

PART II

Section three: the cultural, socio-economic and political context

Chapters 6-8 concentrate on impediments to knowledge in the Arab world. This analysis takes in: a) culture, itself subdivided into heritage, religion and language; b) the dominant socio-economic structure, including modes of economic production, growth and income distribution; and class structure, attitudes and values; and c) politics, including political systems, the role of elites, the corruption of knowledge by politics; the importance of codifying knowledge freedoms under the law; the relationship between good governance and freedom of thought and expression; and the regional and global environment for knowledge transfers and development.



Culture

The production of knowledge is driven by strong and increasing societal demand and the political will to secure the resources necessary for stimulating a vital and capable knowledge system. This includes building high calibre human capital as a base, and ensuring an environment of policies and institutional structures conducive to the system's effective functioning. Important as they are, these factors are in turn affected by societal, cultural, economic and political determinants which also have a bearing on the knowledge system – for knowledge does not evolve in a social vacuum but rather in a particular society that has a reality, a history and a regional and global context. It is this last element that has a special significance for the Arab world in this phase of its history.

This next section of the Report, therefore, deals with fundamental elements of the societal context that affect the knowledge system and that are expected to play a significant role in the establishment of the knowledge society in Arab countries. Chapter 6 considers the relationship between culture and knowledge acquisition, and delves into some of the issues that have been briefly touched upon earlier in the Report (in Chapter 1 in particular). The chapter analyses the various components of the Arab intellectual heritage, religion and language, and folk culture.

The term "culture" generally refers to all human contributions to ideas, perceptions, customs, socio-political systems and economic constructs. It also encompasses literary, artistic and technological innovations throughout history. It almost overlaps with the term "civilisation", and has innumerable more specific definitions. The most common and useful definition of culture refers to the status of intellectual progress, of individuals and societies, reflected in intellectual, value-related, innovative and artistic accomplishments that are cor-

related with progress in the thinking patterns and behaviours of a particular civil group. Arab culture can be perceived from two perspectives: formal culture and folk culture. Formal culture is construed to mean the complete array of intellectual tools, comprehensive concepts, systems and values that govern the system of thought and action, and the perceptions and practices of the individual and society. In this definition, and in an Arab cultural context, intellectual heritage represents a basic component of culture, language is said to be the carrier of culture; religion is the major comprehensive belief system that directs the life of this culture; and values (moral, social and political) are the judges of the actions directed within it. Those are the fundamental elements of Arab culture for the purpose of this analysis. Of course, there are other cultural, knowledge-based, scientific or conceptual elements deriving from other sources that could also be added to those three elements. But intellectual heritage, religion and values, and language stand as the most decisive, determining and instructive elements of formal Arab culture. It is those three that ought to be taken into account first when looking at knowledge production as a step towards building a knowledge society in Arab countries.

INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE

Arab "intellectual heritage" is a major component of Arab culture. An Arab knowledge society must connect with the defining sources of knowledge upon which this society is built. Arab intellectual heritage constitutes a living membrane in the cultural body of Arab society, yet it remains a "historical" phenomenon, i.e., the entirety of its facts go back to objective historical conditions. Change, development and transcendence underlie the entire process of

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this heritage's formation, movement and destiny.

If it is assumed that the human being is the starting point and the origin of this heritage, it can also be assumed that the religious text, from the viewpoint of some, remains outside the scope of history, but is nonetheless identified as one of the fundamentals that interacts with historical realities and responds to their needs. As for the elements of the heritage itself, they are embodied in all forms of intellectual, scientific, spiritual, literary, materialistic, man-made and artistic life that the makers of this heritage have.

All those forms of life are manifest in the historical Arab knowledge experience, dating from the pre-Islamic era, (traditionally designated as the period of "Jahiliyya" by the Arab Islamic heritage), up to the age of Western modernity, beginning in the early 16th century. In the middle of the 19th century, with the advent of printing and communication with the West, modern Arabs re-discovered their intellectual heritage in all its components: linguistic, literary, historical, scientific and philosophical.

HERITAGE: A TUSSELE BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE BUILDING AND IDEOLOGICAL EXPLOITATION

Concurrent with the emergence of Arab "modernity" was the emergence, in reality and in consciousness, of the Arab heritage. The concept of Arab heritage became an important dimension of the modern problematique of culture and civilisation and the Arab past and future. It is with this concept that all of the basic stances and questions concerning the

"historical personality" – the "Self", "the civilisational Self", cultural specificity, identity, tradition and modernity, and Islam and modernity – were connected. These issues, in addition to many other binary opposites, occupied shifting positions that were at times conflicting, harmonious or complementary. Indeed, they became related to the modern reality of Arabs, to the challenges of advancement and progress, and to attempts to deal with "crisis", "backwardness", or "defeat" or other situations that call for inspiration from ideas or forces conducive to progress and revival.

The result was that the issue of Arab intellectual heritage has never been purely a theoretical or scientific question in the strict meaning of the word. Rather, it has been, to a great extent, an ideological issue. It relates not only to religion, the sacred and the Arab past but also to new practical causes that require purposeful acts, political or national concessions, and interest-related aims that are distinct from the pure scientific view.

In being connected with and at the same time contradictory to knowledge, Arab intellectual heritage nowadays raises basic knowledge problems. Its link with knowledge comes from its connection with language, religion, sciences and culture. Its contradiction with knowledge arises because heritage is not usually viewed from a scientific standpoint but is rather closely surrounded by emotion, passion, desire, wishes, glorification and sometimes a disregard of reality and discomfiting facts. In other words, ideological leanings often permeate approaches to this heritage.

It is therefore important to distinguish between awareness of cultural heritage on the one hand, and the humanities and history, with all their branches of study, on the other. The reason is that history is based on methodology, on an objective approach and on maintaining an intellectual distance from the past. The goal of any historian of a great civilisation, while sympathising with and understanding the subject of research, should always be the quest for facts. The temptation to fall in love with the heritage must always be resisted.

Nevertheless, the exploitation of Arab intellectual heritage for ideological reasons should not be exaggerated. Modern interest in

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BOX 6.1

Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406), On the fact that scientific education is a skill and a profession

Dexterity in science, progress and mastery can only be attained through the faculty of knowing its principles and rules, examining its problems and deducing its branches from its main streams. Until this faculty is owned, no skill can be achieved. The Andalusians have lost interest in science because of the deterioration of their civilization for hundreds of years. Of all sciences they have kept and preserved only the art of the Arabic language and literature. Jurisprudence has completely disappeared and no trace of it is left among them. Intellectual activity is even worse off among them. And that is all a result of the worsening condition of education, a consequence of the deterioration of their civilization; and the fact that their enemies dominate them. They have been more concerned with subsistence than with what is beyond it.

Source: Roshdi Rached, in Arabic, background paper for AHDR 2.

the Arab heritage has not been motivated by ideology alone; it has also taken the form of an extensive effort that started at the end of the 19th century to revive and publish this heritage. Orientalists first initiated this revival, which was then undertaken by Arabs themselves who expanded it further into scientific and non-scientific spheres. There is also a substantial body of cultural studies, which have examined this heritage in accordance with accepted and rigorous research methodologies. There is a wealth of Arab scholarship in these fields, in addition to scholarship carried out in the West at institutes and universities specialising in oriental, Arab and Islamic studies. Those studies cover all fields of Arab heritage – language, literature, religion, culture, science and art – and they genuinely contribute to the exploration of its intellectual, spiritual and human dimensions. Thanks to such studies, the relationship between Arab culture and Arab heritage has been made accessible to intellectual and human understanding, rather than being left as a passionate ideological relationship or a shallow expedient resorted to under compelling historical circumstances.

Indeed, this objective approach to knowledge deriving from Arab heritage is the most useful approach for Arab countries now and for building the knowledge society in the future. Yet such knowledge also requires a comprehensive historical view of the substance of this heritage. First, it is necessary to address the issue of the "Arab mentality", an obstacle to understanding Arab heritage that has persisted for a long time. *Al-Jahiz*, for example, believed that all Arab thought was gained only through natural disposition, inspiration and intuition and never by affectation and dissimulation.

