

Living in a Pluralistic World: Class 12
Ansary - West of Kabul, East of New York: pp. 83-152

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- Quiz
- Unintended consequences p. 83
 - Helmand Valley project brought up salt in the soil, new irrigated farms failed
 - dams ended irregular flow of Helmand river, traditional farms failed
 - forced westernization at schools created more graduates than the one university could take, or the country could employ
 - resulted in de-cultured misfits, unemployed, semi-educated
 - gov't drafted them into army run by officers trained in Soviet Union
 - attracting them to communism
 - after service, sent to teach in rural schools
 - blanketing the country with communists and near-communists
 - who eventually overthrew the gov't in 1978
 - western aid transformed cities but not villages, creating rural-urban gulf
 - communist rebels knew little of rural society, increasing gulf
 - revolutionary land reform messed up tribe-based land and water divisions
 - [as in Peru - land reform is a mess]
 - communists promoted educating women - by taking them away to schools
 - tribes feel violated
 - so tribes fight the communists for 23 years - vast death and destruction
- Ansary's father ends up a 5th-level "Volga-class" official; Ansary mortified
 - move back to compound in Kabul
 - learns French, attends French school
 - another try at co-education, with two girls, totally isolated; one is Rona Kayeum
 - but after school, within the compounds, Ansary and Rona could talk, laugh, flirt
 - total contrast to situation at school
 - "your mind is forced to say that one is legitimate and the other is a crock" p. 91
 - "on this issue of sex, Afghanistan and I parted ways. And parting ways on this, we parted ways on everything. I'll go out on a limb and say that I think it is on this issue of sex and the relationship between the sexes that Islam and the West have parted ways, and parting ways on this, have parted ways on everything." p. 92
 - [what does this mean?]
 - [why does Ansary's father return to Afghanistan, rather than take a university teaching job in the US? - can't bear to lose his "larger self", the clan]
 - arriving in US, Ansary expects to leave his divided self behind, becoming "just one person: Tamim Ansary, American guy" p. 97
- After college, joins counterculture in Portland in early 1970s
 - community of 200 friends and lovers resembles an Afghan clan... p. 101-2
- moves to San Francisco, gets a job editing a newspaper for the Asia Foundation

- outsider's concept of "this unusual American custom called dating, in which unrelated strangers meet and explore the possibility of a sexual relationship." p. 103
- Iranian revolution, overthrowing the Shah of Iran, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi
 - students, etc. led by Ayatollah Khomeini
 - declared an Islamic state
 - newspaper accounts focussed on *sharia* law
 - but Ansary grew up in an Islamic society, and knew that this was not so...
 - decides to investigate and write up the truth about Islam
 - proposes to Pacific News Service head, Berkeley history professor Franz Schurmann
 - believes Islam appeals economically to the poor - emphasizing charity and the evil of wealth
 - capitalism and Marxism had not helped the poor, so they turn to Islam
 - the revolution is really about poverty, oppression, colonialism... it has materialist (Marxist) causes
 - Schurmann's materialist view turns out to be an etic view that the Muslims Ansary talks with don't see at all
- breaks through with Debby
 - next morning, Iranian students have stormed the US embassy and taken 53 American hostages
 - "Oh, man. *This* can't be good..." p. 112
- Little brother Riaz (7 years younger)
 - Raised to 6 by parents plus Mawmaw, an old relative: caught stealing and sent away
 - at 8, left Afghanistan
 - at 9, father leaves for Afghanistan
 - from then on, raised just by mother, who had few social contacts
 - at 20, goes to Pakistan, converts to "orthodox interpretation of Islam"
 - frayed stick to brush teeth with, as the Prophet did
 - had to sleep on the floor, eat with hands
 - prayed towards Mecca
 - eats only *halal* meat - story of going to slaughter a lamb p.119-121
- "how can you believe this stuff?" p. 121
 - Tamim: "cultivate a stance of irony...No matter how sure you are, you might be wrong. ... It's the only stance that gives you room to reconsider. Without it, how can you know when you're going wrong? You have nowhere to stand except what you've chosen." p. 121
 - [what does this mean? what do we think of this? Is this a common stance? how does it fit with Christian faith? or Islam, or any other?]
 - Riaz: "my foundation...would center around earnestness. ... an earnestness based on faith is preferable to murky speculation." p. 122
 - [reactions?]
 - Riaz: "Islam points out a middle path between self-denial and ostentation. ... The acts of living take on a meaning of which they are bereft in a materialist framework"

