

THE PASSING OF TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

Modernizing The Middle East

By DANIEL LERNER

with the collaboration of LUCILLE W. PEVSNER

and an introduction by DAVID RIESMAN

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For My Mother

LOUETTA LERNER

Who Moved From Traditional Ways
To A Modern Style
With Dignity And Grace

Preface

NEARLY a decade of effort has gone into the studies from which this book was made. The decade has reshaped our conceptions of modernization in underdeveloped areas—of what happens with the passing of traditional society—and the Middle East has become a very different place from what it was ten years ago. This book is no current events reader (a hard enough task for the news weeklies) but its contents do reflect the changing problems and perspectives of the decade.

The story begins in 1949—appropriately, the year which initiated Point IV—at the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, with plans for a sample survey in six Middle Eastern countries. This pioneer survey, which was begun in the fall of 1950 and continued into 1951 under the general direction of Professor Charles Y. Glock, made use of an extensive questionnaire that was developed with the help and guidance of Professors Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton. The 300-odd respondents in each country were queried, by an interviewer talking their native tongue, about their habits and preferences with regard to the mass media of communication, their attitudes toward foreigners and foreign countries, their general outlook on life, as well as certain features of their daily lives. The field work in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan was supervised by Dr. William J. Millard, Jr. Dr. Robert O. Carlson took over direction of the final phases of the field work in Jordan, and then went on to supervise the surveys in Egypt, Syria and Iran.

The initial analysis of the interviews was carried out at the Bureau. The staff members who participated are named on the title pages and their reports are acknowledged at those places where they have been adapted for use in the present text. These Bureau interviews and reports are the main body of systematic empirical material used in the case studies (chapters IV-X).

In 1953, the Bureau invited this writer, who had made the original analysis of the Turkish materials, to prepare a book under the auspices of the Center for International Studies at M.I.T. With Bureau cooperation, in the person of Paul L. Berkman, a comprehensive recoding and reanalysis of the interviews was made. This produced the comparable data on all six countries reported in chapter III and in the latent structure analysis at Appendix C.

With the rough draft of a manuscript completed in 1954, this writer set out to see how the area had changed since the survey was completed. He talked at length with the original interviewers—and interviewees—in each country. The direct impact of these re-interviews is reported in chapter I. Their convergence on the *varied tempo* of social change in the Middle East led us to reconsider the basic concept of modernization. Why were some countries (e.g., Lebanon) changing so fast while others seemed to falter at rapid modernization (e.g., Iran)? Any answer faced the *tenuous balance* of social change. Why were some countries (e.g., Turkey) able to maintain stability while rapidly acquiring mobility, whereas others (e.g., Egypt) seemed to accomplish any step toward modernization only along an erratic course of violent fluctuations involving personal anguish and social dislocation?

How to interpret such variant responses to the common challenge of modernization is a problem of global scope. India and Indonesia, China and Chile—all of the vast underdeveloped world poses the same questions. Following this lead, we made a difficult detour into studies designed to set the Middle East data in a global context. The direct yield of these statistical studies, reported in chapter II, was a sharper conception of modernity as a *behavioral system*, a comprehensive interlocking of lifeways. This conception was applied to our Middle East data by the basic typology presented in chapter III. Our idea of modernization thus came to pinpoint the passing of tradition as a critical phase. We no longer assumed that as tradition passed, so, more or less automatically, modernity commenced. The specific character of “the transition” in each country took a more central position in our analysis. How each country managed the subversion of ancient ways clearly imposed specific limits on its construction of new ways.

Such recognition that “long-run” social change in the Middle East is likely to be governed by “short-run” decisions entailed a position of greater saliency in our account for international politics. Certain it is that modernization of the Middle East has taken a different course because most of these countries came to independence in the Cold War era. In 1950, when the survey began, Turkey was becoming the area’s bright model of modernization. The interwar decades had given Atatürk a headstart, which he used with superb skill, to achieve an orderly process of social change. The democratic election of an opposition party was an epochal event and the new government’s intervention in Korea gave promise of democratic vigor. Elsewhere in the area, aside from the creation of Israel, the early postwar years were relatively quiet on the surface. Farouk ruled Egypt, ‘Abdullah ruled Transjordan, the young Shah ruled Iran.