"The Arab mentality"

Early Orientalists tended to claim that the mentality guiding Arab heritage is characterised by a simplistic analysis of particulars and is incapable of complex constructions and abstraction. Hence, it is the kind of mentality that lacks the competencies necessary for real innovation (for a critique of such viewpoints see Abdul Razek, in Arabic, 1966). A wide debate ensued recently about the nature of the "Arab mentality" and its knowledge mecha-

nisms. An association was also made between this mentality and an Arab "character" that is governed by instinctive desires, emotion, passion and an overwhelming individualism or the destructive absence of rationalism.

Contemporary Arabic literature is replete with accounts of the "Arab self", the "Arab character" or the "Arab identity". Those texts vary in approach and include harsh self-criticism or analysis, in some cases, or appreciation, commendation, glorification, and presumption of superiority, efficacy, perfection and homogeneity in others. Yet the features of any rich human portrait appear accented or diminished depending on the angle of view. Contemporary accounts are full of ostensible Arab cultural characteristics distorted by one interpretation or another. These accounts are generalisations, and selective ones at that. They are erroneously based on abstracting a fixed and formed Arab "mentality" from ever-changing cultural, intellectual, socio-economic and political contexts.

In the course of its actual historical formation and advancement, the "Arab mentality" has never been restricted to what is purely "Arab", but has rather been open to global intellectual, psychological, social and human interactions. Thus, products of this mentality have been varied, rich, and developed; its methodologies have been multiple and diverse. Historical and ideological factors, moreover, have been decisive in directing those methodologies to various ends. The so-called Arab mentality has at different points in history been traditional and imitative, rational and innovative, analogical (in jurisprudence) and figurative, rhetorical, scientific and experimental, intuitive and Sufi, or transcendental and mystical.

The question of the "Arab mentality", then, should be seen in the context of objective reality and within the flow and flux of time. This mentality is not a single construct with a fixed "essence" and unchanging traits outside history. It is not a myth outside objective reality. Rather, it is a dynamically evolving synthesis of the rich diversity of cultural and social influences that, under particular historical conditions and at different times, have gone into forming this "mentality" in the course of a specific civilisation. As Arab his-

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tory advances, changes and varies, so too the "Arab mentality" encompasses and expresses change. (For more on this issue see, Al-Jabri, [in Arabic, 1991]; Al-Aroui, [in Arabic; 1970], and Tarabishi, [in Arabic, 1996])

Renewal, innovation and knowledge production certainly depend on the major elements and values that are rooted and employed in the cultural system. This would make the Arab mentality a system that is developed and open to knowledge, action and creativity; one that has acquired the competencies for production, progress and innovation utilising and expressing this knowledge.

The foundations of Arab intellectual heritage

Arab intellectual heritage, embodied in the Arab historical experience in its golden age, i.e., since the beginning of the Islamic period until just after the era of Ibn Khaldoun (early 1400s AD, early 800s AH), relies upon a set of knowledge, scientific and cultural foundations and formations. It is by those foundations and formations that the Arab intellectual heritage is defined in history. The Islamic "Revelation", undoubtedly, constituted a primary knowledge base, one that guided the intellectual and spiritual proceedings and the worldly life of the Arabs who exemplified Islam and carried it across geographical borders and among humankind. Likewise, the "Revelation" was the starting point of the School that favoured the imitation of the tradition to which early religious scholars, jurists, traditionalists and scholars, in addition to the masses of believers, adhered. Although the "Revelation" was in fact addressed to the human mind for it to comprehend, and therefore to human reason, Muslims in the first and second centuries of *Hijra* (the Prophet's emigration from *Mecca* to *Medina*), with some notable exceptions, did not give reason much attention. Its function, then, was confined to understanding, interpreting and attributing religious texts, or drawing attention to their linguistic connotations.

Yet interaction with other human civilisations and the spread of Islam across other nations and cultures, together with the transfer of the old scientific and philosophical heritage, combined to elevate the position of "rea-

son". Eventually, a new intellectual power emerged and managed to make reason synonymous with, or the twin brother of, the text, if not precedent to it in questions of theory or nature. Soon afterwards, the contradiction between text-thesis and reason-antithesis brought about a third construction, basically a synthesis of both, which became highly renowned and widely disseminated.

The deterioration of political, socio-economic and scientific life, and the decline of the central state and its social institutions after the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate, produced a tendency towards asceticism, abandonment of the worldly life and immersion in the teachings of Sufism and ecstatic communion. These trends nurtured a tendency that sought to replace communication with the world, society and human beings with communication with God and the Absolute. And once the central state had fallen, in the middle of the 7th century AH (the 13th century AD), the Islamic civilisation retreated and gave way to a new kind of human association, to use Ibn Khaldoun's term. "Arab reason" moved towards mysticism and its supernatural, transcendental sciences. It was released from those pursuits only at the dawn of the 19th century due to a number of historical factors including communication with Western modernity.

Evidently, this liberation was limited because a sub-culture that encourages superstition has remained to the present day and will certainly thrive in popular environments. Such a subculture needs to be uprooted. One of the most effective means of doing so would be to popularise cultural values that respect science and scientific research.

In the Arab historical experience, the Revelation, reason and their synthesis, as well as inner consciousness, ecstatic communion and mysticism, were respectively the epistemological basis of Arab thought until the dawn of the modern age. Each principle has served as the starting point for the development of one or more branch of Arab cultural expression.

Arab historical knowledge outcomes

Revelation, for example, has been the starting point for the sciences of theology and legislation, such as Qura'nic Sciences and Exegesis, the science of Hadith terminology, Islamic jurisprudence, and also, to some extent, Muslim theology, Monotheism and Scholastic Theology. Each discipline in turn arose in response to historical challenges and needs at different times. Those needs of the time had to do with the understanding of religion and its beliefs, the practice of religious acts of devotion, the enforcement of religious dealings and the application of religious provisions in all fields of life. It is thus not strange to find disparities and discrepancies in the understandings, perceptions and independent juridical judgements that eventually culminated in a number of different schools of jurisprudence based on elements deriving from different principles.

Moreover, the interpretation of the religious text did not stop at one approach; on the contrary it initiated diverse methods of thought: the linguistic method; the rhetorical method; the rational method; the traditionalist method; the school of ecstatic communion or Sufism; and the *Zahirite* school (interpreting the Qura'an according to its literal meaning). These diverse approaches to understanding the religious text testify to its richness, variety and depth. Similarly, the multiplicity of schools of jurisprudence attests to the diversity of principles for arriving at independent judgement. Some schools disclose the wide latitude, others the narrow boundaries laid down before the believers. Most important of all, what the varied nature of this legal heritage confirms is that its contents are not ultimately fixed, but are closely tied to historical subjective conditions and to the living relationship between the "text" and changing reality.

As for Reason, it was the starting point for the sciences of the Arabic language, the science of Scholastic Theology and the body of philosophical sciences that were called "the intellectual sciences". These include logic and philosophy, as well as the natural, medical, engineering and mathematical sciences passed-down to the Arabs from the "predecessors", i.e., the Greeks in particular. Few as they were, the Arab intellectual sciences were not

originally entrenched in ancient Arab culture; indeed, they were dubbed "intruding sciences" by the Arabs themselves. Yet they represent a historical manifestation of this culture that has been blurred with the passage of time and with the renewal and advancement of modern knowledge. Their historical value in the advancement of human civilisation is unquestionable.

The synthetic method, which combined the two poles of Arab thought, the imitation of tradition and the exercise of innovative reason, and which characterised the scholastic perspective of the *Ash'arite* school, was the starting point of wide cultural activity. The method produced an eminent group of great religious intellectuals, who were active in the period from the third century AH (the ninth AD) to the current cycle of Arab Islamic civilisation. The impact of this method remained evident in the intellectual thought which accompanied the age of modernity and the modern renaissance.