- "Besides, I realized that Islam would work. ... If everyone followed these practices, none of today's problems would exist. Families would be rock-solid... no warfare, no injustice, no division between the rich and the poor" p. 122
- [is this true of the last 1300 years of Islamic history?]
- "That kind of closeness [from jointly focussing on the same thing: God] comes about for Muslims when we say our prayers" p. 123
- Riaz gives Tamim a Koran
 - he discovers he feels reverence for it
 - uneasy about claiming to be a lapsed Muslim... "I didn't believe in a personal God, and yet I worried that my disbelief might make Him angry" p. 123
 - culture's effect on thought and emotion is profound...
- Soviet Union invades Afghanistan
 - "Wow, I thought. this can't be good." p. 124
- Travels to Tangier (in Morocco, North Africa, across the Strait of Gibraltar from Spain)
 - guides pseudo-hippie identity created by tourism
 - people seeking "authentic" other culture are actually causing that other culture to change to fit their needs and preconceptions
 - Moroccans explain Islam
 - won't discuss ambitions, prospects, dreams, poverty, injustice
 - [why not? analogies to El Nahra and charity scene?]
 - go straight to rules: "God is one. Don't drink alcohol. Don't eat pork. If you steal, your hand will be cut off. Don't commit adultery. Women must not display themselves to strangers. The judgement day is coming."
 - they hate the Moroccan king: he is an atheist, because he drinks, chases women, and dresses like a European.
 - [same assumptions as Sheik Hamid in Baghdad]
 - think Qadafi is a Jew, planted to disgrace Islam!
 - Conflicted about Khomeini - a Shiite (Moroccans are Sunni)
 - would eventually grant that he was Muslim, thus OK
 - Iranians and Afghans are battling for the honor of Islam
 - Iran fighting against the US, Afghanistan fighting "with" the US against the USSR
 - they see no difference!
 - [do you? do you remember the polarized world of the Cold War?]
- Meets "real Muslims" like Abdullah
 - wear special long white robes to pray: "this is sunna"
 - not relaxed, but work: scholars concentrating on a difficult text
 - "A Muslim must advise. That's the most important." p. 134
 - "When Muslims follow the sunna [the way the Prophet lived], God helps the community. When we don't, god withdraws his favor, and the community becomes weak" ... they don't follow sunna in most mosques, hence the long poverty and powerlessness of the Muslim world.
 - but focuses on tiny details: holding out the little finger, pausing at a certain spot, holding the thumb below the navel... p. 135

- yet they argue about what the details are
- religious scholars don't follow sunna because they have sold themselves to the governments p. 136
- this allows the governments to get away with being corrupt
- sees women in long skirts and scarves as wearing miniskirts...? p. 137
 - again: reacting to the meanings cultural categories impose on things, rather than the things themselves
- Can't write a materialist story: that people turn to Islam out of poverty and desperation p. 143
 - "Practically everyone who talked to me about Islam fixated on alcohol, short skirts, the *sharia*, and believing in one God. I was just refusing to take them at their word."
 - this is their insiders, emic, view
 - Riaz contrasted Islam to "the materialist framework"
 - is Schurmann just recasting the situation in materialist terms?
 - i.e. an outsider's, etic, view
 - are Islamic revolutionaries lying, really just want wealth?
 - "And wasn't that exactly what a materialist would say? Perhaps I was describing myself, not them." p. 144
 - Middleton! It's all about *us*.
 - Schurmann is seeing not the Other, but our own reflection in the Other
 - As in National Geographic: text always emphasizing the pristine, innocent, backward native, compared to the intrepid traveler
 - These are our own values, expressed through statements about the Other
 - Margaret Mead: Coming of Age in Samoa
 - Claim: Samoan girls had easy, unconflicted adolescences because their culture had a permissive, open attitude towards premarital sex
 - Fit perfectly with the "sexual revolution" of the 1960s
 - Seeing our reflection in the Other...
 - Afghan gov't built model town of Nadi Ali to settle nomads p. 144
 - nomads refuse, prefer harsh, poor, traditional life
 - rejected material goods for a way of life
 - for experiences, belonging, rituals - "nodes in webs of meaning" p. 145
 - Ansary, the non-anthropologist, is almost quoting Middleton!
 - understanding culture and behavior as system of meanings
 - Intellectual debate between orthodox (Sunni) and Mu'tazilites (another splinter group like the Shiites)
 - Are beliefs and actions good because God commands them (Sunni)?
 - ie. God is omnipotent and unintelligible to us
 - thus we can't figure out what to do except by referring to his words or the sunna
 - or does God command them because they are good (Mu'tazilites)?
 - ie. God is limited by greater concepts of good, and we can understand God's will
 - thus we can figure out what he would want by reasoning it out
 - we can figure out the good as circumstances change

- Sunni view empowers a few Arabs (whose origins were closest to the life of the Prophet) over many non-Arab Muslims
 - That is, Arabic speakers over Farsi speakers (Iran, Afghanistan) or Indonesians
 - Indonesia is the 4th most populous country in the world
 - And the most populous mostly Muslim nation
- Mu'tazilite view empowers any Muslim to interpret the Koran
- Mu'tazilites lost
- rational study of ethics dropped, replaced by study of texts and history of first Muslim community (of Medina and Mecca)
 - 1st authority: Prophet's words
 - 2nd authority: sunna - Prophet's life
 - 3rd authority: customs of the Prophet's community – who happened to be all Arabs
- renewal movements in Islam thus always look back to the 600s AD
 - in theory - but actually to the conclusion of the debate in the 700s.