

Narrative:_Islam, Time and Foresight. Foresight Practices in the Context of Arabo-Muslim Culture

The emergence of philosophical thought in the Islamic world began during the Umayyad period (661-750) and the beginning of the Abbasid period. Intellectual activity at that time focussed on the construction of both legal and theological systems. This is the blossoming of seventh century Arab Thought.

Unlike Judaism and Christianity, Islam was a universalist religion. It wanted to be open and transcendent. Thus, far from turning inwards it aimed to be open and rising up towards transcendence. For much of the Islamic world the message of Muhammad concerns men and women of any previous history and any conditions. For them it is the immediacy of the relation between Muslims and God that offers absolute divine transcendence.

This monotheism provided a way of bringing together diverse tribal groups without linguistic unity, often nomads, but also people around the city of Mecca, a commercial and religious town, dominated by the tribe of Quraysh, itself divided into two clans.

Muhammad, was a forty year old merchant, belonged to the second of these clans, the Banu Hâschim. He became a prophet, stating that he had received a message from one God, Allah. This message in its entirety is contained in the Koran^[1]. The new prophet preached for a dozen years, between 610 and 622 until he emigrated to the oasis of Yathrib, about 200 km north of Mecca. Yathrib will later be called Medina, the City of the Prophet (Madinat al-Nabi). And it is this departure which marks the Hegira (hijra), starting point of the new Muslim calendar.

The text of the Koran generated many exegeses (tafsir) starting very early, in the eighth, ninth and tenth century, it is this set of basic texts which nowadays Professor Mohammed Arkoun described as the "Corpus officially closed."

It would be wrong to try to separate the knowledge and traditions of Islam and the Greek world. The existence of the Prophet Muhammad, who lived from 570 to 632, comes from muslim texts, but also from Greek stories or syriac. But the transmission in Arabic has become increasingly important, transmission of knowledge, transmission of the Islamic Doxa.

Scholars have long argued that vast effort at translating a wide variety of texts from many different languages into Arabic undertaken by the caliph El-Ma'moun^[2] made these traditions more available to Arab thinkers. Indeed many major works from the Greek--Latin tradition, and from Indian and Persian sources were able to be accessible to the Muslim intellectuals, and to the most important thinkers of the Islam.

So in a curious way it was the teachings of Socrates as Plato and Aristote that helped to encourage an unprecedented intellectual adventure, perhaps one that has never been repeated since then, an adventure free from the constraints of pure logic without breaking from the essentials of the Islamic religion. This is an amazing example of an exercise in free thought without the uncertainties and vagaries of free-thinking.

It When it comes to the word for philosophy in Arabic it was not the Semitic word hikma, meaning wisdom which was chosen but the Greek word philosophia. Translated into arabic the word was falsafa, and the philosopher is now the faylasuf (pl.falasifa) transcribed from the Greek philosophos. The origin of this perspective is attributed to Al-Kîndi, who was soon followed by a long line of philosophers.

According to Al-Kîndi, in his treatise The first Philosophy (Al-falsafa al-ula), even if intense investigations had been conducted by Arabic thinkers, without the Greeks " it would not have been possible to collect the true principles." These were the principles that became the point of departure for thinking about the future. The main assertion of the Messengers of Thruth is the sole sovereignty of God. This implies that we should follow His virtues and forget the sins. Metaphysics, ethics and religion go hand in hand.

With the advent of philosophy a new relationship with time and the future emerges in Muslim and Arab thought. Indeed there is a conflict over the concepts of time and the future between philosophers as proponents of a rational mind and dogmatic theologians. Philosophers face towards the future and display a strong foresight attitude. For example Averroès is entirely turned to the future, his main contribution is a desire to convey the idea that most people can have a better future, a rational future in his ideal city. Ibn Khaldun^[3], part of the same line of Arab thinkers marks the apogee of foresight. Khaldun expressed reservations about philosophy and he broke from that tradition. There is even a chapter in his Muqqadima entitled the refutation of the philosophy and the falseness of its views.

So the prospective thought melted with the relationship between time and future existed and preceded the appearance of the concept of prospective and scenario planning. Is that just theory? Are there now any foresight studies and centres in the Arab world? The following brief survey of foresight work is restricted to the Arabic world, it is worth bearing in mind that this only represents a quarter of the Muslim population around the world.

Foresight Practices in the Context of Arab World

?The Arab world is at a historic milestone. Torn between the oppressive situation at home and violation from abroad, Arabs are increasingly excluded from determining their own future.? That's how the back cover of the Arab Human Development Report (2004) begins.

On one hand, this report illustrates in its first pages that the Arab's future escapes from them and is shaped by outside forces.

The United Nations Development Programme was at the origin of the launch of the projects of prospective reflections in most the Arab countries, as an example Morocco 2030, Tunisia 2030 and quite recently Mauritania at the edge of 2030. Thus, UNDP considers foresight as a key or a tool which leads to development.