As noted earlier, with the fall of the central state and the eclipse of scientific rationalism, inner consciousness and ecstatic communion became the principles of a spiritual life that expressed the yearnings of the self towards the Supreme Absolute. This movement was the basis of all subjective and communal Sufi experiences, which filled Arab and Islamic cultural life. Whatever their individual features, the sciences of Ultimate Reality, whether spiritual or philosophical, rational or irrational, reflected a rich intellectual life with a high spiritual value that echoed throughout the East and West, touching upon human spirituality in traditional and in modern times. This is not surprising as those sciences are closely tied to the metaphysical and existential dimensions of humankind. Yet because they are intimate personal experiences, they could not become the founding principles of a collective knowledge system.

On the other hand, the supernatural culture, which was related to astronomy, astrology, the science of Talismans and even to some forms of religiosity, and which held a distinctive position after the great age of Ibn Khaldoun, belongs to the backward stages of Arab intellectual heritage. It is well known that modern enlightened movements have

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contributed decisively to the withdrawal and elimination of this culture in modern times.

In summary, Arab consciousness arises at the confluence of multiple historical currents flowing through and from its cultural inheritance. That consciousness has displayed itself in diverse forms and in different areas. It has been *traditional*, bound by the limits of the text and the traditional arbiter. It has also been *innovative and intellectual* as in the case of the scholastic theologians, jurists, philosophers and scholars of the "intellectual" and natural sciences. It has been *synthetic*, combining reason and the imitation of tradition; and it has been *mystical*, as in the deep Sufi consciousness open to the Absolute across space and time, yet closed to society with its worldly horizons. Finally, it has been cloaked in the *supernatural*, which in reality signified an absence of consciousness and an abandonment of the scientific and intellectual basis that underpinned the Arab classical cultural experience (Jada'an, *in Arabic*, 1998).

HERITAGE AND THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

There is some kind of consensus among Islamic thinkers to define religion (Islam) as a multidimensional system of beliefs that embraces the spiritual and the material, the divine and the earthly, the heavenly soul and mortal worldly deeds.

What is that part of the Arab intellectual heritage that remains steadfast and alive through history? And what is that part that can, or ought to be upheld, built upon and employed for the sake of active involvement in the knowledge society and in knowledge production? Undoubtedly, Arab intellectual heritage has undergone many changes and developments and quite a number of its components have been superseded by the progress of knowledge and science. Yet some fields of knowledge and sciences have progressed farther than others (Centre for Arab Unity Studies, *in Arabic*, 1985). The conventional religious sciences have remained unchanged and have failed to produce results in the field of religion. Moreover, as these sciences by custom associated the notion of science with "religious science" or only with knowledge "useful" to religion, they also failed to contribute to advancing the fields of natural knowledge. On the other hand, the Arab intellectual sciences, i.e., the philosophical and natural sciences have pioneered a number of valuable and solid methodological approaches at the

comprehensive human level. Amongst the most important are:

- Increasing the tone of rationalism in religious thought.
- Fostering objective rationalism in philosophy.
- Founding a new analytical mathematical rationalism.
- Establishing experimentation as a pattern of proof in knowledge.
- Introducing values as principles in thinking.

Heritage, in the sense discussed here, has been a dynamic contributor to thought. The profound and varied cultural influences, methods and values deriving from that heritage and living on in the present, which can be built upon in creating the Arab knowledge society, are subsumed in language, religion and values (moral, social and political).

These building blocks represent what can be termed "formal culture" in contradistinction to "popular culture". What is the status of these building blocks? And how would they contribute to establishing a successful knowledge society in the Arab context?

RELIGION

The approaches of Islamic thinkers and the various intellectual currents underlying Islamic religious experience vary greatly in both their nature and objectives. This is evident when one considers the different approaches of philosophers, theologians, Sufis or fundamentalist thinkers. But there is some kind of consensus among Islamic thinkers to define religion (Islam) as a multidimensional system of beliefs that embraces the spiritual and the material, the divine and the earthly, the heavenly soul and mortal worldly deeds. Therefore the definition advanced by Al-Tahanoui ("Terminology in Arts and Sciences, "1996) exactly reflects this multidimensionality: religion, according to him, is a divine dispensation that inspires rational mortals to focus at one and the same time on bettering their lives on earth while earning their place in the afterlife. This definition confirms the vital relationship between religion as a belief linked to the religious absolute and to reality, in all its flux and flow, as governed by the religious ab-

solute through a cognitive system and its methods of induction, deduction and judgement in relation to the primacy of the Qura'an and Sunna (traditions of the Prophet) and to other judgements as derived from the analogical, adjudicative, public interest and ratiocinative methods.

Yet this section is not aimed at considering the nature of religion, ideas, or subjective and historical facts. Rather, it considers how religion relates to knowledge production in a knowledge society. Its focus on Islam as opposed to other religions is to be expected since Islam is the major religion in most Arab countries. Moreover, Islam was a major inspiration for Arab civilisation. However, this focus implies no detracting at all from the value and importance of Arab communities that embrace a religion other than Islam, especially Christians who have a recognised and dignified position in modern and classical Arab culture. Indeed a multitude of religious groups have played a very significant role in the formation of this culture and in the production of science and knowledge.

RELIGION, THE MATERIAL WORLD AND KNOWLEDGE

The relationship between religion and knowledge is closely linked to the concept of the essence of religion and its comprehensive attitude towards worldly life. Reading religious Islamic texts reveals a balance between both religion and worldly life, and between life on earth and in the afterlife. The recurring focus is on the importance of enquiry, contemplation, science and sound reasoning, and whatever relates to the continuity of humankind on earth. There is emphasis on contemplation of both the heavenly and earthly kingdoms and on subduing the universe for the good of humanity.

Historically, some Muslims drifted from this innate balance by interpreting the principles of science and reason in the light of "Religious Science" and forms of knowledge useful for religion. By limiting and narrowing the concept of science in this way, they did not advance the openness of the intellectual and natural sciences. Other Muslim groups believed that worldly life, being transient, had no

BOX 6.2

Milad Hanna - Religious Harmony and Knowledge in the Arab World.

All the Abrahamic religions arose and flourished in the Arab region. Judaism emerged with the Prophet Abraham in the city of Or, in Iraq, then moved to Palestine, then Egypt and came back to Syria and Babylon in a long and well-known historical journey. Then Christianity emerged in Palestine and continued in the Arab East up to the present day. There are many Christian communities in the Arab world that represent all three major branches of Christianity: Orthodox, Catholic and the group of Protestant sects. The most famous among them are the Coptic community (most of whose members are Orthodox) in Egypt, the Maronites (Catholic) in Lebanon, the Syriac in Syria and the Assyrians in Iraq. There are also Armenian minorities, who migrated from their original country and found refuge in the Arab region.

Most Arab communities of Christian faith are generally on very good terms with Muslims. They have lived under Islamic rule for centuries and their relations with Arab Muslims are excellent, although there remain some problems that can be easily solved.

The point that is worth emphasising in the context of this report is that these Arab Christian communities have been partners in the shaping of the Arab-Islamic civilization. It is an established his-

torical fact that they contributed, during the time of the Abbasid Caliphate, to a wide-ranging movement of translation into Arabic of literature that preceded Islamic civilization, benefiting that movement with their knowledge of the Greek language, in addition to their original Assyrian, Syriac and Coptic languages. Their contributions helped to transfer pre-Arabic heritage and formed a cultural bridge to it, thus maintaining the continuity of knowledge from ancient to modern times.

The knowledge available to humankind today is a cumulative knowledge transferred and enhanced through the translation movement, which flourished at the height of Islamic civilization and was augmented and enriched by the knowledge provided by that civilization itself.

The Christianity that developed in the Arab world co-existed with Islam through successive eras and produced knowledge. Indeed, whatever knowledge humankind achieves, in whatever field, is but an accumulation of knowledge through successive civilizations and a tributary of world human development as a whole.

This Christian-Islamic co-existence in the Arab world represents a model of unity in diversity, which is one of the sources of human progress and advancement through knowledge acquisition.

claim on their attention and so pursued the afterlife on earth. They turned to the life of asceticism and Sufism, abandoning worldly preoccupations. The nature of their choices diminished the influence of worldly sciences and the pursuit of material and intellectual knowledge and science. Nevertheless, the major tendency of early Arab civilisation expressed itself as a keen interest in the world and in acquiring scientific knowledge and in the encouragement of knowledge in all its aspects. Indeed, the production of knowledge was prolific, as witnessed by the Islamic Arab heritage in linguistic, literary, intellectual, physical and other disciplines.

