

# Conclusion:

## Muslim Ambivalence

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A consensus on the measure to which Westernization is necessary for survival, or desirable for the resurgence, of the [Muslim] community has not yet been reached.

—*Gustave E. von Grunebaum*

THE DECISION to modernize ultimately comes down to a question of whether to adhere to the Shari'a and Islamicate patterns or to try out Western ways: fundamentalism, reformism, and secularism represent the principal responses. Which of the three the umma adopts will determine, more than anything else, its success with modernization.

The Shari'a itself does not impede modernization so much as do attitudes toward the West; after two centuries of exposure, Muslims are still reluctant to acknowledge the West's power and cultural leadership. The result is what Naipaul terms the "Muslim disturbance," that is, admiration for what the West does mixed with resentment for the fact that it fares so well; a desire to imitate its results but an unwillingness to emulate its actions:

The West, or the universal civilization it leads, is emotionally rejected. It undermines; it threatens. But at the same time it is needed, for its machines, goods, medicines, warplanes, the remittances from the emigrants, the hospitals that might have a cure for calcium deficiency, the universities that will provide master's degrees in mass media. All the rejection of the West is contained within the assumption that there will always

exist out there a living, creative civilization, oddly neutral, open to all to appeal to. Rejection, therefore, is not absolute rejection. It is also, for the community as a whole, a way of ceasing to strive intellectually. It is to be parasitic; parasitism is one of the unacknowledged fruits of fundamentalism.<sup>1</sup>

What holds truest of the fundamentalists holds true, in milder form, for the umma as a whole.

Two nearly parallel phenomena exist here: on one side, a religion that has strict requirements (the Shari'a) and a penumbra of cultural implications (the Islamicate way of life). On the other, a process of change (modernization) with its own penumbra of culture (the Western way of life). In theory, a Muslim faces few conflicts when he tries to reconcile the Shari'a with modernization, for they overlap only rarely—mostly in economics; with a few adjustments, he should be able to make the two compatible. The presence of so few areas of conflict between the Shari'a and modernization encourages some Muslims, the fundamentalists, to believe that they can become modern without Westernizing, that they can avoid most of those features of Western life that cause them such anguish.

But this belief is illusory; if modernization is theoretically distinct from Westernization, the two are in fact inescapably intertwined. The chances for becoming modern without Westernization are about as good as conceiving children without sex. A Muslim intending to work as a jet pilot, for example, will not become adequately technicalized unless he is Westernized as well. Modernization is not some abstract principle but a very real force projected by teachers, administrators, investors, and writers from the Occident. The jet pilot's training has to be carried out in a Westernized environment either by Westerners or by Westernized persons. Also, Westernization is necessary because Muslims are influenced not only by the Shari'a but by the whole of Islamicate civilization. Even if the Shari'a rarely conflicts with modernization, Islamicate civilization differs from Western civilization on a wide array of issues.

An outsider can easily see the faulty logic behind fundamentalism and reformism. Fundamentalism assumes that Muslims can modernize without Westernizing, leading to the contradictions Naipaul exposed; reformism holds that the two processes are compatible, leading to the falsehoods that so many scholars have noted. But secularism also fails, for even when Muslim leaders do dispense with the Shari'a itself, the Islamicate legacy persists. Formally giving up the idea of a caliph has hardly eased the predicament of Muslim governments vis-à-vis nationalism; nor has outlawing the veil (as the Iranian authorities did in 1936) achieved much more than heighten Muslim fears of social and sexual anarchy. Muslims are tied to the Islamicate legacy; even when they

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disavow the Shari'a and try to technicalize, Islamicate elements remain, holding them back from fully Westernizing.

The result is disarray and ambivalence. In the words of a Pakistani lawyer, "Our people emotionally reject the West. Materially, we may be dependent on the West."<sup>2</sup> Equivocation of this sort paralyzes Muslims and prevents them from decisive action. Individuals and governments muddle along, rarely willing to devote themselves either to a secular program or a fundamentalist one. Reformism, with its hesitations, empty rhetoric, false promises, misrepresentations, sleights of hand, tortured logic, and flights of fancy, wins by default. It demands the fewest commitments and tolerates the most contradictions, offering a vacuous but optimistic middle ground for Muslims unable to decide on fundamentalist or secularist programs. Reformism does not satisfy, but the alternatives do not attract. Secularists and fundamentalists offer sharper, more persuasive programs, but few Muslims wish to experiment with them. Except in a few states, notably Turkey and Albania in one direction, Iran and Pakistan in the other, Muslim leaders have avoided committing themselves to clear-cut solutions. The result is cultural stagnancy and political volatility.