Unfortunately, on the other hand, this report reveals the impotence of some Arab countries to reach that goal or at least to point to it. However, numerous attempts occurred in the past. One of the first foresight seminars organized in an Arab country was held in Morocco on 21-22 March 1980. The theme was "Development and Prospective " and the key note speaker and initiator was Mehdi Elmanjara, well known for his theories on scenario planning.

In 1988, appears the first study on the future of the Arabic world published in the Lebanon by the center of studies on the union of the Arabic world. This study was realized over five years around an ambitious scientific project on the theme: a forward-looking vision of the future of the Arabic world during the future thirty years. Due to the lack of public and private financing, the last two chapters of the study were not able to be published.

This project imagines three different scenarios, an unfavourable scenario " limited horizon and risk of division ", an intermediate scenario " scenario of cooperation and collaboration: the challenges of resistance in a global context ", and a third desirable scenario " Arabic unity ".

It should be noted that there are essentially two types of prospective studies in the Arab world, the normative studies (Libya 2019, Oman Vision 2020, etc..) and the exploratory studies (Tunisia 2030, Egypt 2030 Morocco 2020, etc..). They can be initiated by governments like "Egypt 2030" or directly by the civil society like "Egypt 2020" which was drafted by a non-governmental association and has been one of the first prospective study designed in the Arab-Muslim world.

There are also studies of sector-based type called strategic studies, more precisely those led by the World Bank in 2002-2003 which deal essentially with the tourist sector on the horizon 2020 even if the recommendations of this

report went unheeded.

Another type(chap) of prospective, whom we can consider as "autocratic" made its appearance in the majority of the Arab-Moslem countries. The peculiarity of these studies holds the fact that their representatives fix the reference terms and intervene extensively in the choice of the participants and speakers, what harms necessarily in the good progress of the initiative and ends in results that might consolidate the expectations and the desires of the decision-makers.

Studies developed by autonomous entities have been achieved even if these studies are of uneven value. First we found that studies which were conducted by independent entities are more relevant in terms of methodology and results than those mandated by national government agencies.

Examples of studies undertaken by independent entities, we have selected some relevant work including a study by the World Economic Forum in 2007 : "The Gulf Cooperation Concil (GCC) countries and the world : scenarios to 2025". GCC's scenario planning study is the result of eighteen months of researches involving three hundred experts of the countries of the Gulf. What uncorked in the realization of three other foresight studies respectively in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. The followed methodology is the Scenario Planning method and the language of the work was English.

The CIA report: "How will the world be in 2020?" is a geopolitical foresight exercise launched in 2003 at the initiative of the National Intelligence Council. It is a reflection that involved thousand experts of different nationalities on a one year period. This report has identified five trends for 2020 and four possible futures (scenarios).

The transmutation of international terrorism is the fifth trend that emerges from this report. It illustrates the fact that the terrorist threat continues to exist and will be fed in one hand by the unemployment raise and poverty in the Muslim world and secondly, the development of information technologies that will be a springboard to all terrorist activities. The fourth scenario is called "New Caliphate" in which the report imagines this scenario through this scenario-fiction a new world order governed by the upholders of an extremist view of religion.

Besides and through our research for all centers of prospective studies country by country in the Arabic world, we were able to count about fifty centers which vary according to their organization, their functioning, their method of appointment or their degree of politicization.

The number of studies commissioned is phenomenal, we will attempt to deliver the best and most relevant. The result of this inventory has identified three major waves related to the impulse of prospective thinking : a first wave postcolonial And a second wave concomitant to the first Gulf War and a third wave post September 11, 2001.

The first wave, postcolonial, was launched by intellectuals educated in western schools, so there was a vision of the future related to intellectual engagement, it id the case of Bourguiba, the leader of the Tunisian independance. These men and women have therefore contributed to the establishment of a foresight attitude and methods from Europe with the aim of adapting them to their country.

The second wave is concomitant with the post-Gulf War and is also closely linked to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. With the fall of communism, another vision of world could arise with an impact more or less important on the countries of the Arab-Muslim world and especially in relation to the planning system of the USSR.

But the third wave is certainly the most significant : the post September 11, 2001. This event was crucial for the Muslim world. Since then, we have witnessed the proliferation of centers with strategic vocation and multidisciplinary state studies or emanating from the intelligentsia of the civil society.

Notes

1. 2 For the sunni muslims not chiites
2. 2 Abbassid Calif who founded in Bagdad the House of Wisdom in 832, Bayt al Hikma, which goal was to translate greek knowledge in arabic.
3. 2 The perception of time and future in Ibn Khaldun's work was treated by Sohail Inayatullah, Macrohistory and future studies, Futures, vol. 30, n° 5, pp. 381-394, 1998; and also Macrohistory and Macrohistorians, Galtung, J. and Inayatullah, S. (eds), Praeger, New York, 1997. See also, ? Islam and the Future? Special issue, guest editor Ziauddin Sardar, Futures, Vol. 23, n°3, april 1991.