In the modern age, the intellectuals of the Arab Renaissance recognised the diminution of science and knowledge as the main reason for the backwardness of the Arabs and the degradation of their civilisation. Thus, they were anxious to espouse the rational princi-

This Christian-Islamic co-existence in the Arab world represents a model of unity in diversity.

BOX 6.3

Al Kawakibi (1854-1902) Despots and Knowledge

Knowledge is a firebrand from God's light. God created light for enlightenment and for generating strength. He made knowledge as an example revealing good and uncovering evil, generating warmth in souls and nobility in the mind.

A tyrant never fears religious knowledge or the After World, as he thinks such matters cannot harm him, but rather distract the minds of people interested in them. If any of those thus distracted

Source: The Character of Despotism, pp 50-51.

became knowledgeable and famous among common people, the tyrant would always find a way of using him for his support by shutting up his mouth with scraps.

But the tyrant would shiver in fear of worldly knowledge such as theoretical wisdom, intellectual philosophy, the rights of nations, civil policy, history, literary rhetoric and other knowledge that pierces the veil of ignorance and enlightens people.

Islam is a system of religion and worldly life at the same time.

ples behind the surge of global knowledge and science and combine the values of Islamic civilisation with those of modernity (Hourani, 1967).

Religious texts were a significant tool in the process of justifying this new combination and encouraging the advancement of knowledge and science and their applications. The

latter, after all, are considered a major factor in the comprehensive development of humanity and a form of worship of God on earth.

However, the course of development in the modern Arab world, and the national, political, social and economic problems that recurred from the years of independence until the end of the twentieth century, had a profound impact on the intellectual, scholarly and cultural life of Arab countries. Religion, and its attendant concepts and objectives, was especially affected by these trends. A major phenomenon that appeared in the religious Islamic sphere in the last decades of the twentieth century gave political aims precedence over any other objectives: social, economic or material. This development resulted in the escalation of conflict and confrontation with the society, the State and "the other".

"Opposition" and "confrontation" with the West reached their climax especially after the tragic events of September 11, 2001. In their aftermath, Islam itself faced an onslaught of defamation, slander and criticism in the media, reflecting ignorance of Islam in most instances and in some cases the tendentiousness of commentators.

It is important to reiterate here that Islam is a system of religion and worldly life at the same time. It is difficult to separate surgically the "political" from other transactions among people in Islamic teaching. Moreover, the prevailing Islamic sect in Arab countries has neither a clergy nor a defined church or religious authority. Hence the separation of church and state is not an issue. What qualifies an individual to have a say in religious affairs is his or her knowledge, and not an affiliation with a religious institution. Authority in worldly affairs is civil, based on people's selection of a ruler from among several candidates.

Nevertheless, the collusion between some repressive regimes and certain types of conservative religious scholars has resulted in certain interpretations of Islam that serve the interests of those regimes. Such interpretations represent serious impediments to human development, particularly when it comes to freedom of thought, accountability of the ruling authorities and women's participation in public life. Furthermore, suppressing political action

BOX 6.4

Erudition in the Qur'an and the Sunna (prophetic tradition)

The Qur'an¹

Allah witnesses that there is no deity except Him, and the angels and people of knowledge know that He is the One and maintains justice in all Creation. (Sūrah 3- Āli'Imrān, 18)

Say, "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" (Sūrah 39- az-Zumar, 9)

Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees. (Sūrah 58 - al-Mujādalah, 11)

And say, "My Lord, increase me in knowledge." (Sūrah 20- Tā Hā, 114)

Nūn. By the pen and what they inscribe. (Sūrah 68- al-Qalam,1)

The Sunna

"If anyone travels on a road in search of knowledge, Allah will cause him to travel on one of the roads of Paradise. The angels will lower their wings in their great pleasure with one who seeks knowledge, the inhabitants of the heavens and the Earth and the fish in the deep waters will ask forgiveness for the learned man. The superiority of the learned man over the devout is like that of the moon, on the night when it is full, over the rest of the stars. The learned are the heirs of the Prophets, and the Prophets leave neither dinar nor dirham, leaving only knowledge, and he who takes it takes an abundant portion." (Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 25, Number 3634)

"Spread knowledge and you will congregate so that the un-knowledgeable will know. Knowledge does not vanish save when it is hidden."

BOX 6.5

Learning and knowledge in the Holy Bible, Old Testament²

"And if anyone longs for wide experience, she knows of things of old, and infers the things to come; she understands turns of speech and the solutions of riddles; she has foreknowledge of signs and wonders and of the outcome of seasons and times" (Wisdom of Solomon, 8:8)

"Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge." (Proverbs, 23:12)

"And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches." (Proverbs, 24:4)

¹The Qura'an, translated and revised by Saheeh International, Riyadh, 1997.

²Electronic Text Centre, University of Virginia Library, <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbib>

in many Arab countries has driven some "Islamic" movements underground and pushed others to work under an Islamic cover. In the absence of peaceful and effective political channels for dealing with injustices in the Arab world, at the country, regional and global levels, some political movements identifying themselves as Islamic have adopted extreme interpretations of Islam and violence as means of political activism. They have advocated belligerence towards both other political forces in Arab countries and "the Other", particularly the West as relations have grown more tense, accusing both of being the enemies of Islam itself. Not only are such interpretations inconsistent with pure religion; they also divide societies, taking them further away from the requirements of the knowledge society.

In summary, for religion to regain its role in the development and production of knowledge, the time has come to proclaim those positive religious texts that cope with current realities and the hoped-for future rather than those related to specific historical developments that Islam underwent in one era or another. These positive texts focus on a number of basic values that link the aims of religion with the development and growth of life: the succession and continuity of humankind on earth, the creation of paradise on earth and the enjoyment of the earth's bounties, respect for human beings and their cognitive faculties - curiosity, reason, science, the senses, vision and feelings; and building a good and respectable nation. Certainly, these are all values that motivate the search for knowledge and its production from a religious point of view. Religion urges people to seek knowledge and to work towards the realisation of its founding principles firmly, effectively and with determination. Neither arrogance nor careless disregard of humanity has any place in obeying that call.

Three fundamental conditions need to be fulfilled so that religion can take its proper place in the Arab knowledge model and become an effective force for knowledge. The first is to return to the moral, civilised and humane vision that stands behind the essential objectives of Islam. The second is to free religion from the sway of politics and to free reli-

BOX 6.6

Technology in the Arab Islamic Civilisation

It would seem unnecessary to discuss an obvious factor such as the role played by the Islamic religion in the renaissance of Arabic civilisation, since without Islam probably no such renaissance would have taken place.

The blossoming of science and culture in Islamic civilisations was the result of the increasing quality of material life in Muslim cities. The urban life of these cities, the material prosperity, the varied local industries, the local and international trade, and the flourishing science and culture, were all linked together, while none of the aspects of life in the cities would have flourished without a developing technology. And if Islam was the force behind the rise of cities, as is frequently asserted, then it was also the force behind all aspects of the prosperity of these cities, and hence the technological efforts associated with urban life.

It is estimated that there exist at the present time, in spite of destruction and many losses, nearly a quarter of a million manuscripts, mostly in Arabic, in the various libraries of the world. And this does not include unrecorded collections.

Source: Ahmad Y. Al-Hassan and Donald R. Hill, 1986, *Islamic Technology; an Illustrated History*, UNESCO, Paris – Cambridge University Press.

The admirable flexibility of the Arabic language enabled the Muslims to coin and extract scientific and technological vocabularies capable of expressing the most complicated scientific and technical ideas.

The state enabled scientists and engineers to spend all their time on research, inventions and writing.

As is natural in the history of civilisation in general, Muslim scientists and engineers received the heritage of their predecessors, but this grew into their own science and technology through a continuous process of invention, research and development.

There can be no doubt that institutions – academies, libraries, observatories, etc. – played a major role in the continuing vitality of Islamic science. These, together with the readiness of students to travel hundreds of miles to learn from acknowledged scholars, ensured that the whole corpus of knowledge was kept intact and transmitted from one place to another, from one generation to the next, with continual expansion and enrichment.

gious institutions from political authorities, governments and radical religious movements. The third is to acknowledge intellectual freedom by reviving scholarship (ijtihad) and the protection of the right to differ.