A year later, when the Bureau interviewers made their rounds, the area had erupted. Mossadegh, an historic figure, had accelerated the transformation of the Middle East by involving Iran squarely in bipolar world politics and, simultaneously, by advocating the primacy of radio propaganda over political economy. The reconstitution of the Middle East elites was under way. In rapid strokes a “pattern” had been shaped:

'Abdullah was assassinated in Jordan, Farouk was exiled from Egypt, and the military took power in both Egypt and Syria. Meanwhile, Turkish progress seemed to falter. An unfavorable balance of payments, inflation and a new repressiveness appeared in the Menderes regime. World attention shifted from admiration of Ankara to anxiety over Cairo.

The book takes account of this shift. In Turkey and Lebanon we deal with the socioeconomic issues of modernization as they emerged from the interwar years—secular problems of mobility, media, youth, women. In the more turbulent Arab countries and Iran, our discussion turns upon the psychopolitical issues of the bipolar era—crucial problems of personal identity, revolutionary ideology, propaganda technique. Throughout the book, our eye is on the personal meaning of social change in the living Middle East; but we take account of the varied social settings which frame personal meaning in each country.

After the manuscript was sent to the printer, I returned to the Middle East—this time at the invitation of the American University at Cairo—and made brief visits to Egypt, Syria, Lebanon. By and large, the perspective of the book seems relevant to events of 1958. Were I starting afresh, psychopolitical analysis might figure even more prominently, given the current political mergers of Egypt-Syria and Iraq-Jordan. These events document the continuing “quest for a usable political identity” which is discussed in chapters III, VII, XI. The United Arab Republic certifies Nasser’s impressive achievement of personal charisma. But this imposes upon him the need for a more effective confrontation of the real problems of national livelihood without winning him the desired supranational chieftainship over a single unified Arab Nation or Islamic World Parliament. That the first response to the Egypt-Syria Union was the rival Iraq-Jordan Federation indicates the continuing validity of our earlier conclusion: “Any accurate Middle East landscape will depict the political ties that bind in pale pastels over a distant horizon; the bold primary colors in the foreground will represent multiplicity and diversity” (page 403).

Returning, then, to a finished set of galleys, I have only appended a few paragraphs about each of the three countries revisited and have written this preface. No other “updating” was done. This disregard of the latest news imposes a special obligation to exonerate those who helped me from any responsibility for my performance. Their personal kindness implies no endorsement of my observations or opinions. In this sense it gives me pleasure to acknowledge that, on my travels through the Middle East, I would have got nowhere in Turkey without the unforgettable experiences owed to Kasim Gülek and Ahmed Emin Yalman; in Egypt without Hanna Rizk, Laila Shukry el-Hamamsy, Gordon K. Hirabayashi; in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan without George Grassmuck, Lincoln Armstrong, and three alumni of A.U.B. (a Lebanese Druze, a Syrian Muslim, a Palestinian Christian) who cannot be named; in Iran without my World War II chief, the late Major General Robert A. McClure.

For publication of earlier versions, I must thank *Harper's* (chapter

I), *Behavioral Science* (chapter II), *Sociometry* (chapter III), *American Scholar* (chapter XI), and *Explorations* which led to the Introduction by my friend and critic, David Riesman. In preparing this text Mrs. Pevsner, wise and valued colleague, guided the hand that held the pen throughout and drafted chapters VI, VIII, IX. Chapters in various stages gained much from expert readings by Professors E. A. Bayne, Morroe Berger, Eleanor Bisbee, Carleton S. Coon, L. P. Elwell-Sutton, Philip K. Hitti, J. C. Hurewitz, Bernard Lewis, Raphael Patai, Moshe Perlmann, Spaulding Rogers, E. A. Speiser, Afif Tannous. Professors David Riesman and Ithiel Pool performed major surgery on the earlier drafts. The BASR analysts—particularly Patricia L. Kendall, William N. McPhee and David L. Sills—subjected the intermediate versions to methodological scrutiny. Harold R. Isaacs, Herbert Gans and Christine Gainer reviewed the final manuscript as the serious reader's friends. Their counsels were good; the errors and follies are my own. It is conceivable that the manuscript would have reached print without the talents of my wife, Jean Lerner, but I do not see how.

