

ISLAMIC CULTURAL NATIONALISM

The protection of regional languages as a way of resisting globalization is just one part of a larger movement that interests geographers and other scholars. The movement, known as **cultural nationalism**, is an effort to protect regional and national cultures from the homogenizing impact of globalization, especially from the penetrating influence of U.S. culture. Figures 5.24 and 5.25 provide a picture of two widespread aspects of U.S. culture—films and television. Many other U.S. products also travel widely outside of U.S. borders (Figure 5.26). While many products of U.S. culture are welcomed abroad, many others are not. France, for example, has been fighting for years against the "Americanization" of its language.

Nations can respond to the homogenizing forces of globalization and the spread of U.S. culture in any number of ways. Some groups attempt to seal themselves off from undesirable influences. Other groups attempt to legislate the flow of foreign ideas and values, as in some Muslim countries.

After Christianity, Islam possesses the next largest number of adherents worldwide—about 1 billion. The map in Figure 5.27 shows the relative distribution of Muslims throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia; Figure 5.28 shows the heartland of Islamic religious practice,

The Islamic world includes very different societies and regions, from Southeast Asia to Africa. Muslims comprise over 85 percent of the populations of Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Tunisia, Turkey, and most of the newly independent republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus (including Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan). In Albania, Chad, Ethiopia, and Nigeria, Muslims make up 50 to 85 percent of the population. In India, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, China, Greece, Slovenia, Thailand, and the Philippines, significant Muslim minorities exist.

Islam is an Arabic term that means "submission", specifically submission to God's will. A **Muslim** is a member of the community of believers whose duty is obedience and submission to the will of God. As a revealed religion, Islam recognizes the prophets of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, but Muhammad is considered the last prophet and God's messenger on Earth. The **Qur'an**, the principal holy book of the Muslims, is considered the word of God as revealed to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel beginning in about A.D. 610. There are two fundamental sources of Islamic doctrine and practice: the Qur'an and the Sunna. Muslims regard the Qur'an as directly spoken by God to Muhammad. The **Sunna** is not a written document, but a set of practical guidelines to behavior. It is effectively the body of traditions that are derived from the words and actions of the prophet Muhammad.

White Islam holds that God has four fundamental functions—creation, sustenance, guidance, and Judgment—the purpose of people is to serve God by worshipping him alone and adhering to an ethical social order. The actions of the individual, moreover, should be to the ultimate benefit of humanity, not the immediate pleasures or ambitions of the self. There are five primary obligations, known as the five pillars of Islam, that a Muslim must fulfill: repeating the profession of the faith ("There is no god but God; Muhammad is the messenger of God"); praying five times a day facing Mecca; giving alms or charitable donations; fasting from sunrise until sundown during the holy month of Ramadan; and making at least one pilgrimage, or **hajj**, to Mecca if financially and physically able.

The emergence and spread of Islam are linked to the commercial history of the Middle East and North Africa. The geographical origin of Islam is Mecca, in present-day Saudi Arabia. When Islam first emerged, Mecca, where Muhammad was born in AD, 570, was an important node in the trade routes that at first connected Yemen and Syria and eventually linked the region to Europe and all of Asia. Today Mecca is the most important sacred city in the Islamic world, as well as an important commercial center. Eventually Medina also became an important sacred city because it was the place to which Muhammad fled when he was driven out of Mecca by angry merchants who felt his religious beliefs threatened their commercial practices.

Disagreement over the line of succession from the prophet Muhammad occurred shortly after his death 632 and resulted in [the split of Islam into two main sects: **the Sunni** and **the Shi'i**. The Sunni faction argued that the clergy should succeed Muhammad, while the Shi'i argued that Muhammad's cousin Ali should succeed his father. Ali was killed, and the Sunnis became dominant. They remain the mainstream branch of Islam, but the pattern varies from one country to another. The majority of Iran's 60 million people follow Shi'i, the official state religion of the Islamic Republic of Iran, founded in 1979. The majority of Iraq's population is also Shi'i. It is also important to keep in mind that Islam is practiced differently in many different locales throughout the Middle East and North Africa and that Muslims who had migrated from the region—to Europe and the United States, for instance—are shaped by, and shape the practice of, Islam in the Middle East.

Perhaps one of the most widespread cultural counterforces to globalization has been the rise of Islamism more popularly, although incorrectly, known as Islamic fundamentalism. Whereas fundamentalism is a general term that describes the desire to return to strict adherence to the fundamentals of a religious system, **Islamism** is an anticolonial, anti-imperial, and generally anticore political movement. In Muslim countries, Islamists resist core especially Western, forces of globalization—namely modernization and secularization. Not all Muslims are Islamists, although Islamism is the most militant movement within Islam today.

The basic intent of Islamism is to create a model of society that protects the purity and centrality of Islamic concepts through the return to a universal Islamic state—a state that would be religiously and politically unified. Islamists object to modernization because they believe the corrupting influences of the core place the rights of the individual over the common good. They view the popularity of Western ideas as a move away from religion to more secular (nonreligious) society. Islamists desire to maintain religious precepts at the center of state actions such as introducing principles from the sacred law of Islam into state constitutions.

Another important aspect of the Islamist movement is the concept of **jihad**, which is a sacred struggle. When this struggle is violently directed against the enemies of Islam, jihad is understood to be a holy war. But jihad can also be a more peaceful struggle to establish Islam as a universal religion through the conversion of nonbelievers. One example of jihad today is the struggle of Shiite Muslims for social, political, and economic rights within Sunni-dominated Islamic states.

As popular media reports make clear, no other movement emanating from the periphery is as widespread and has had more of an impact politically, militarily, economically, and culturally than Islamism. Yet Islamism—radical and sometimes militant movement—should not be regarded as synonymous with the practices of Islam, any more generally than Christian fundamentalism is with Christianity. Islam is not a monolithic religion, and even though all adherents accept the basic pillars, specific practices vary according to the different histories of countries, nations, and tribes. Some expressions of Islam allow for the existence and integration of Western styles of dress, food, music, and other aspects of culture, while others call for the complete elimination of Western influences (Figure 5.29)