

senger who has a higher chance of being a terrorist. Finally, there is the matter of economics.

Long lines make people marginally less likely to fly, which pushes airlines that much closer to bankruptcy. The only way to reduce lines in the current system would be to add more security checkpoints. But that's not easy. It means hiring more screeners, when it is difficult to have enough competent ones to fill the current slots; it means spending more money, when airlines are already bleeding; and it bumps up against a physical constraint at many airports, which may not have more room for screening checkpoints. The same problem applies to examining checked luggage—there is so much of it and so few machines that doing all of it well and quickly will be impractical for years.

#### THE WAY TO GO

It obviously makes sense to find ways to whittle down the security load. The answer is to separate out passengers according to the threat they represent, probably into three groups. One would be members of an enhanced frequent-flyer program, with travelers voluntarily undergoing a background check and getting a fool-proof biometric ID card in return for fewer security hassles. (The airport in Amsterdam already has such a program, which includes an eye scan.) Arab-American travelers could opt into such a program, and never again worry about being profiled. Then, there would be the unwashed masses, who would get more routine security treatment. The last category would be passengers profiled as potential risks, who could get a version of the full-bore Israeli scrutiny.

This would make everyone involved very uncomfortable, especially, of course, the targeted passengers. Almost all of them would be clean. The extra burden on young male Arab-Americans and Arab immigrants—the extra pat-down, the searching questions—would be very unfair in a cosmic sense, but an acceptable social cost given the stakes involved in preventing further attacks.

The fact that no one is systemically profiled on the basis of ethnicity and national origin now contributes to the nervousness of pilots, passengers, and security personnel who don't trust the current system and attempt to do amateur profiling on their own. A sophisticated computerized system would reduce the need for individual judgments after a passenger has already passed security checkpoints. But a pilot should still have the right to refuse a passenger, a privilege that goes back to old maritime law. It was this prerogative that was in play in the American Airlines/Secret Service agent case, as the pilot balked at carrying an agitated armed man whose paperwork wasn't properly filled out.

American, to its credit, has stood by the pilot, all the while insisting that the airline would never ethnically profile. But if the pilot hadn't noticed that the angry guy trying to board his plane with a gun looked like all of the September 11 terrorists, he would have been a fool. The Left talks often of "diversity," but is unwilling to acknowledge that the world's variousness might mean that certain ethnic groups are more likely to be terrorists than others. Willfully ignoring this fact contributed to September 11. Continuing to do so would heap criminal folly on top of willful recklessness. In a famous 1949 case, Justice Robert Jackson said that the Constitution is not "a suicide pact." Indeed, it isn't, but maybe our racial politics is. **NR**

## Veil of Fears

Why they veil; why we should  
leave it alone

STANLEY KURTZ

**L**AST month's dramatic pictures of Afghan women shyly peeking out from beneath freshly lifted veils set off a torrent of commentary on the meaning and aims of the war. Although Afghanistan's new rulers quickly abolished the Taliban's draconian codes of womanly conduct, some Americans called for a government-imposed program of feminist reform. Feminists, like *Vagina Monologues* author Eve Ensler, even tried to spin the war as a crusade against a global "patriarchy."

Meanwhile, the mainstream press was busy detailing the horrors of the Taliban's treatment of women, focusing on the veil. "It was like being in jail," said one Afghan woman of her years under the veil. But now, proclaimed the *New York Times*, "the prisoners have been set free." In a cover story on Muslim women, *Time* magazine dubbed the Afghan burka "a body bag for the living."

But the "veil as body bag" notion is both mistaken and dangerous. There is no surer way to drive the Islamic world into the arms of the fundamentalists than to force Western feminism on a newly conquered Muslim country. It is no coincidence that the two Muslim fundamentalist regimes of our day—Iran and Afghanistan—arose in nations that had systematically attempted to root out traditional Islamic practices regarding women. (Those efforts were sponsored by the shah in Iran and the Soviets in Afghanistan.) Instead of being damned as a senseless outrage, veiling deserves a qualified defense. The practice has undoubtedly slowed the Muslim world's path to modernity, and that is a serious problem. But that difficulty would never have arisen in the first place if veiling hadn't accomplished something important. Veiling is embraced by millions of Muslim men and women as one of the keys to their way of life. They are not mistaken.

The conflict between modernity and the traditional Muslim view of women is one of the most important causes of this war. The tiresome claim of the leftist academy that poverty causes terrorism misses the point. So far from being poor, Muslim fundamentalists tend to come from a relatively wealthy modernizing class. The terrorists and their supporters are generally newly urbanized, college-educated professionals from intact families with rural backgrounds. They are a rising but frustrated cohort, shut out of power by a more entrenched and Westernized elite. True, the new fundamentalists often find themselves stymied by the weak economies of Muslim countries, but as a class they are relatively well off. Like many revolutions, the Muslim fundamentalist movement has been

Mr. Kurtz, an anthropologist, is a fellow at the Hudson Institute.

spurred by increased income, education, and expectations. But it is the clash between traditional Middle Eastern family life and modernity that has decisively pushed so many toward fundamentalism. And women are at the center of the problem.

