

A MODERNITY-MATURITY CONTINUUM

WHERE STAND THE ARABS?

by 1264

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- MODERNIZATION: "Modernization is characterized by a core belief in rational or scientific control. This belief is the most important characteristic."<sup>1</sup>
- THE ARABS: "Suspicion, fear, restlessness, lack of confidence in the future, lack of social balance and stability are characteristics which the people display."<sup>2</sup>
- MATURITY: "When the adolescent falls short of what he considers to be adult standards, he feels inadequate and insecure, and he attempts to compensate for or overcome this feeling by boastfulness, aggressive behavior and competitiveness...<sup>3</sup> an emotionally immature individual tends to feel all [authorities'] actions which involve him are attempts to embarrass or humiliate him."<sup>4</sup>
- THE ARABS: "Incompletely emancipated, the Arab's resentment has exploded in the same direction as before: boastfulness, exaggeration of his capabilities, and a tendency to see the slightest skepticism in another as a grave insult."<sup>5</sup>

## FOREWORD

The purpose of this paper is to place the Arab character on a dual continuum, which shall be entitled a "modernity-maturity continuum". There would seem to ample support for the conjecture that there is an Arab character.<sup>6</sup> Hamady lists their shared characteristics as follows: They share the "same way of life", "a transmittable community of acting, thinking, believing and feeling". The Arabs are alike in the "way they bring up their children... family patterns...social relations". They live, or have become accustomed to living under basically the same "economic system", "class hierarchy", type of government, and hold the same attitudes toward government. Communication is through "one medium of thought"; the "traditions...history and cultural heritage" are the same. In aspirations for the future and orientation towards unity they are one; their "symbolic system" is the same and based primarily on the Muslim tradition.<sup>7</sup>

To say that there is an Arab character is to admit simultaneously that a national character is not only possible but real and definable. This point too would seem to have been amply documented.<sup>8</sup> Erich Fromm says that different "societies or classes within a society have a specific social character":<sup>9</sup>

"The social character comprises only a selection of traits, the essential nucleus of the character structure of most members of a group which has developed as the result of the basic experiences and mode of life common to that group."<sup>10</sup>

That group behavior patterns may be so similar as to be predicted statistically is noted by Ledger Wood.<sup>11</sup>

Lastly, it should be noted that the Arabs of whom we speak are chiefly the eighty per cent<sup>12</sup> who still live as farmers and peasants: i.e., the unmobilized and traditional. The validity of this discussion is dependent on the exclusion of those subjected, and respondent to, rapid change.

## PREFACE

Certain assumptions are taken for granted in this paper. They are as follows:

1. THAT ANY GIVEN SOCIETY OR SOCIETAL GROUPING WILL TAKE AS ONE OF ITS TASKS THE TRANSMITTAL OF A CERTAIN FRAME OF REFERENCE TO ITS NEW MEMBERS FOR THE PURPOSE OF UNDERSTANDING AND DEALING WITH THE REALITIES OF ITS ENVIRONMENT. THESE FRAMES OF REFERENCE, AND THE VARIETY IN WHICH THEY MAY BE FOUND, ARE SYMBOLIC OF MAN'S ADAPTABILITY.

2. THAT THE FRAME OF REFERENCE WILL BE BOTH A CREATION AND A REFLECTION OF A SOCIETY'S ENVIRONMENT AND THE TRADITIONAL INTERACTION THAT A SOCIETY HAS HAD WITH THE REALITIES OF ITS ENVIRONMENT.

This point is supported by Erich Fromm:

"Character in the dynamic sense of analytic psychology is the specific form in which human energy is shaped by the dynamic adaptation of human needs to the particular mode of existence of a given society."<sup>13</sup>

This character in turn molds the "thinking, feeling and acting of individuals"; especially on non-empirical concepts, e.g. ethics and philosophy. These concepts, which have an "emotional matrix" in an individual's character, are answers to specific needs:<sup>14</sup>

"The social character internalizes external necessities and thus harnesses human energy for the task of a given economic and social system."<sup>15</sup>

Two additional assumptions should be included at this point. First, though the mode of one's existence is set by one's environment, there are certain

"...inherent human qualities: [man's] striving to live, to expand and express the potentialities that have developed in him in the process of historical evolution."<sup>16</sup> (My emphases).

Secondly, realities will shape man's frame of reference in more than one way; i.e., they will not only shape an individual's interaction with them, but also his lack of interaction. We will expect to find the tolerability of reality and the emphasis it receives in direct proportion.

3. THAT A FRAME OF REFERENCE -- IN THAT IT IS REFLECTIVE OF A CERTAIN, DEFINABLE SOCIETY -- IS A DEFINABLE CONCEPT, AND LIKE MOST, MAY BE PLACED ON A CONTINUUM REPRESENTING AT LEAST TWO DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THAT CONCEPT.

4. THAT FEW GROUPS OR ENTITIES EXPLORED IN LIGHT OF A GIVEN CONCEPT CAN BE PLACED AT THE EXTREME ENDS OF A CONTINUUM: RATHER, THAT MOST TAKE A POSITION SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE TWO POLES AND INCORPORATE ASPECTS OF EITHER EXTREME.

5. THAT A "TRADITIONAL PERSONALITY"\* NOT ONLY EXISTS, BUT IS CAPABLE OF DEFINITION: THAT CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS, AND PATTERNS OF CHARACTERISTICS EXIST IN THOSE THAT HAVE BEEN THE PRODUCT OF "TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES".

6. THAT A "MODERN PERSONALITY"\* EXISTS, AND IS CAPABLE OF DEFINITION: THAT CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS, AND PATTERNS OF CHARACTERISTICS EXIST IN THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN THE PRODUCT OF "MODERN" SOCIETIES.

7. THAT A "MATURE PERSONALITY"\* EXISTS: ONE WHICH IS AGAIN CAPABLE OF DEFINITION. THAT, FURTHERMORE, THE MATURE PERSONALITY IS A REFLECTION OF A MATURE SOCIETY, i.e., ONE WHICH INCORPORATES THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MATURITY.

8. THAT AN "IMMATURE PERSONALITY"\* EXISTS, IS DEFINABLE, AND IS ALSO A REFLECTION OF ITS SOCIETY.

9. THAT MATURITY IS DOUBLY SYMBOLIC: IT REPRESENTS THE MAXIMIZATION OF HUMAN POTENTIAL, AND THE MINIMIZATION OF DEFENSE MECHANISM UTILIZATION.

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\*To be defined in the introduction.