D. L.

Cambridge, Mass.
May 1958

Contents

PREFACE	vii
INTRODUCTION by David Riesman	1

Perspectives

I. THE GROCER AND THE CHIEF: A PARABLE	19
1. Balgat Perceived: 1950	
2. Balgat Revisited: 1954	
3. The Passing of Balgat	
II. MODERNIZING STYLES OF LIFE: A THEORY	43
1. The Mobile Personality: Empathy	
2. The Mobility Multiplier: Mass Media	
3. The "System" of Modernity	
4. The Hurdles of Modernization	
5. The Model of Transition	
III. THE PASSING OF TRADITIONAL SOCIETY: A SURVEY	76
1. The Story of This Book	
2. Ranking the Nations: Societal Audits	
3. Persons and Places: Deviant Phases and Divergent Styles	
4. The Cases in Hand	

The New Turks

IV. TURKEY: FROM THE PAST	111
1. The Ottoman Context	
2. The Atatürk Vectors: Ways of Participation	
3. The Communication Revolution	
4. Toward New Turks	
5. Traditionals: The Constrictive Self	
V. TURKEY: TOWARD THE FUTURE	136
1. From Tradition to Transition	
2. Constriction and Communication	
3. Moderns: The Big Picture	
4. Transitionals: The Widening World	

The Arab Worlds

VI. LEBANON: TWO WORLDS IN SMALL COMPASS	169
1. The Westernizing Factors	
2. Media and Status	
3. New Opinion Leaders in Rural Lebanon	
4. Women and the Media	
5. Problems of Modern Governance	
VII. EGYPT: THE VICIOUS CIRCLE	214
1. The Vicious Circle of Poverty	
✓ 2. The Revolutionary Symbolisms: NATION and CLASS	
✓ 3. The Media and the Revolutions	
✓ 4. Politics and Psyche in The Vicious Circle	
5. Whither the Communication Revolution?	
6. Which Way Is Forward?	

VIII. SYRIA: THE LURES OF EXTREMISM	264
1. The Social Setting of Political Instability	
2. The Young Effendis: From Personal Frustration to Political Extremism	
3. A Typology of Political Attitudes	
4. The Politics of Insecurity	
IX. JORDAN: ONE STATE WITH TWO PEOPLES	303
1. "Culture Contact": The Setting of Social Change	
2. The Constrictive World of the Beduin	
3. The Village Farmers	
4. The Town Enterprisers	
5. The Cosmopolitan Elite	

On the Margins

X. IRAN: IN A BIPOLAR WORLD	353
1. Iran between the Powers	
2. The Struggle at Home	
3. The Structure of Iranian Extremism	
4. Bipolarity and International Communication	
5. The Meaning of Mossadegh	
6. Epilogue: The Future of Media and Mass	
XI. RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT	398

Appendices

A. THE QUESTIONNAIRE	415
B. REPLICATION OF THE EMPATHY INDEX	434
C. THE LATENT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS	438
NOTES	447
INDEX	461

Introduction*

By DAVID RIESMAN

SOME YEARS AGO Professor Lerner gave me the opportunity to read a number of translated interviews that had been done in Turkey and Lebanon. I studied them and, later, some of the interviews done in other countries of the Middle East, less to develop my very limited knowledge of the area, than out of my interest in the technique of the interview as a cultural form, as a mode of communication among the social strata as well as a mode of inquiry. I had long wondered how interviewing was even possible in Muslim cultures where relations between strangers of opposite sex were supposed to be jealously guarded and where, as in other traditional societies, an anthropologist might come and live in a community and gradually establish a role for himself, but hardly a passing interviewer whose motives could scarcely be grasped.

Indeed, there were barriers. It proved impossible to get the survey under way in Iraq. In uneasy Syria, the interviewer was sometimes taken for a spy; as one wrote:

I heard that after I had finished this interview rumors started to go around that I belong to the F.B.I. looking for Communists. Others said I want to take their sons to Korea. . . . Although I had explained the matter and purpose of the interview yet people were very skeptical about it. And any time the name of any big power or the name of their government used to be mentioned, you feel that they are not at ease and give short dry answers, this is the attitude I met with most of the non-educated class.¹

Moreover, as Professor Lerner explains, those more accessible to interviewing were consciously oversampled—men as against women; town and city dwellers as against farmers and nomads; readers and

radio listeners as against non-readers and non-listeners. For the effort of the studies was to sense the drift of opinion and feeling among those who counted or might possibly count politically. Nevertheless, the political orbit was drawn much wider than hierarchically-minded people concerned only with those now holding power would think made sense: many illiterates, peasants, and poor workers and unemployed were drawn into the net of the interviewing.