Although the puzzle of "modernity and the Muslim woman" is one of several keys to this war, the feminist sensibility of the American press has rendered the connection between terrorism and the Islamic sexual system all but invisible. The press has been obsessed with the relatively small number of modernized women in Afghan cities who were indeed viciously oppressed by the Taliban's infamous policies. Women who had once been accustomed to Western skirts were not only forced to cover themselves entirely and forbidden to leave home without a male relative, they were banned even from making noises with their shoes as they walked through the streets of the city.

The world has justly condemned these policies, but this picture of government-imposed veiling does not accurately describe the situation of most Afghan women under the Taliban, much less the lives of the many educated women throughout the Middle East who have enlisted in the Muslim fundamentalist movement through their decision to don the veil.

#### TOWN AND COUNTRY

The Taliban's code of womanly behavior was intentionally directed toward the cities. The aim was to "purify" those areas of Afghanistan that had been "corrupted" by modernization. But the Taliban never bothered to enforce its rules in traditional areas. Actually, in most Afghan villages, women rarely wear the burka. That's because villages in Afghanistan are organized into kin-oriented areas, and the veil needs wearing only when a woman is among men from outside of her kin group. A rural woman puts on a burka for travel, especially to cities. Yet just by exiting her home, a woman in a modern city inevitably mixes with men who are not her kin. That's why the Taliban prohibited the modernized women of Kabul from so much as stepping onto the street without a male relative. So the real problem with the veil in Afghanistan was the Taliban's attempt to impose the traditional system of veiling on a modernizing city. Yet, remarkable as it may seem, many modernizing urban women throughout the Middle East have freely accepted at least a portion of the Taliban's reasoning. These educated women have actually taken up the veil—and along with it, Muslim fundamentalism. To see why, it is necessary to understand what makes traditional Muslim women veil in the first place.

Life in the Muslim Middle East has long revolved around family and tribe. In fact, that's what a tribe is—your family in its most extended form. For much of Middle Eastern history, tribal networks of kin functioned as governments in miniature. In the absence of state power, it was the kin group that pro-

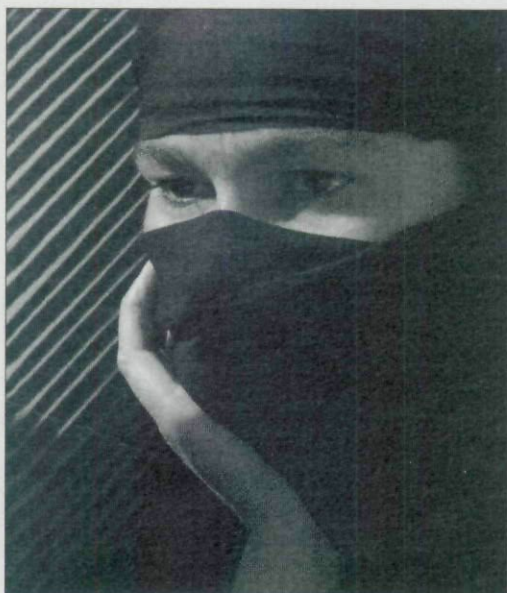
tected an individual from attack, secured his wealth, and performed a thousand other functions. No one could flourish whose kin group was not strong, respected, and unified.

In the modern Middle East, networks of kin are still the foundation of wealth, security, and personal happiness. That, in a sense, is the problem. As we've seen in Afghanistan, loyalty to kin and tribe cuts against the authority of the state. And the corrupt dictatorships that rule much of the Muslim Middle East often function themselves more like self-interested kin groups than as rulers who take the interests of the nation as a whole as their own. That, in turn, gives the populace little reason to turn from the proven support of kin and tribe, and trust instead in the state.

So from earliest youth, a Middle Eastern Muslim learns that his welfare and happiness are bound up in the strength and reputation of his family. If, for example, a child shows a special aptitude in school, his siblings might willingly sacrifice their personal chances for advancement simply to support his education. Yet once that child becomes a professional, his income will help to support his siblings, while his prestige will enhance their marriage prospects. The "family" to which a Muslim Middle Easterner is loyal, however, is not like our family. It is a "patrilineage"—a group of brothers and other male relatives, descended from a line of men that can ultimately be traced back to the founder of a particular tribe. Traditionally, lineage brothers will live near one another and will share the family's property. This willingness of a "band of brothers" to pool their labor and wealth is the key to the strength of the lineage.

But the centrality of men to the Muslim kinship system sets up a problem. The women who marry into a lineage pose a serious threat to the unity of the band of brothers. If a husband's tie to his wife should become more important than his solidarity with his brothers, the couple might take their share of the property and leave the larger group, thus weakening the strength of the lineage.