LANGUAGE

Language is perhaps the most distinctive and defining feature of any human society. The rise of all civilisations was always accompanied by a linguistic renaissance. Some cultural historians also believe that no human conflict exists without an implicit linguistic clash. Language is the living medium that expresses the reality of a society, and the basic tool that determines the relationship between human beings and this reality. Language is the lens through which human beings apprehend the world. It is the decisive attribute that forms their identity and gives society its unique character. Identity is the outcome of meanings created by individuals through language, and the character of a society is the outcome of the interaction of internal linguistic discourses shaped by historical variables, and reflecting the facets of

The time has come to proclaim those positive religious texts that cope with current realities.

agreement and conflict of the societal system.

Such statements on the importance of language in human society are even more applicable to the knowledge society, whether they concern expectations of its promise or challenges to its creation. The Arabic language is undoubtedly the most prominent feature of the Arab culture. If the knowledge society, as delineated in the current report, is the source of hope for Arab human development, the Arabic language system is one of the decisive underpinnings for building that society and shaping its success.

Language is the device by which the individual conceives the surrounding world and expresses his or her individual and social identity. Accordingly language can be defined as the vital player in reviving activity and embodying new genres of creation in the cultural system of knowledge-based communities. Language is pivotal in the realm of information technology, the tool that all modern sectors use, and the foundation on which modern human communication is established. In addition, language articulates the worlds and worldviews of finance, trade, politics and the mass media.

The Arabic language precedes all manifestations of Arab culture and its human artefacts. In the Arab historical experience, Arabic is also connected with two basic matters that are closely associated with both the existence and future of Arabs. The first connection is with "identity"; the second is the question of the "sacred". The Arabic language is the distinctive feature that distinguishes the Arab identity. It is the language of the holy Qura'an. And it was the rallying point for the intellectual, spiritual, literary and social activities incarnated in an entire human civilisation,

namely the Arab Islamic civilisation.

LANGUAGE AND THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

As one of the fundamentals of culture, language plays an essential role in the knowledge society, not least because culture is the seedbed from which the development process springs. Language is instrumental in the cultural system, linking intellect, creation, pedagogy, media, tradition, values and beliefs. Language is instrumental in information technology, instructing the microprocessors that drive that technology and its artificial intelligence. Language is the tool used by all disciplines of knowledge, including philosophy, the human and natural sciences and the arts. The knowledge society, in which education and learning are lifelong endeavours, depends on language, whether natural human language, software and programming languages, or biological genetic language. Language is necessary to build communication skills that are essential to knowledge dissemination. It is the instrument by which the powers of capital, trade, politics and ideology dominate the mass media, the public and the culture industry in general. Language and cognitive discourse occupy a prominent position in all spheres that serve regimes, organisations, institutions, and market interests.

The crisis of the Arabic language

Notwithstanding the seminal importance of language, Arabic today, on the threshold of a new knowledge society, faces severe challenges and a real crisis in terms of theorisation, teaching, grammar, lexicography, usage, documentation, creation, and criticism. The rise of information technology presents another aspect of the challenges to the Arabic language today.

The central aspects and symptoms of this linguistic crisis can be summarised as follows: First, there is a marked absence of linguistic policy at the national level, which diminishes the authority of language centres, limits their resources, and eventually results in poor co-ordination among them. Second, the Arabisation of the sciences and the various disciplines has not proceeded according to expectations.

The Arabic language is the distinctive feature that distinguishes the Arab identity.

BOX 6.7

About Language

Language is that which translates the meaning borne in our minds.

Ibn Khaldun, Prolegomena

Most of the blemishes of our life can be traced to linguistic failure that incites disunity, blurs the truth, wastes effort, and impedes sublimity of the soul, body, mind, and heart.

Amin El-Khouly

It seems that there will be no solution to the dilemma of language neither

in mathematics nor in logic, but the key to the linguistic secret is in biology.

Noam Chomsky

If language is truly a mirror of the mind, it must reflect not just the algorithms of syntax but the mind as a whole, the complete set of rules by which a human being, in Lakoff's words, "gives form and sense to his universe, where without them there would be none."

Jeremy Campbell, Grammatical Man

Third, there is a chronic deficiency in translation efforts in the sciences and the humanities. Fourth, linguistic theory suffers from stagnation, isolation from modern philosophical schools and methodologies, and a lack of awareness of the role language plays in modern society. Fifth, the situation of the Arabic language is further complicated by the duality of standard and colloquial Arabic. Sixth, Arabic electronic publication is weakened by the scarcity of advanced Arabic software. Finally, the Arabic language continues to suffer from the duplication of research and development projects and the absence of co-ordination among them, conflicting diagnoses of the ills afflicting the language, and the conspicuous absence of a clear vision of linguistic reform.

The crisis of the Arabic language is no less central and no less dangerous or complicated than the other crises facing the Arab world, particularly on the verge of a radical shift in the importance given to knowledge. Yet crisis is also opportunity. Moving towards the knowledge society will force countries to address the challenges facing the Arabic language in order to harness its latent powers and address other challenges. The most significant opportunities include:

- The revolution in modern linguistics, which has ushered in several scientific methodologies³. These can help address many difficulties besetting the Arabic language.
- Massive technological development in "language engineering", in which the language system, with its extreme complexity, constitutes a rich subject for new approaches to the art of manipulating sophisticated systems.
- The Internet, which has become a resource for teaching and learning the English language and could become a platform for promoting the use of Arabic in multiple formats.
- Increased awareness of the importance of linguistic diversity. World awareness of this problem has reached new levels, so much so that UNESCO has drawn attention to a crisis of linguistic diversity and the risk of extinction that threatens several languages.
- New and viable initiatives in some Arab countries in the theory of literature and lexi-

cography; and recent successes in the digital processing of Arabic, especially in the domains of morphology and grammar, and the use of computers to create a modern Arab thesaurus.

Advancement of the Arabic language

But these options on their own, or together, are not sufficient to resolve the crisis of Arabic and render it responsive to profound contemporary developments in culture, knowledge and education, or to recent global challenges. There is another aspect of the problem; the many-faceted relations between Arabic and the system of knowledge acquisition, notably:

- The relation between the Arabic language and thought.
- Arabic and access to sources of knowledge.
- Arabic and the communication and assimilation of knowledge.
- Arabic and the utilisation of knowledge.
- Arabic and the generation of new knowledge.

Language and thought: understanding the nature of the relationship between systems of language and thought requires exhaustive analysis on the psychological, pedagogical, and social levels. This aspect of language has not received due attention from Arab researchers; certainly, classical linguists did not tackle this problem and did not present anything that substantially contributes to the development of Arabic thought.

A number of reasons account for the gap. First, Arabic thought has refrained from engaging with multidisciplinary issues, which are of great importance within the knowledge society. For example, Arab philosophical thought, especially in theology and philosophy, has been isolated from other disciplines, despite the marked attention paid by traditional scholastic theology, philosophy, and traditional jurisprudence to language, concepts, and terminology. Next, research efforts in psycho-, socio-, and especially neuro-linguistics have been marginal. In reality, strengthening the relation between the Arabic language and thought needs a concerted institutional effort by specialists in psycho-linguistics in order to reveal the relations between the characteristics

The crisis of the Arabic language is no less central and no less dangerous than the other crises facing the Arab world.

³New methodologies cover statistical, anthropological, reproductive, textual, computerised, bio-neurological, hypothetical, mathematical and logical, functional, lexical, and empirical methodologies).

Arab North Africa - Language Duality

In the 1980s, Algeria intensified its efforts to substitute Arabic for French as the dominant language of the country. Its Arabisation policy, which has been in place for more than two decades, particularly in education, communications and justice and in many public administration institutions, has been effective in several respects. Yet some consider that the conversion from French to Arabic of an entire generation of mainly French-speaking professionals has led to a loss of knowledge and capability. Arabisation has been less effective in economic, tech-

nological and administrative fields where French continues to dominate. Books, newspapers, radio and TV programmes are published or broadcast either in French or in Arabic (some also in Berber languages) with relatively few translations. This language segmentation has reduced communication among different spheres of society.