Another result is the acceptance of inconclusive compromises. The unitary umma conflicts with nationalism, so nations exist, but in limbo. Dhimmi disabilities clash with the Western ideal of equal citizenship, so non-Muslims may enter the government and the military but not become head of state. The Islamicate tradition of withdrawal from politics goes contrary to the ideals of democracy, the civic society, and the militia; skewed elections, weak voluntary associations, and recruitment from small portions of the population result. Shar'i court procedures differ fundamentally from the British Common Law, the Code Napoleon, or any other European legal system, so elements from several systems are drawn on at the same time and mixed freely, satisfying no one. These compromises neither preserve the old ways intact nor thoroughly assimilate those of the West. They cause the umma to drift ideologically, seeking a program true to its traditions yet helpful for dealing with modernity, seeking a niche between the two super-powers, and hoping somehow to regain the successful self-image of old.

To escape anomy, Muslims have but one choice, for modernization requires Westernization; the fundamentalist option is illusory, with most of its proposals "too unsophisticated to be of any value in solving the complex issues now facing the world."<sup>3</sup> Islam does not offer an alternate way to modernize. So long as the umma insists on looking for solutions to current problems with patched-up versions of archaic programs, it will remain poor and weak. Secularism cannot be avoided. Modern science and technology require an absorption of the thought processes which accompany them; so too with political institutions. Because content must be emulated no less than form, the predomi-

nance of Western civilization must be acknowledged so as to be able to learn from it. European languages and Western educational institutions cannot be avoided, even if the latter do encourage freethinking and easy living. Only when Muslims explicitly accept the Western model will they be in a position to technicalize and then to develop. Secularism alone offers escape from the Muslim plight.

A comparison with the modern history of the Jews suggests that Islam is likely to witness a weakening of the law over time. Today's debate over the observance of the Shari'a corresponds roughly to the Jewish debate about a century ago; then as now, advocates of Westernization were gaining strength, just as adherents of the law held strong. The Jewish experience indicates that legalist forces, however strong, numerous, and well-organized, will fail, for they are defying the prevailing ethos of the age, antinomian Westernization. Too much occurring in life today undermines adherence to the law; it is inconceivable that Muslims can withstand Westernization any more than Jews could.

If they accept Westernization, it is the opinion of some that the essence of Islam will be lost and the religion forsaken; as M. Jamil Hanifi sees it, abandoning the Shari'a means "an all-powerful Allah without adequate guidance concerning his will, a holy book without agreed upon interpretations, a religious emotion without clear ethical and social consequences, and authority in the community without traditional legitimacy."<sup>4</sup> H. A. R. Gibb sees it in even starker terms: "To reject the Sharia *in principle* is . . . in some sense apostasy. . . . With the maintenance of the Sharia is linked the survival or disappearance of Islam as an organized system."<sup>5</sup> But this is overly rigid: religions, like all human institutions, survive through adaptation, and if Islam must discard the law and adopt faith and ethics, as Judaism did, it will do so. It can flourish too, for a Protestantized Islam will serve Muslims no less well than a legalized one; decline in the law need not impair the relations of men to God. This said, the efforts of those Muslims who do persevere in keeping the law deserve respect, for they are maintaining important traditions in the face of great challenge.

If Shar'i precepts often conflict with Western ways, so too do Jewish ones, at least in the private sphere, where the Halakha outdoes the Shari'a in the number and scope of its regulations. Even the Christian churches advocate precepts that differ from the customs of the modern West (such as the Catholic prohibition of divorce). All three religions discourage or prohibit taking interest on money, yet this does not hinder the free use of interest payments in the West and in Israel. In some ways, the sacred law has helped the Jews modernize; devotion to Talmudic studies is widely credited with giving Jews literacy and analytic skills which proved of great value outside the ghetto or shtetl.

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The eventual adaptation of Jews to modern life makes it clear that attitude, not sacred law, is the key. Whereas most Jews accept Western ways and work hard to incorporate them or adjust to them, Muslims too often attempt to finesse Westernization and become modern without it.

To prosper again, the umma faces an inescapable set of demands: worldly success requires modernization; modernization requires Westernization; Westernization requires secularism; secularism must be preceded by a willingness to emulate the West; and this willingness will gain acceptance only when Muslims are unalterably convinced that it is their only choice. Westernization is an unpleasant prospect which Muslims will not pursue unless all other efforts fail. Thus, were the Westernizers to flourish and the fundamentalists to fall behind, Westernization would look good and attract more Muslims. But it was precisely this that did not happen in the 1970s, when changes in the umma dramatically increased the power of fundamentalists and weakened that of the Westernizers. This was the worldwide phenomenon known as the Islamic revival.