There is a solution to this problem, however—a solution that marks out the kinship system of the Muslim Middle East as unique in the world. In the Middle East, the preferred form of marriage is between a man and his cousin (his father's brother's daughter). Cousin marriage solves the problem of lineage solidarity. If, instead of marrying a woman from a strange lineage, a man marries his cousin, then his wife will not be an alien, but a trusted member of his own kin group. Not only will this reduce a man's likelihood of being pulled away from his brothers by his wife, a woman of the lineage is less likely to be divorced by her husband, and more likely to be protected by her own extended kin in case of a rupture in the marriage. Somewhere around a third of all marriages in the Muslim Middle East are between members of the same lineage, and in some places the figure can reach as high as 80 percent. It is this system of "patrilineal parallel cousin marriage" that ex-



Paula Bronstein/Getty Images

plains the persistence of veiling, even in the face of modernity.

By veiling, women are shielded from the possibility of a dishonoring premarital affair. But above all, when Muslim women veil, they are saving themselves for marriage to the men of their own kin group. In an important sense, this need to protect family honor and preserve oneself for an advantageous marriage to a man of the lineage is a key to the rise of Islamic revivalism.

#### COVERING UP

Most people think of the Iranian revolution of the late 1970s as the beginning of the contemporary Muslim fundamentalist movement, but it was in Egypt in the mid 1970s that modern Islamic fundamentalism really took off. The movement was started by students—men and women—at Egyptian universities who spontaneously adopted a code of Islamic decorum in mixed company. In keeping with that code, and despite government attempts to forbid it, Egyptian college women began to don the veil. The practice soon spread (and along with it, the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism) to legions of educated working women in Egypt's cities.



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Oddly, these willing wearers of the veil were precisely the sort of educated career women on whom the Taliban would ruthlessly force the burka. The difference was that these women, unlike those who later fell victim to the Taliban, had free access to education and modern careers. They put on the veil precisely as a way of enjoying these modern innovations—without also endangering their marriage prospects, or their family's honor, in the new, mixed-sex environment.

The last three decades have seen a tremendous increase in the number of Egyptians receiving an education. Many of these young people are fresh from villages, where the traditional marriage system is still strong. These are the grown children whose parents, uncles, brothers, and sisters sacrificed to make them into professionals. By veiling, they are fulfilling their end of the bargain; they are promising not to destroy—by a shameful affair, or by marriage to a stranger—the honor or prosperity of their families. Of course, not all Muslim women are young or waiting to marry relatives, but the preferred marriage pattern shapes a wider ethos. Some modernized office workers decide to veil only after they marry, to reduce jealousy, and protect the honor of their husbands and families.

The veil was never the nightmare American feminists make it out to be. In a world where satisfaction in life is predicated on the honor, strength, and unity of the kin group, the veil makes sense. Although the oppressive impositions of the Taliban have rightly been abolished, the United States ought

not to be in the business of browbeating Muslim women out of their veils, much less reforming the Middle Eastern kinship system. Instead, we need to encourage the separation of traditional Muslim family practices from the political ideology of Islamic fundamentalism. By far the best way to do this is to roundly defeat the fundamentalists on the battlefield.

Once military and political failure has broken fundamentalism's appeal as an ideology, traditional family practices will be free to gradually adapt to modernity. Modernizing Egyptian women may still veil, but if they drop the theocratic fundamentalist baggage, that will be enough. Can we really get modernizing Muslim women who veil to drop their support for fundamentalist theocrats? It won't be easy, but nothing is more likely to produce a disastrous backlash against the United States than the conviction that an American victory will lead to a feminist-directed assault against veiling and the family. And many Muslim women in rural areas veil without being followers of the fundamentalist theocrats.

When the United States governed Japan after World War II, we forcibly reconstructed the country as a democracy, without being so foolish as to seriously challenge its traditional family or sexual system. That system has remained far more "traditional" than our own, yet today Japanese family and sex roles (for better, and for worse) are slowly changing and adapting to modernity. With luck, the pattern will someday repeat itself in the Middle East.

Muslim fundamentalists have turned on America as a convenient scapegoat for the agonies and contradictions of modernization in their own society. Yet distorted and unjust though it is, their logic contains a kernel of truth. The Western movies, television shows, and other media that now reach the Middle East tell of a world in which premarital sex and love-marriages are the norm—a world in which the extended family counts for little, and the lineage for nothing. This is what most alarms Muslim traditionalists. Western family norms may someday gain a foothold in the Middle East, but historically, family change lags behind and adapts to changes in political and economic life. So it is to the economic and political spheres that we ought to apply our pressure.

The veiling question cuts across conventional political lines. The Left, of course, is split between feminists and multiculturalists: The former camp says, "Such practices as veiling are impermissible, for anyone"; the latter camp says, "Well, this is what *they* do, and who are we to object?" But conservatives are divided as well. Conservatives are eager to spread Western values across the globe, and when it comes to democracy and the free market, they have a point. But the conservative "realist" tradition in foreign policy warns against endangering ourselves through attempts to remake the world in our image.

Burke's conservatism is the model here. Burke was a critic of the excesses of British rule in India, and he also favored American independence when few of his fellows did. Burke was never the die-hard opponent of reform he's often made out to be, but he did respect the wisdom embodied in custom. Burke believed that gradual change—from within the framework of custom—was the best policy, not only for England, but also for the nations England ruled. When it comes to veiling, Burke's policy should be our policy.

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