look ahead to the future, and strive to preserve our heritage. In both the past and the present we should find inspiration to draw a better future for all. For ignoring one's past is ignoring one's roots.”*

Heritage is bound by no timeframe. For all that a writer leaves after their death is the product of their intellectual labour. Therefore, works by Shawqi, Hafez, Omar Abu Risha, Taha Hussein, al-Aqqad, Mohamed al-Tahar Ben Achour, Mohammed Abduh, Allal al-Fassi and their likes are of no less historical significance than Abu Tammam's, al-Mutannabi's, al-Tabari's, Sibawayh's, al-Ma'arri's, Ibn al-Haytham's, Ibn al-Nafis's, Ibn Rushd's and those of other famous scholars of Islamic civilization.

## **Pioneering works**

Works by Arab Muslim scholars embraced a wide range of subjects, as can be evidenced by the many extensive bibliographic encyclopedias of Arab scholars. Prominent classical works include the Baghdad bookseller Ishaq Ibn al-Nadim's *“Fihrist”*<sup>(4)</sup> (Catalogue of Books), compiled in 377 A.H., the Ottoman Mohamed Bin Abdullah Kâtip Çelebi's (known as Hajji Khalifa d. 1657).

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(4) Mohamed Awni Abdurraouf and Halal Iman As-Said, eds. (Cairo: General Organization of Culture Palaces, Az-Zakhair series, 2006) 149-150.

***Kashf al-zunun 'an asami al-kutub wa al-funun*** (The Removal of Doubt from the Names of Books and the Sciences)<sup>(5)</sup>, in addition to a variety of biographical dictionaries arranged by names of notable scholars (*tarajim*) and the eras (*tabaqat*) in which they lived.

In modern times, there emerged three established scholars of Damascene descent who rendered outstanding services to the Arab Islamic culture. These are:

- Muhammad Kurd Ali, who played a leading role in the establishment of the Arab Academy of Damascus. He compiled a six-volume history of Syria (***Khitat al-Sham***)<sup>(6)</sup>, first published in 1925.
- Umar Rida Kahhala, a famous bio-bibliographer, who compiled a fifteen-volume biographic dictionary of Arab authors (***Mu'jam al-Mu'allifin***)<sup>(7)</sup> of which the introduction was first written in 1925. A sixteenth volume was added to the book.
- Salah al-Din al-Munajjid, who between 1970 and 1982 compiled a five-volume catalogue of Arabic manuscripts published in Beirut between 1954 and 1980, (***Mu'jam al-Makhtutat al-'Arabiyya min 1954 ila 1980***)<sup>(8)</sup>.

Damascene scholar Salah al-Din al-Munajjid served as the director of the Cairo-based Institute of Arabic Manuscripts, and was believed to be the precursor of the Arab-Islamic manuscript revival movement to come.

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(5) "Dar Ihya' At-Turat Al-'Arabi (Arab Heritage Revival House)," Beirut.

(6) "Al-Matba'a Al-Haditha," (Damascus, 1925).

(7) "Muassassat Al-Risala," (Beirut, 1993).

(8) "Dar Al-Kitab Al-Jadid," (Beirut, 1962-1982).

In addition to these three Damascene encyclopedias, there is a five-volume catalogue of works of Arab scholars (*al-M'ujam al-Shamil lil turath al-Arabi al-Matbu'*) (Comprehensive Dictionary of Printed Arabic Heritage). The book, compiled by scholar Muhammad 'Isa Salhiya, was released by the Arab League Institute of Arabic Manuscripts during the period between 1992 and 1997.

Considerable work has been done to document the Arab Islamic cultural heritage; most notable is the encyclopedic historiography of the city of Damascus (*Tarikh madinat Dimashq*) by renowned Damascene scholar Abu al-Qassim Ali ibn al-Hasan ibn Hibatullah ibn Asakir. This very interesting scholarly work, in sixty-nine (69) volumes, was edited by Mrs Sukayna al-Shihabi and published by the Damascus Arabic Language Academy. The effort made to edit this huge work is highly commendable.

Al-Furqan Foundation for Islamic heritage, which is based in London, is making considerable efforts to classify and publish with finesse a wide range of comprehensive indexes (*fihrist*) of Arabic manuscripts in various parts of the world.

Among the most prominent Western scholars who rendered immense services to the Arab Islamic heritage was the great German orientalist Carl Brockelmann (1868-1956). It took Brockelmann half a century to compile his huge six-volume encyclopedia (*Tarikh Al-Adab Al-Arabi*) (The History of Arab Literature), which was translated from German into Arabic.