Tensions resulting from this language duality appear to have relaxed in recent years, paving the way towards multilingualism in different areas of education and communications.

Source: Country Report prepared for AHDR 2.

Translation into Arabic is still extremely scarce and is not keeping pace with the global knowledge explosion.

of Arabic, its morphological, grammatical, lexical, and rhetorical resources, and the main functions of the brain. Establishing a research centre specialised in the fields of Arabic language in relation to information technology, neuro-technology, and genetic engineering would significantly advance the frontiers of knowledge in this field.

Language and access to sources of knowledge: The contemporary knowledge explosion, with its at times overwhelming information overload, poses a challenge to Arab thought. It would be easy to succumb to a sense of defeat before the sweeping hurricane of data and information blowing in from the global information society. A bold response requires devising a new software toolkit to process texts and to make access to knowledge more efficient, whether in Arabic or other languages. The most important of these tools are: automatic tools for indexing, extraction and abridgement; and intelligent tools for research into the body of texts in order to understand the depth of their inherent structures and extract their intrinsic contents. The application of artificial intelligence and electronic document management techniques and developing an Arabic inference tool would be key supports in this new research.

Access to sources of knowledge in languages other than Arabic is mainly connected with translation. Translation into Arabic is still extremely scarce and is not keeping pace with the global knowledge explosion. This lag emphasises the importance of developing electronic translation. Of course, there are several

levels of translation: rough translation used to convey impressions of a subject, which is currently taking place on the Internet in a very modest way; and faithful translation of texts. The state of electronic translation globally is a long way from the level of faithful and accurate translation.

Language and the assimilation of knowledge: The relationship between Arabic and the communication and assimilation of knowledge involves two major considerations: the Arabisation of university education and the teaching of Arabic.

The Arabisation of university education is no longer simply a matter of nationalism; it has become a prerequisite for developing the tools of thinking and the creative faculties of young minds and for assimilating the rising volume of knowledge. For example, the failure to Arabise the sciences is an obstacle to communication among different scientific disciplines. Despite the evident importance of the issue, efforts at Arabisation are still faltering under opposition from many academic quarters. The principal objection to teaching sciences in Arabic is that it would prevent Arab students from having access to the original sources of scientific knowledge that are mostly in foreign languages. Yet modern students are increasingly accustomed to resorting to different sources of knowledge and research anyway. If Arabisation efforts run parallel to efforts to strengthen the teaching of foreign languages in all scientific disciplines, this objection recedes.

It is relevant to observe here that facility with the English language is waning across the Arab world. With the exception of a few university professors and educated individuals, real proficiency in English has ebbed, preventing many Arab researchers from publishing their research in international scientific journals. This trend also explains the wide reluctance to make presentations at scientific gatherings in English, or to participate in seminars or even Internet user groups. Paradoxically, this decline makes developing the methodologies of teaching Arabic mandatory. For the dominant language acquisition theories now hold, contrary to past thinking, that a good command of one's mother tongue is an essential tool for learning foreign languages.

Arabisation requires a fresh look at word structures and encouraging more production in Arabic in different scientific disciplines as well as supporting current efforts in the development of electronic translation. It also calls for more use of what ICT can provide by way of building databanks of terms and helping in the conceptual decomposition of Arabic words. When translating non-Arabic terms into Arabic, the new term should convey accurately and completely the meaning and concept of the original term.

The teaching of Arabic also suffers from an acute crisis, both in curricula and methodology. The most apparent symptoms of that crisis include: concentration on the superficial aspects of teaching grammar and morphology, rather than on the core concepts of texts and their respective holistic structures; inattention to semantics and meaning; neglecting the functional aspects of language use, such as improving linguistic skills in everyday use; limiting language classes to writing rather than reading; abstaining from using conventional lexicons, (which are admittedly difficult owing to the juxtaposition of new and old entries and explanations without distinctions); and the inadequacy of pedagogical research in language teaching.

Indeed, the problem of teaching the Arabic language is not detached from the state of classical Arabic at large. This language today is no longer the "language of conversation". It is rather the language of reading and writing and their official manifestations (religious sermons and political, administrative or social addresses). Moreover, it is the language of the educated and the intelligentsia, often used to display their knowledge in lectures. In other words, classical Arabic is not the language of cordial, spontaneous expression, emotions, feelings and everyday communication. It is not a vehicle for discovering one's inner self or outer surroundings. It goes without saying that the problems of classical Arabic start when one enters school, where it is taught as a concept or an independent subject. In other words it is taught in the first place as an object of thinking, analysis, classification, evaluation, and inference. All this flows from the traditional school and its principles of reading, reciting, narrating, rote learning,

and the avoidance of creativity and initiative. This is a state of affairs that can only lead to the production of knowledge that is stagnant and lifeless. True, since the modern Arab enlightenment, the Arabic school has been connected with the experimental rational European school, and is thus more open to rich and accelerated knowledge and methodologies. Nevertheless, the prevailing methodology that the Arabic school follows in teaching the language still emphasises memorisation rather than the acquisition of dynamic, renewable knowledge.

Language becomes more vital, vivid, and creative in its renewable, active, civilised and human domains inasmuch as it draws its depth and richness from the heritage it preserves. It is hardly possible to distinguish, except in form, between the language of a society on the one hand and the cultural structures, scientific and practical intellectual concepts, and applied methods of that society on the other. The re-birth of the Arabic language through the measures discussed in this chapter is the core and crux of a new Arab renaissance centred on knowledge and human development.

This is why linguistic research is vital. It requires establishing language centres, new dictionaries incorporating words common to both colloquial and classical Arabic, functional scientific dictionaries (written and audio-based) for basic education, specialised functional dictionaries, the Arabisation of scientific terms, the gradual simplification and rationalisation of grammar leading to a median language that neither lapses into the colloquial nor replicates the rigid old structures that are difficult to use. Again, ICT and the Internet can contribute significantly to modernising the teaching and learning of Arabic in both content and methodology. This entails moving forward with research into computer languages and reading theory in addition to the pedagogical, psychological and social dimensions of languages.

Language and the utilisation of knowledge: the link between language and the use of knowledge can best be seen from the perspective of problem solving. Problem solving encompasses the ability to make an accurate diagnosis and compare available choices to find solutions. In other words, it demands ra-

Facility with the English language is waning across the Arab world.

The prevailing methodology that the Arabic school follows in teaching the language still emphasises memorisation rather than the acquisition of dynamic, renewable knowledge.

The re-birth of the Arabic language is the core and crux of a new Arab renaissance centred on knowledge and human development.

Two distinctive features of the Arabic language are its unique capacity to derive words and terms flexibly from its lexicon and its prodigious vocabulary of synonyms and meanings.

tional analysis. To reinforce the definitional and descriptive power of the Arabic language, it is essential to consolidate and enhance glossaries of terminology, thesauruses and specialised lexicons in social and scientific fields. To improve its capacity to frame logical analysis, Arabic discourse needs to update its basics of proof, methods of persuasion and argumentation and use of logic. Other measures for the renewal of Arabic include initiating a fresh formulation of its grammatical rules, and enhancing its communication capabilities by expanding its functional use in every day life, which would make Arabic a more supple medium for living social dialogue.

Language and the generation of knowledge: The role of language in the generation of modern knowledge, especially in the human sciences, is also critical. These sciences contribute to the identification of new research methodologies distinct from those of the physical sciences. If Arabic develops close relations with modern and informational biochemistry, for example, the language can enhance scientific creation. It can also contribute to literary and artistic creation, and indeed to all of the arts of the Arabic language.

Two distinctive features of the Arabic language are its unique capacity to derive words and terms flexibly from its lexicon and its prodigious vocabulary of synonyms and meanings. This flexibility and wealth play a real and effective role in producing knowledge in dynamic and changing contexts requiring new analysis, description and definition.