However, from the data in hand, we cannot know what all the obstacles were to getting the inarticulate to respond—the underdogs who, even in our own opinion-prone country, tell the interviewer that they have no views, that their feelings could not possibly interest any higher-ups, and won't he please go down the road and find someone else. Nevertheless, every so often in the chapters that follow one gets a glimpse of the interviewer at work (notably so in the town of Balgat at the outset). And one of the interviewers in Syria reports, in response to the final question which asked what the respondent thought of such interviews as this, that the latter blurted out:

Why should *you* go to the Universities and study, while *my* children start working at ten years of age?

To be sure, such an "uncalled for" retort, with its class-conscious comparison, is very rare in the materials I read, and we learn from the rest of the interview that this man, a carpetweaver, is pro-Soviet—one of the tiny minority of workers deeply touched by proletarian rather than primarily nationalistic ideology.

Interviewers, in fact, bear to the bureaucracy of social research somewhat the same relation that foremen bear to industrial management: the interviewers mediate between the home office and the field, adjusting to the capabilities of particular respondents the demands for comparability and standardization that issue from central headquarters. Gaps of education and empathy, even within our own country, are sufficiently wide to make the "same" questions mean different things to different sorts of respondents. And any question is seldom, in the tone of the interviewer, the same question orally as it appears in print, despite the survey director's strenuous use of a kind of "Basic American" which will neither patronize the rich nor intimidate the poor. Correspondingly, the interviews on which Mr. Lerner relies were inevitably "translated" by those who

did them and who managed with differential effectiveness to blend distant queries with parochial understandings.

While the interviewers thought that they got better interviews from the more articulate, I found those interchanges at least as illuminating which went more awkwardly, as where the respondent stood on his privacy, or lacked that ready conversational coin of opinions which the process of the interview presupposes. In the Western countries where private opinion has become public, and vice versa, one finds only a tiny minority of "don't knows" among the overwhelming majority of "do knows," and little attention has been paid to this perhaps vanishing small group. But in the pre-industrial and pre-democratic lands, the "don't knows" still loom large. A characteristic answer is that of the Turkish peasant who, responding to the question as to what he would do if he were President, declared:

My God! How can you ask such a thing? How can I . . . I cannot . . . president of Turkey . . . master of the whole world?

Correspondingly, many of the tradition-minded in these interviews, asked where they would like to live if they could not live in their native villages, said they would rather die; they could not conceive of living anywhere else, any more than of being somebody else.

Yet it should be noted that the concept "Turkey" was not strange to the man quoted above, and the concept "Egypt" was familiar even to the most depressed *fellahin*—though not all the nations of the Middle East have percolated their often newly established collective identity down to the remote villages. (The concept "Middle East," as Mr. Lerner points out, is alien both to the surviving parochial identities and to the nascent pan-Arab, pan-Islamic, and other more inclusive and mutually competing identities.) In this perspective, the interviews themselves give as well as get information: they are an aspect of secularization accompanying the mass media now beamed at the area, and informing people that they are Turks, Syrians, Arabs, and that other people are other things—thus replacing tribalism and isolation by nationalism, and folk proverbs by widely-distributed slogans and opinions.

The most dramatic material in this volume, in this perspective, concerns the speed with which traditional society is breaking down, prior to the coming of commerce, industrialism, or literacy.

As we know from many reports, this is happening everywhere, so much so that a young generation of anthropologists is growing up who cannot find tribes uninfluenced by Western contact. Even so, it is hard to realize the rapidity of change in the rate of change. Joyce Cary's wonderful novel, *Mr. Johnson*, may serve as an illustration. It describes a young West African clerk, educated in a mission, who is on the edge of literacy, and who has a vivid roseate picture, gained from consular officials, of "home," that is, Great Britain. The pathos of his situation is that, with his Bush wife and semi-aculturated fellow-clerks, he cannot move rapidly enough to take possession of the new estate of British gentleman held out to him; in the fashion of the *arriviste*, he overreaches himself dramatically, and crashes. Cary is extraordinarily sensitive to the pace as well as the pathos of African modernization; yet, reading his book published in 1939, one would never suppose that the successors to the Mr. Johnsons would bring forth an independent and politically alert and, in many strata, literate Ghana less than a generation later.