J.J. Reiske, another German scholar to have richly contributed to the Arab Islamic heritage, said more than two hundred years ago:

*“Anyone who reads the history of literature will be surprised to find out that there are so many people in the Mashreq who were fully conversant with all kinds of literature, at a time when Europe was plunged into complete ignorance and barbarity. Nevertheless, historiography shows that the East and Europe have each contributed a great deal to the development of human culture and civilization.”*

In his foreword to the book (***Turath Al-Islam***) (The Legacy of Islam), German orientalist Joseph Schacht wrote<sup>(9)</sup>:

*“The word 'turath' in this book refers both to the contribution of Islam to human achievement in all its manifestations, and to the contact and influence Islam has with non-Muslim world. The book (The Legacy of Islam) is not primarily concerned with how other religions and civilizations might have influenced Islam, or with how in expanding far to the Mashreq (Turkey, eastern Indian lands and Afghanistan) and the Maghreb the Islamic civilization brought together diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. **The book rather deals with Islam as a civilization, not only as a religion.**”*

How deeply the Arab Islamic civilization influenced and fascinated the Europeans is beyond imagination. Suffice it to note in this regard that some Christian authorities in Al-Andalus, especially bishop Álvaro of Córdoba, were scandalized at how many young Christians preferred the literary works and language of the Arabs to that of the Europeans. In this connection, Álvaro said:

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(9) “***Aalam Al-Ma'rifa*** (World of Knowledge),” (Kuwait, May 1978).

*“Many of our brethren Christians read Arabic poems and tales, and study the works of Muslim theologians and philosophers, not to refute and criticize them, but rather to express themselves as elegantly as the Muslims would do in the Arabic language.” In the 'College of Christ', Álvaro complained, scarcely one youth in a thousand would write a descent letter in Latin, whereas most could compete with the Arabs themselves in the composition of Arabic poetry, and would voice their admiration and appreciation for the Arabic literature.<sup>(10)</sup>*

Such is the core of the Arab Islamic heritage in which we take immense pride, and from which we derive our authentic Arab and Islamic identity.

Heritage, in the broad acceptance we have explained, comprises three main elements:

1. Written and oral tradition.
2. Buildings, sculptures, pictures and ornaments.
3. Traditions, customs and behaviors.

Heritage as such is the main constituent part of the Arab Muslim identity in its deepest sense.



## **Identity: Significance and full extent**

It should first be noted that there is a strong correlation between heritage and identity. They cannot exist in isolation from one

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(10) Imara Mohamed, *Islam in the Mirror of Western Thought* (Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi) 108.

another, both being constituent elements of the self and integral parts of individuals and communities.

Every nation has its own heritage and distinctive cultural identity of which they are either mindful or oblivious.

In his *al-Kulliyat*, a dictionary of terminology and language differences, Abu al-Baqa' al-Kafawi distinguishes between the common quiddity and real nature (*mâhiyah*) of a thing, which indicates the permanent existence of a thing in a way that it (this existence) is apprehended intellectually, and the self identity (*huwiyyah*) of a thing, when the existent is perceived in its relation with other existents.<sup>(11)</sup>

In Al-Jurjani's *al-Taarifât*, identity is defined as the absolute truth that enshrines facts amidst its folds like the nucleus that embodies the future tree.<sup>(12)</sup>

In contemporary literature, the term (*huwiyyah*) designates the fact of being the same in all respects, either to oneself or to a similar entity. The same definition is given in modern dictionaries, in which 'identity' stands for the absolute essence of an entity or an individual, the essence which embodies their intrinsic, distinctive qualities. It is also called the 'unity of the self'.

Our perception of the identity is based on our civilizational heritage. In the Arab-Islamic culture, 'identity' means to be distinct from others in all concerns. The term takes on three meanings: the **personification**, the **person themselves** and the **external existence**.

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(11) Adnan Darwish and Muhamed al-Misri, eds. Al-Kafawi Abu al-Baqa', *Al-Kulliyat*, (Beirut: Al-Risala Institution, 1995) 961.

(12) Al-Jurjani Al-Sharif Ali Ben Muhamed, *Kitabu Al-Taarifât*, (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, 1995) 257.

Whether we adopt the linguistic or modern philosophical acceptance of the term 'identity', the general sense does not change for that matter, as it will always connote the fact of being distinct from others or of being the same in all respects, that is to say to have specific characteristics, values and constituents that distinguish the individual and society from others.

In short, the cultural and civilizational identity of a given nation represents their immutable and characteristic traits, which confer upon the national personality a patina that distinguishes them from the other national personalities.<sup>(13)</sup>

## **On the preservation of heritage**

But how to safeguard the Arab Islamic heritage and the Arab Islamic cultural and civilizational identity in the context of a far-reaching globalization, whose leverage stretches out to the entire international community?

