However, in the "globalized" late twentieth century, technological advances (including the Internet) have enabled Muslim communities to learn more about one another. Through these sophisticated communications tools, "religious movements for purity" have been able to reach a much wider audience than before. Despite these trends, a global "pan-Islamic community" is still seen by many as a myth.

Challenges of the Late Twentieth Century and Beyond

During the late twentieth century, Muslim communities underwent profound political and socio-economic changes, among them: decolonization, modernization, nation-building, and Westernization. The early 1970s, according to some, represented a turning point in Islamic history, as Muslim communities began to exhibit a newfound self-confidence in international affairs as a result of the Egyptian victory over Israel in the October war of 1973, and the heightened significance of oil. It seemed as if centuries of political decline was suddenly reversed.

However, this initial optimism proved short-lived. The Arab-Israeli conflict festered, as did other conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere. As well, secular authoritarian regimes were challenged by Islamist political forces that questioned the lack of political freedoms on the one hand, and Western-inspired visions of modernization and secularization on the other. Consequently, in the 1980s, a reassertion of Islam in politics emerged in Muslim societies, from Sudan to Malaysia. In response, authoritarian regimes carried out harsh crackdowns on Islamist political movements (e.g. Algeria, Tunisia, and Syria, among others). Though elite classes held a Westernized world view, this perspective was not embraced by the majority populations of these countries. As a result, Western-

inspired modernization did not lead to a triumph of the secular ideal. Rather, the 'Western path' was widely seen as the primary source of economic, social, and political failures. This repudiation of foreign systems resulted in increased support for Islamist activists who authenticated a more 'traditionalist' outlook.

At the same time, divisions within and between Muslim communities continued. Reflecting this, Islamic organizations, particularly the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), have been described as ineffective in diffusing crisis situations, especially in Afghanistan and Lebanon. Specific political grievances, such the lack of a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the perception that the West delayed addressing the Bosnian conflict, have contributed to a "seige mentality" among many Muslims.

A Return to Roots?

In the late 18th century, religious 'purity' movements emerged in response to a feeling of distress in some communities (e.g. Wahhabism). This drive for purity led to a "millenarian" politics. Osama bin Laden's *al-Qaeda* movement can be seen as an offshoot of these 18th century movements for 'purity.' In the contemporary world, communications technologies (including the Internet and *Al Jazeera* Television) have allowed these movements to wield further influence.

September 11, 2001: A Clash of Civilizations?

Since September 11, 2001, a series of editorials and provocative articles have appeared in leading newspapers, journals and other media legitimizing the "clash of civilizations" thesis. A decade-old debate has been renewed about