We are talking about complex and differentiated societies. They comprise political and cultural fields with diverse for all the many contexts. Many of the cities in the Middle East have been, and often remain, the loca
tion of flourishing fields of culture and politics. Of course there were the bearded men of the Islamic Brotherhood, the religion of the people, however, was much more relaxed and syncretistic, including music, song, dance, and even exotic substances often frowned upon by the orthodox. Popular rituals, rituals and celebration, as such as those of the Prophet's birthday and the commemoration of the martyrdom of the last 144 apostles to the present day. Popular religiosity also mixed happily with other elements of celebratory culture. It is exemplified in the popular song sung by Abdul-Muttalib: O Nabi, Allah saysiya wa-habibi rak ikhhusayn, wa-ola sha'an alun kula al-nida yama arhu/wu muranat 1 (O Prophet, O my beloved, I love you in the shrine district of central Cairo) and my beloved lives in al-Hussayn (another shrine district, and in order to attain maximum

Image not available online

Religious Authority and Public Life

The image of the Middle East projected in current public discourses is one imbued with religion. Media consumers would be forgiven for assuming that the region consists of only men who do the same things in prayer when not shaking their fists and burning American flags, and shadowy women in burqas. The region is ‘clash of civilizations’ and political world’, religion stamped on every aspect of its life and function. The ‘clash of civilizations’ idea, much criticized, remains a potent notion both in the West and in Muslim cultures. A mythical totalized ‘Muslim world’ is opposed to an equally mythical unified ‘West’, with religion as the essence of the former and the main key to its politics and society.

Modernization and secularization

‘Secularization’ is not necessarily ‘secularism’. It is not an ideological commitment against religion, but a socio-cultural process by which religion becomes differentiated from the religious locations in the public and political spheres, and function. The ‘clash of civilizations’ idea, much criticized, remains a potent notion both in the West and in Muslim cultures. A mythical totalized ‘Muslim world’ is opposed to an equally mythical unified ‘West’, with religion as the essence of the former and the main key to its politics and society. When religion prior to its political resurgence in the 1970s? Of course it was there, but in many forms and guises, mixed in with other elements of culture and politics. Of course there were the bearded men of al-Azhar, and different bearded men of the Muslim Brotherhood (the religion of the people, however, was much more relaxed and syncretistic, including music, song, dance, and even exotic substances often frowned upon by the orthodox. Popular rituals, rituals and celebration, as such as those of the Prophet’s birthday and the commemoration of the martyrdom of the last 144 apostles to the present day. Popular religiosity also mixed happily with other elements of celebratory culture. It is exemplified in the popular song sung by Abdul-Muttalib: O Nabi, Allah saysiya wa-habibi rak ikhhusayn, wa-ola sha’an alun kula al-nida yama arhu/wu muranat 1 (O Prophet, O my beloved, I love you in the shrine district of central Cairo) and my beloved lives in al-Hussayn (another shrine district, and in order to attain maximum

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