More importantly, how can the requirements of national sovereignty, along with spiritual, cultural and civilizational specificities, tally with those of globalization?

The trend taken by globalization portends an adverse impact on both identity and sovereignty. The Western stance vis-à-vis the identity of peoples is conspicuously contradictory. While, on the one hand, the West takes great pride in its identity, to which it clings staunchly by the way, it refuses, on the other, to recognize the national identities of non-Western peoples, as it feels that globalization might lead to increased awareness about cultural and civilizational specificity.

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(13) Altwajri Abdulaziz Othman, *Al-Aalam Al-Islami Fi Asr Al-'Awlama*, (Cairo: Dar Ash-Shuruq, 2004) 46-47.

Western thinkers take this to be the thorniest problem with which they are confronted. It is clearly evident that they have a confused understanding of the matter.

In a study published in the November and December 1996 issues of the *Foreign Affairs* Journal, under the title (*The West: Unique, Not Universal*), American thinker Samuel Huntington drew a balance between the concepts of 'modernization' and 'westernization'.

Huntington stated that non-Western peoples could not become an integral part of the Western civilizational texture albeit they consumed Western goods, watched American movies, and listened to Western music.

He then argued that the **heart of a culture**, however, **involves language, religion, values, traditions and customs**, indicating that the West inherited much from earlier civilizations, including most notably Classical civilization. Classical legacies in Western civilization, he underlined, are many, and include Greek philosophy and rationalism, Roman law, Western Christianity, Latin origins of European languages, separation of spiritual and temporal authority, rule of law, social pluralism and civil society, representative bodies, and individualism.

Samuel Huntington further said: “*Modernization and economic development neither require nor produce cultural westernization. To the contrary, they promote a resurgence of, and renewed commitment to, indigenous cultures [...]. The time has come for the West to abandon the illusion of universality and to promote the strength, coherence and vitality of its civilization in a world of civilizations [...].*”

He went on to explain that this required the unity of the West under the leadership of the United States of America, and deli-

neation of the limits of the West, from the perspective of cultural homogeneity.

It should nevertheless be said that such was a courageous stance on the part of an interesting thinker.

## **How globalization affects peoples' identities**

Amidst these persistent cultural challenges, the following question must be addressed:

- Is globalization a new formulae of the civilizational confrontation waged by the West, in the general sense of the term 'West', against the identities of peoples and the cultures of nations in order to impose the hegemony of a unique culture and civilization over the globe ?

From this perspective, globalization proves to be absolutely inconsistent with the rules of international law, the reality of international relations, let alone the national economics, the national sovereignty and the principle of cultural diversity.

Should globalization proceed along this course, it will ultimately lead to the collapse of world stability by dint of eroding the gist of cultural and civilizational identity, and sapping the very bases of cultural coexistence among peoples.

Because of its extensively coercive approach, globalization will bring on a worldwide anarchy of thinking and conduct, reflected also in economics, trade, arts, literature as well as science and technology.<sup>(14)</sup>

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(14) Altwajri.

In spite of all that, mankind cannot, at the present time, disentangle itself from the constraints of globalization in view of its pressing need for keeping abreast of the economic, scientific and technological trends of the New World Order. It can, however, devise a counter-cultural current apt to face up to the hegemonic drive of the phenomenon of globalization on the theoretical and practical levels, and to cope with its fall-outs pending the **emergence of new world powers that would act as opponents or at least counterweights to the power currently holding the reins of the world order.**

Six years ago, I published in Cairo a book titled (*The Islamic World and Globalization*). In it I wrote:

*“A group of futurists and strategists, mostly belonging to the West, concede that the first decade of the next century will witness the occurrence of a critical imbalance in the international power relationships on the political and economic levels, which will trigger a radical change in the trends of globalization. This will enhance the strength and prevalence of the international legitimacy resting on the rules of international law, not on the logic of power and triumph in cold war battles.”<sup>(15)</sup>*

The first decade is almost over, and many quick-paced changes have unfolded on the world scene which had an unintended, continuing knock-on effect on the global economy. We are particularly interested in how the global economic crisis affects the cultural and civilizational identities of peoples and nations, and how its attendant implications would seriously disrupt those societies which renegade their heritage and identity.

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(15) Altwajri.