Linguistic development and societal context: Yet linguistic development and reform are not only related to the internal elements of the knowledge acquisition system, as in the earlier discussion. They are also related to the social context, where language exercises its public functions and to the linguistic-social interaction becomes significant on both the economic and political levels, regionally and globally.

The state has an important role in supporting linguistic development on a number of key fronts: formulating linguistic policies, providing financial resources by which the language academies can perform their duties, directing the official mass media to confront language issues, or supporting the development of

Arabic educational and linguistic programmes. Such efforts, supplemented by those of non-governmental organisations, would advance the protection and development of the Arabic language. Moreover, the expected role of Arabic within the regional context must be taken into account. The Arabic language – with its organic relation to the Qura’anic text – is a major entry point for the study and revival of heritage. It is also the main pillar of Arab solidarity, national unification and Arab cultural unity. Further still, Arabic is the bulwark against fragmentation emanating from "Information Age Orientalists" who defend the multiplicity of Arabic dialects. Finally, the Arabic language has a significant role in linking Arabic culture to other Islamic countries’ cultures. It also has another important role to play in the international context in confronting cultural globalisation and the move towards rejecting linguistic and cultural specificities. In other words, the Arabic language is disposed and able to be an effective party in cultural dialogue. And, although there is no reason to believe that the Arabic language is threatened by extinction, it is necessary to work determinedly on strengthening its linguistic shields and enhancing its practical and subjective characteristics that confirm its international profile and receptivity and its ability to assimilate new informational and technological developments. It is also essential to strengthen its relationship with other languages.

The renewal of Arabic will of course gain strength if the conditions and resources necessary to support Arab culture as a whole – moral, economic and technical - are put in place.

FOLK CULTURE

Until recently, folk culture did not receive much recognition in most contemporary Arab intellectual and cultural accounts. The tendency has been to view it as a blemish on culture, not an achievement, an historical backwater, a synonym of myth, or a defect in formal thought.

This prejudice has receded in recent decades amid the rediscovery that folk culture has a significant role in Arab cultural, social

and economic life. The relationship between Arab folk culture and formal culture has been established as a profound reciprocity of influence and effect. Holistic accounts of Arab culture see the two forms as equally authentic components of an integrated pattern.

Folk culture is, in fact, a huge repository of experiences and creative efforts that have enriched the intellectual, emotional, and behavioural life of all Arabs. It is rich in its components, as it consists of knowledge, beliefs, art, ethics, law, conventions, industrial knowledge and the popular creations of Bedouins and rural and urban dwellers. Folk culture is the creation of shepherds, farmers, artisans, and craftsmen who produce that culture outside of formal educational establishments and institutions. This culture, however, has also expanded to reach other social, cultural, and scientific groups. It also permeates old Arab history and has deep roots in the region. Varied as its forms and origins in different Arab societies are, folk culture nonetheless has elements of similarity and unity.

Folk culture is communal and oral and these two attributes account for how knowledge is produced and propagated in traditional societies. Production springs from the demands of the group. Transmission is by way of social interaction and relationship. Surprisingly, such processes often take place efficiently and do not run counter to the acquisition of rational knowledge, as might be imagined.

Folk culture comprises: concrete folk culture, folk knowledge and representations, folk conventions and traditions, and artistic folk expression (music, performing arts, visual arts, drama and linguistic expression).

Each category is blended with an artistic experience that is intrinsically connected to the style and practices of a particular community life. Therefore, some have no relation to the process of acquiring knowledge directly; rather, they are forms of entertainment, such as storytelling and the narration of biographies.

FOLK CULTURE: BETWEEN CREATIVITY AND IMITATION

Yet these forms are not devoid of knowledge.

Biographies, for example, are full of historical, geographical and humanistic knowledge. Imaginary worlds appeal to the creative human instinct for empathy and personal extension. Both forms are popular means of exchanging historical knowledge or rules related to customs. Many folk tales commend the value of knowledge and place it in a position superior to property. The high respect commonly shown for a written script by folk communities indicates the degree of their respect for knowledge, its value and importance.

Commonly, the culture expresses two voices: one, a conformist voice that calls for the imitation of traditional practices; the other, forward looking that advocates creativity, curiosity rationality, and the pursuit of knowledge. Some simple and even thoughtful proverbs originating in the nomadic area of Najd convey this latter outlook: "Ignorance is a lethal malady" and "Need provides the tool", not to mention others such as "Knowledge is illumination", "Be in quest for knowledge even in China". By the same token, the conformist elements of the culture have their own observations and stories. A well-known example concerns the individual who has been allowed to open all the doors in a hall except one; driven by curiosity, he pushes that door open and is punished with exile. English readers are familiar with the popular saw, "Curiosity killed the cat", which expresses a similar caution.

Traditional community celebrations when a young boy graduates from the 'Kuttab' (the traditional school for memorising and reciting the Holy Qura'an and the basics of arithmetic and other disciplines) indicate the high standing of knowledge in popular culture. The young graduate is treated to a great procession through his village accompanied by eulogies and prayers. A banquet follows and inaugurates a new chapter of social esteem for the latest possessor of knowledge. The community further ensures that, until the age of twelve, the boy continues to be schooled in elementary social disciplines: manners, rules of societal relations and ethics as well as in the fundamental skills for acquiring knowledge in whatever craft he has learned.

The relationship between Arab folk culture and formal culture has been established as a profound reciprocity of influence and effect.

Many folk tales commend the value of knowledge and place it in a position superior to property.

CRAFTS

Traditional occupations and crafts are highly prone to deterioration, decline, and withdrawal from people's everyday lives.

This principle of learning also applies to crafts and jobs, which need physical stamina or an intensive specialised skill. Thus, a boy is motivated to acquire the required learning and techniques through a direct apprenticeship with his master. The "master" or tutor graduates the phases of practical work for the apprentice according to the stages of his learning and actual progress. That is why it is not unusual to find boys in grazing communities herding flocks of cattle or, in agrarian communities, taking part in irrigation, running water-wheels and so on. Of course, they also perform a good part of the routine work required by the crafts or industries they have embraced.

Some crafts and jobs require more time, as well as mental and physical maturity, to master. Other tasks that do not require physical strength, such as scouting human and animals trails, tracking the positions of celestial bodies, and practicing folk medicine, still require dexterity, skill and knowledge to achieve proficiency. Occupations that require physical strength, such as masonry, blacksmithing, carpentry, weaving, and pottery also entail not only practice but skills in using tools and instruments, some of which are mechanically sophisticated. Indeed, craftsmen often devise their own work tools.

Significantly traditional occupations and crafts are highly prone to deterioration, decline, and withdrawal from people's everyday lives. This runs counter to the common assumption that the abstract and speech components of a folk culture disappear before its livelihoods. Field inspections reveal the decline of these crafts and occupations together with their associated knowledge and skills.

Behind the decline in Arab folk crafts stands a change in modes, tools, and relations of production. Demand for the products of those crafts and occupations, which called for experience, dedication, specialised skills and mastery, has withered because inferior mass-produced goods have replaced them at lower cost. With the decline of returns on their products, these craftsmen have given up their tools and their apprentices; and the traditional cycle of learning through the reproduction and communication of skills, expertise, and

knowledge has been broken. What remains are mainly those types of crafts that require no commitment or specialisation, and that are not the main source of a livelihood. The decline of traditional crafts as a source of employment, income and skills development, in both developed and developing societies, is well documented. But it assumes special importance in the Arab region, which suffers the highest rates of unemployment in the world and a growing deficit of knowledge in both new and traditional forms.

THE REVIVAL OF AN AWARENESS OF FOLK CULTURE

Folk culture provides artistic, musical and literary inspiration for several modern Arab art forms. Contemporary artistic solutions, technical methods, and creative forms and images are sometimes found in folk legacies and blended with modern performances and taste. Certain musical composers who take a scholarly approach draw directly from traditional musical compositions following a scientific methodology that results in innovative and creative music. Acknowledgements and evidence of folk influences can also be found among the plastic arts and in painting, sculpture, pottery, the cinema and other modern art forms.

