

Part V

The Predicament of Islam between Culture and Politics Revisited after September 11, 2001 and March 11, 2004

Introductory Remarks

The assaults of September 11, 2001 in the USA and on March 11 in Europe were much more than simple acts of terrorism. They were an indication of a new pattern of violence addressed as 'irregular war' and legitimised as a *jihad* in the understanding of a 'holy terror' in the 'Mind of God' against the West. At issue is a war without rules, which is embedded within an overall process of politicisation and militarisation of religion. In this context, we witness how the new *jihadism* in world politics is related to the subject of this book on 'Islam between Culture and Politics'. The new role of politicised religion emerges within an on-going process of inner-civilisational development in Islam, a development which is related to a predicament with modernity. September 11 also bears relevance, therefore, on the subject matter of this book on Islam. What we see is a pendulum, swinging between culture and politics. As a social scientist trained in philosophy and history, I believe in the importance of placing such an oscillation into an overall historical context. This must be done in this case if we are to achieve a proper grasp of the current phenomenon. In this understanding, one cannot properly deal with Islam and its followers without taking into consideration two contextual starting points: first, the world at large, that is the global environment of Islam in the twenty-first century, and second the historical continuity of the overall internal development of Islamic civilisation itself.

September 11, 2001 heralded the return of the sacred in the world at large, i.e. in the West itself (if not in Europe, certainly in the USA) within the framework of a cultural turn that is the hallmark of our age. As argued in this book, religion is a cultural system, which may also be developed into a political ideology. In Islam itself this kind of politicisation of religion has been turning from the simple defensive-cultural call for *al-hall al-Islami* (the Islamic solution), to a call for concrete action. This shift is taking place in a period of crisis for the nation-state, which, it is envisioned, will be replaced by the *Nizam Islami* (Islamic order). The call for global *jihad* thus moves from the confines of the abode of Islam to the world at large. This move occurs while reviving Sayyid Qutb's formula of an 'Islamic World Revolution' based on the doctrine of global *jihad*. This is the overall context to be dealt with in this chapter, which is an addition to this new edition.

The development of political Islam as a variety of religious fundamentalism was the subject of my earlier book, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New Order*, published in 1998

and updated in 2002. This addition is by no means merely a rehashing of my earlier findings, repeated in the post-September 11 context, nor is it a new version of what others have already written on political Islam – two traps into which I find much current research falls. For example, I find Eickelman's formulation of *Muslim Politics*, the title of his book on this subject reprinted after September 11, not only misleading, but also an inadequate treatment of the phenomenon of politicisation of religion occurring within Islamic civilisation. Some cultural anthropologists seem to have difficulties in understanding the intertwined developments of religion and politics in an international environment. Those – like Eickelman – moving away from Geertz's apolitical dealing with religion in addressing what is called Islamic politics do not solve any problems. One can learn from Geertz how to understand religion, but fail to learn anything from Eickelman's dealing with religion and how it becomes intertwined with politics. In a market in which books on Islam are mushrooming, a more promising work is that of Beverly Milton-Edwards, entitled *Islam and Politics in the Contemporary World*, because she understands the issues. Among the less promising contributions, one finds Gilles Kepel's declaration of Islamism's premature death, in his revised edition of *Déclin de l'Islamisme*. This book's analysis of Islam and international politics lacks a professional quality that is so desperately needed within International Relations after September 11, 2001, and reflects instead the overall lucrative nature of dealing with the subject of Islam in the post-9/11 world. My own interest in the topic is different. As a reform Muslim, my work on Islam revolves around the destiny of the civilisation to which I belong and thus touches on my own identity. But I care equally for Europe, which guarantees me the freedom of writing this book, a work I regret I could not write in most countries of *Dar al-Islam*.