The pace of change has been immensely accelerated by the coming of mass media—radio and movies—which do not require the arduous steps of literacy; and, as we know from advertisers' experience within the United States, these media have come on the world stage along with many mass-produced consumer goods which have altered the imagery of ambition out of all keeping with traditional limits. While peasants could always wish for more livestock and land (as in Tolstoy's legend "How Much Land Does a Man Need?"), and a bigger house, and while people can slowly learn to want more money as an end in itself, the new consumer "durables" of the last few decades—such as radios, refrigerators, bicycles, even cars—have greatly reduced the traditional wantlessness of the impoverished, and have brought women as well as men into the orbit of desire.²

With wants come new opinions; with new opinions, new political awareness. Professor Lerner relates these trends by means of his concept of the "participant style" which has come about in the West with near-universal literacy, with industrialization and some degree of urbanization, and with free elections. But what happens when peoples skip steps (as, of course, the age-old processes of borrowing and diffusion always facilitate in some measure), moving from preliteracy or illiteracy to the post-literate stage of

the mass media, without the individuation, commercial and managerial skills, and occasional cultivation that accompany print? Mr. Lerner's book is also a story of pseudo-participants: of mobs on the streets of Cairo or Tehran who have been brought into the political process, though they lack the skills needed to make their new slogans come more nearly true. While analogous mobs were not wholly unknown to Imperial Rome or 19th Century Paris and New York, the continuous turmoil that the new media can encourage, and the new consumer goods entice, would seem to be new.

The mobs would not be there in such number, ejected from the land and without work or home in the city, were it not for the explosion of population brought about by modern sanitary measures. The hope of overcoming the Malthusian impasse in the countries of high population density and potential rests on achieving industrialization with such speed that the values of the low-birth-rate family would quickly spread, and thus prevent each increase in productivity from being eaten up by the growing excess of births, as in India and Egypt, where, as generally in the underdeveloped areas, deaths have dropped so much more quickly than births that all efforts at per capita economic progress are repeatedly set back.

Something of the same cancerous disproportion, it seems to me, has occurred with the spread of the newer media. People now are brought into the participant style who would earlier have lacked the chance to develop what Mr. Lerner calls the "mobile sensibility": the empathic readiness to try on a new way of life. Whereas once a few energetic spirits would have left an Anatolian or Lebanese village and come to Brazil or New York, today, as it were, Brazil and New York, Hollywood and the BBC, the Voice of the Arabs and many other impalpable voices, too, come to the village.³ Not everyone listens, to be sure; and some of Mr. Lerner's most arresting work has gone into study of the differences in personality between the "Transitionals" who expose themselves to the media and those of like income, illiteracy, and physical setting who do not. But there are enough of these Transitionals, nomads of the spirit in search of a new identity, to prefigure the end of traditional society. As births have outrun deaths, so have opinions outrun opportunities.

The two problems are, of course, related. Malthus thought population run riot would be checked by famine, pestilence, and

war. What about opinions run riot? Mr. Lerner shows how, after the Aswan Dam defeat, Nasser became in some measure the captive of his own movement and its polemics: in the face of the immense technical and psychological obstacles to industrial development and its cultural concomitants, the mobile sensibility of the Transitionals tended to push him toward profitless adventurism. It is depressing to read the Egyptian interviews where, one after another, even the very highly educated respondents say, when asked what can be done about the poverty they agree is terrible, that driving out the British (this was 1950) or destroying Israel will do it. To be sure, Israel's own nationalism and expansionism may somewhat increase the cost of Egypt's defense, and driving out the British may increase Egypt's élan and sense of self-chosen destiny. But, to the outsider, the gulf between Egyptian aspirations and realistic plans (and the same is true, *pari passu*, elsewhere) appears much greater than that of European nations in their formative stages—for the latter, of course, did not have their aspirations set by the present Western model of military strength and economic prosperity. Paradoxically, in one sense the nascent opinions do not run riot enough: slogans proliferate and swirl around a few nationalistic themes, but the interviews (possibly hampered in this respect by their form and level of approach) are not marked by great heterogeneity of outlook within socioeconomic categories.

In any event, the kind of sloganized xenophobia and suspiciousness which turns up in many interviews with well-educated members of the middle classes (of course, in other interviews one discovers more cosmopolitan types, secular in spirit and moderate in temper) is the kind one is apt to find in the United States among the least educated, that is, people who are participant enough to have and voice opinions, but not middle-class or well-educated enough to be moderate, soft-spoken, and more or less tolerant and trustful. The *pre-literate*, to the extent they still exist in the Middle East, cannot be called nationalistic or bigoted; they are simply voiceless, or speak with the voice of tradition. But the illiterate and the post-literate have absorbed the shorthand aims of the mobile literate leaders—men who, as in Pakistan, can produce explosive awakenings of nationalism (in Pakistan, with a million dead and sixteen million made homeless, the end is not yet). Certainly, inventions worked out in the West, such as federalism and judicial protection of minority rights (which offer bulkheads