We can safely argue, through our direct experience of reality and close understanding of present-time changes, that **national identities are exposed to considerable risks.**

## **Heritage as perceived of in the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World**

ISESCO's **Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World**, which was adopted by the Sixth Islamic Summit Conference (Dakar, 1991), and approved in its amended version by the Fourth Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers (Algiers, 2004), gives an objectively precise definition of the concept of heritage. Heritage, as explained in the Strategy, is considered to be one of the aspects of the individual and collective creativity of a nation throughout their long history. Heritage is also considered to be the best expression of the cultural identity and the cultural character of a nation.

Heritage includes numerous cultural, artistic and intellectual forms inherited from the early and recent past of a nation. It is the product of the human mind and differs in time and place. In its general acceptance, it is related to the material heritage including archaeological monuments or things discovered through excavations or the antiquities available in museums which represent different ages. It also includes the intellectual heritage hailing from the works of creative scholars and thinkers each in their time.

There is also social heritage, which takes the form of customs and traditions prevailing in society and their effect on the individuals of that society. Therefore, this kind of heritage has a strong link with the cultural practices and the linkage between the present and past of a nation and its outlook to the future.

*It was also stated in the Strategy, “As we believe that the main source of the Islamic heritage is the Holy Quran and the sound tradition of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) which brought high scientific, intellectual and cultural achievement, we should not confine the sense of our heritage to the mere organized maintenance of monuments, their enlistment and exhibition, to the mere continuation of the traditional ceremonies, or to the emotional attachment to the vestiges of the past. Heritage is rather one of the most important means for cultural identity entrenchment.”*

The Strategy, which provides a roadmap for the Muslim Arab Ummah to protect its heritage and preserve its identity, further stresses: *“We also reject the sanctifying of the Islamic heritage, bearing in mind that it was the understanding of man to the revelation and the interaction with the established norms of the universe, a product, however, that is neither part of revelation but that's human creativity related to revelation.”*

*“Therefore, it is our view that a critical objective study of the heritage is of use and that it forms a part of the attention to be accorded to heritage. Culture that dares to undertake auto-criticism of its history and draws lessons from its heritage could mould its future heritage with a creative spirit in order to keep pace with the changes without renouncing its originality. Those who discover, understand and criticize heritage would be better equipped to maintain continuation through changes.”*

The Arabic language, it must be admitted, is another key element of heritage and a major determinant of national identity.

The fine record of achievement by Muslim scholars in various religious and worldly sciences confirmed that Arabic is a flexible

language, that it can be developed and expanded to accommodate various sciences, and that it has the capacity to adapt itself to the scientific, intellectual and psychological needs. The Holy Quran managed, with its miraculous textual nature, to penetrate into the minds of millions of people. Muslims built their thinking and civilization on the basis of this Holy text. Thus, the Arabic language became a permanent receptacle for Muslims to understand the Quran and appreciate the immense wealth of Islamic heritage.<sup>(16)</sup>

Bearing in mind that much of the Islamic intellectual works appeared in other languages in the non-Arab Islamic countries, though mainly transcribed in the Arabic script, it would be necessary to pay attention to these languages and to endeavour to publicise non-Arabic material on the Islamic culture. ISESCO is actively engaged in this area.

The Islamic heritage - the outcome of sciences and arts, historic and architectural glories and their ongoing arts and industries created by Muslims - is a source of Islamic culture and a constituent element of the Arab Muslim identity. Indeed, most of it is considered to be an important part of human heritage which can neither be denied nor ignored.

The Islamic heritage also manifests itself in a set of social institutions such as waqfs, bookstores, academic bodies, charity and even animal-care facilities, and cultural institutions such as Qur'anic schools. It also finds its true expression in a number of religious and social manifestations such as celebrations of religious feasts and festivals.



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(16) *Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World*, (Rabat: ISESCO, 2001).

It is therefore the collective responsibility of Muslims to preserve our heritage and maintain our identity, which is a matter of pride to all of us, and serves as a **real bulwark against all forms of external threat**.

In this increasingly unstable world, serious challenges are posed to human societies which threaten to undermine their cultural and civilizational specificities, religious integrity and national identity. Worse even, the fast pace of these dangerous changes, amid a unilateral world order, leaves little chance to successfully rise up to them.

It is therefore a vital necessity and a first-rate duty to safeguard our Arab Islamic identity, culture and civilization.

Preserving a thing requires a five-step approach consisting of: **attendance, maintenance, prevention, surveillance and observance**. Any such effort is futile unless these parameters are concatenated together into one whole.<sup>(17)</sup>

In addition, preservation occurs on two major levels, **internal and external**. One often tends to care for that which is infinitely precious to them, and would spare no effort to always keep them in their possession. And what else is more invaluable and worthy of protection than our heritage and identity! This is what gives meaning to existence.