All this points to the fact that folk culture can be a major element in the production of artistic knowledge and a source of cultural creativity. For example, Egypt's experience in mobilising folk culture as a stimulus for contemporary creativity underlines two points:

First: The adoption of a cultural strategy pointing in two directions. In the first direction, folk culture moves out of its confinement and migrates towards the larger cultural structure, taking up new space there. An enriching dialogue and hybrid relationship with other cultural components thus begins. In the second direction, the contemporary cultural structure moves towards the space of folk culture to bring the highest achievements and cultural creations to the broad mass of people.

Second: This cross-fertilisation can pay large dividends in building both cultural diversity and strength. Interaction, amalgamation and new syntheses will inevitably drive

Behind the decline in Arab folk crafts stands a change in modes, tools, and relations of production.

new and advanced Arab cultural products, rooted in social pluralism and national identity, and capable of offering a rich alternative to cultural globalisation.

The seeds of this future harvest have already been planted in a number of "festivals" held in Arab countries. Their host cities have become the centres of communication, interaction, synergy and new cultural energy: Salalah in Morocco, Sosa and Kartaj in Tunisia, the Cairo International Book Fair, Ganadriya in Riyadh, Jarash in Jordan, Karien in Kuwait, Baalabak in Lebanon, and others. There are also cultural events and symposia sponsored by civil institutions, such as *Abdelhameed Shoman* in Amman, and the cultural gatherings in Beirut, Abu-Dhabi, and other cities. All these manifestations are vivid evidence of an Arab cultural interaction, which holds folk culture in high esteem and places it in a visible position domestically and internationally. The state, the private sector, and the civil society should make the continuation of this new fusion their first priority in supporting modern Arab cultural development.

CULTURAL INTERACTION

Historically, Arab culture was never a closed system. Through all historical turning points, it exhibited openness and growth. Going beyond the cultural ego, it accepted the experience of other nations and assimilated them in its knowledge systems, customs and daily practices in spite of the differences and dissimilarities among those nations and their experiences.

The first of the two major experiences that touched Arab culture goes back to the age of scientific recording and the encounter with Greek civilisation and its disciplines of knowledge. This was the age of seeking out new disciplines and importing them into the culture, especially in the third and fourth centuries of Hijra, the ninth and tenth centuries AD. Here, an outstanding process of translation of most of the Greek scientific and philosophic heritage took place (Ibn El-Nadeem, in Arabic, 1964; Badawi, in French, 1968; Walzer, 1962). This heritage was profoundly assimilated and

then reproduced in new forms of creation. This interaction with the ancient heritage was the first step towards producing science, knowledge, and culture. The second major experience occurred in the 19th century when the modern Arab world encountered Western civilisation and opened up to its sciences, arts, knowledge and technology. The outcome of this was the renovation and modernisation of the Arab cultural heritage. The Arab world embraced the future and contributed its own prolific production in all branches of knowledge, sciences, arts, literature, and technology.

In both the east and west of the Arab world, cultural production continues to show a profound interaction between Arab intellectuals and creative artists, and the global culture and its different philosophies and intellectual movements. This interaction is revealed in the translation of literary, scientific and philosophical works from their source languages into Arabic. Of course, translation efforts into Arabic are woefully insufficient, compared to those into other languages, since the total body of such translations, as noted in a previous chapter, amounts to about one book per million Arabs according to UNESCO statistics. Arabs continue to translate the works of other cultures, not as exercises in translation, but to study, analyse and criticise those works as knowledge, while seeking out their influence and inspiration.

Regional, geographical and linguistic contexts have to a great extent influenced the interests of Arab intellectuals. Arabic culture in the western part of the Arab world reflects an explicit interaction with French literature and culture owing to the proximity of the sub-region to France and its historical experience with France and the French language. In the eastern part of the Arab world, interaction is greater with the scientific, literary and cultural production of the Anglo-Saxon and American worlds. In addition, similarities and common human and political factors between Arab countries and those of Latin America, as well as other developing regions, have led some Arab writers and intellectuals to welcome the creative works produced by artists and thinkers in those countries.

All prominent names in global culture have found their place in the Arab contempo-

Historically, Arab culture was never a closed system.

Cultural production shows a profound interaction between Arab intellectuals and creative artists, and the global culture and its different philosophies and intellectual movements.

Arab contemporary culture is generally explicit in its openness to human cultures... The single exception is the imitative school of tradition, which is slavishly tied to the past and its legacy.

Arab culture cannot exile itself, feeding only on its past, its history and its intellectual heritage.

rary culture. All global ideologies and methodologies the human and social sciences, including *inter alia* structuralism, functionalism, phenomenology, stylistics, deconstruction – the list is endless – have found both committed adherents and ardent critics in Arab culture. Hence, Arab contemporary culture is generally explicit in its openness to human cultures and the interaction with the contents, concepts and methodologies common in those cultures. The single exception to such openness is the imitative school of tradition, which is slavishly tied to the past and its legacy. However, some representatives of even that school accept, in varying degrees and within certain limits, some of the products of modernity.

Yet despite all these marks of openness, Arab culture today finds itself deeply challenged by aspects of global culture: the unbridled power of mass communication and the gigantic power of the global economy and global finance. It is, like many other cultures, confronting the problems of an emerging monolith while also concerning itself with cultural multiplicity, cultural personalities, the problem of the "self" and the "other", and the problem of its own cultural character. These and similar terms and concepts reveal the obsessions and anxieties of Arabs. Fears about the extinction of their language or their very culture itself, or about the diminution and dispersal of their identity, have become overwhelming obsessions that increasingly haunt the Arabic intellect and Arab society.

The way out will be the way through. The only historical possibility for Arab culture is to go through this new global experience. For it cannot exile itself, feeding only on its past, its history and its intellectual heritage in the new world of overwhelming powers that dominate knowledge, products, technology and global culture.

There is nothing that can justify Arab culture, in light of its rich historical experience and heritage, seeking to escape from the new conditions. Undoubtedly, some currents embedded in this culture would prefer a policy of rejection, indifference, isolation, and hostility to all values, ideas, and practices from outside. This is an understandable response to a global culture that is not impartial in most cases: understandable, but not acceptable. Withdrawal, even if it were feasible, would only lead to the weakening, decline, and fading away of the structures of Arab culture, rather than their flowering and further development. Moreover, as this chapter has argued, the most authentic values and ideas in current Arab culture, especially in the fields of language, religion, and values, are quite capable of holding their own against the challenges of globalisation without retreating from, or rejecting the future.

The global culture has its own dimensions of knowledge, science, and technology, which countries neglect at their own risk. Openness, interaction, assimilation, absorption, revision, criticism and examination cannot but prompt creative knowledge production in Arab culture. It is time to give the most enlightened, the most rational, objective and balanced, the most productive and the most humane impulses and currents of Arab culture their due, perhaps overdue, place in shaping and driving the next Arab encounter with the infinitely expanding world of knowledge.

BOX 6.9

Amin Maalouf: Protecting Diversity

The formidable power lent to Man by modern science and technology may be put to diametrically opposed uses, some beneficial and some destructive. Nature has never been so abused as it is today, yet we are in a much better position than ever before to protect it: not only because of our ability to influence environmental problems but also because our awareness of them is greater than in the past.

This does not mean our power to do good always gets the better of our ability to do harm, as is shown by only too many examples: take the depletion of the ozone layer, for instance, and the many

species still threatened with extinction.

I might have referred to other fields besides that of the environment. I chose that because some of the dangers we encounter are similar to those involved in globalisation.

In both cases there is a threat to diversity. Just as animal and plant species that have lived for millions of years are now dying out before our very eyes, in the same way, if we are not careful, we may witness the disappearance of many cultures that have hitherto managed to survive for hundreds or thousands of years.

Source: Amin Maalouf, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*, 2001, pp 128-129.

This chapter has indicated that there is no contradiction between the defining elements of Arab culture as analysed here and knowledge acquisition.

It concludes that the soul of Arab culture, which has permeated three millennia, has what it takes to build the Arab knowledge society in the third millennium, as effectively as it did at the end of the first millennium and the beginning of the second. Indeed this well-stocked and well-knit culture can be a source of strength in coping with the challenges of globalisation. The next two chapters turn to other key dimensions of building the Arab knowledge society: the Arab socio-economic structure and the political structure on the national, regional and global levels.