At the interior level, where a thing - a sacred religious or moral principle or a precious object of great historical significance - is believed to be highly invaluable, people would tenaciously cling to them.<sup>(18)</sup>

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(17) Altwajiri Abdulaziz Othman, *On the Civilizational Edifice of the Islamic World*, vol. 7 148 (Rabat: ISESCO, 2004).

(18) Altwajiri 147.

Externally, for a thing to be best preserved it needs strong resolve and resourcefulness to achieve the sought-after objectives, regardless of difficulties and obstacles.

It is extremely important to see to it that one preserves what they hold on to. The more precious an object is, by virtue of their price or intrinsic value, the more incessant is the need for decisive action, with clearly stated objectives. Any effort which does not observe these conditions will not pay off.

Without hard work and dedication, there is no chance to maintain in safety from any sort of harm the thing one holds dear in their heart.

Action in this regard requires that the immediate environment and prevailing conditions be carefully examined, in order to closely see how these positively or negatively affect the ability to achieve the desired goals. Failing to better understand changes and conditions will only take away from the effort made to reach the sought-after objectives.

It is important, in order to successfully preserve a thing, to fully understand their core, value and impact on their immediate environment, tangible and intangible. The more we apprehend the significance of a thing, regardless of their nature, the more we will want to retain and keep them unaltered. There are certain obligations that have to be met when, out of genuine belief or dire necessity, we ardently desire to preserve a thing.

Both levels, internal and external, are closely associated, especially when it comes to a fundamental principle or a religious sanctity or an ultimate value. This amounts to a principal religious obligation.<sup>(19)</sup>

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(19) Altwaijri Abdulaziz Othman, *Al-Aalam Al-Islami Fi Asr AL-'Awlama*, 45.

This point needs to be emphasized and re-emphasized, all the more as the dangers posed to our identity and heritage are real and should not be underestimated.



Heavy challenges are weighing on the Arab Muslim Ummah, threatening to undermine its identity, destroy its core specificities, compromise the **spiritual and cultural security** of its people, and take away from its everlasting Arab Islamic civilizational mission.

We are in the midst of a savage war, waged against our history, heritage, identity and the language of our sacred book, and should therefore head off every attempt to distort our history. This is how we can march safely and serenely into the future with a well-conceived vision. For how else can we achieve civilizational development and social progress, if not with a genuinely deep understanding of our cultural heritage? What other ways are there to achieve this goal, if not by using critical thinking to assess which values are genuinely ours and which are not?<sup>(20)</sup>

Heritage, the distinctive feature of a nation's **culture and civilization**, is a crucial component of identity, itself a reflection and vehicle of heritage. Preserving heritage in diverse forms and manifestations is an obligation and a mission, it being understood that heritage is the treasure trove and cumulative product of human experience in various realms of knowledge. Failing to preserve heritage is breaking the fetters of one's identity and

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(20) See Jalal Shawqi's *Globalization : Identity and Course : An Arab Perspective*, (Cairo: Ad-Dar Al-Masriyah Al-Lubnaniya, 2007).

renouncing one's cultural origins. For this reason, the protection and preservation of cultural heritage in all its forms for future generations is an avoidable imperative.

That the Arab Muslim civilization has contributed significantly to human development - in intellectual, cultural, literary, scientific and other fields - is an established fact and a matter of pride. The Arab Muslim heritage is the outcome of a rich interaction of people from various ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds (Arabs, Persians, Romans, Indians, Turks and others) throughout centuries of shared existence and mutual exchange of principles, values, ideas and thoughts in various realms of knowledge. It should be noted that heritage does not conflict with renewal and regeneration of ideas, perceptions, approaches and systems. **It constitutes a solid benchmark for a better life.**

Identity is the bulwark against cultural absorption. This means that by preserving heritage we preserve our identity.

In his (*Al-Awlamah: Al-Huwiyyah wa Al-Masar: Ruyah Arabiyyah*) (Globalization: Identity and Course: An Arab Perspective) Arab writer Shawqi Jalal said:

*“The next battle, as current President of Israel Shimon Peres said, will not be over land or borders, but over the Jewish identity and cultural belonging.”* Commenting, Shawqi said, Shimon Peres's words show **an ideological stance derived from the Torah, but which runs counter to the natural flow of history. We, Shawqi further stressed, need to clearly understand the value system and ideational traditions that form the basis for a history, toward a greater sense of belonging.**

This is what the enemy, an artificial state unwarrantedly planted on the usurped territories of Palestine by Western colonial

powers, takes as their battle at this point of time in the history of human civilization.

I want to finally stress that the challenges posed to us, at this very critical juncture, are such that a firm, concerted stance is needed to protect and safeguard our heritage, identity and existence.