

Gentlemen, I have taken trouble to show, in these accounts, how a great people, whose national course was considered as ended, reconquered its independence; how it created a national and modern State founded on the latest results of science.

The result we have attained to day is the fruit of teachings which arose from centuries of suffering, and the price of streams of blood which have drenched every foot of the ground of our beloved Fatherland.

This holy treasure I lay in the hands of the youth of Turkey.

Turkish Youth! your primary duty is ever to preserve and defend the National independence, the Turkish Republic.

7

HASSAN AL-BANA

The Tyranny of Materialism over the Lands of Islam

Hassan al-Bana (1906–1949) was an Egyptian social critic who came to believe that the cure to political corruption, foreign influence, and materialistic culture could be found in a social transformation based on the original tenets of Islam. To that effect, in 1928 he launched the Society of Muslim Brothers, an organization in which members met in cells, which were called “families,” to bring about social, cultural, and political change. While actively engaged in organizing prayer groups and providing aid to the poor, the Brotherhood was seen by the Egyptian monarchy and (after 1953) the republic as a dangerous threat to the state. Members recruited volunteers to fight in Palestine and, in the wake of the war against the establishment of Israel, the Brotherhood became a powerful force in Egypt. In 1948 the organization was banned. Hassan al-Bana was assassinated in 1949 after one of the Brotherhood members assassinated the prime minister. The Muslim Brotherhood has continued to be popular and influential in Egypt and other Muslim countries despite its illegal status.

What did al-Bana see as the impact of Europe in Egypt? What seems to have offended him most about European influence? How did he hope to counter this influence?

Source: “Six Tracts of Hasan al-Bana,” from the *Majmu'at Rasai'il al-Irman al-Shahid Hasan al-Banna* (1906–1949), International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, Kuwait & Africa, for Publishing & Distribution, Accra Ghana (2006), 42–48.

THINKING HISTORICALLY

Compare al-Bana's nationalism with that of the other anticolonialists in this chapter. Some of these proponents of independence were more personally conflicted than others. Where would you place al-Bana on a continuum from those who were completely certain to those who were torn between the appeals of opposing values? In this respect, who in the chapter does al-Bana most resemble? Who is he most unlike?

VIII. The Tyranny of Materialism over the Lands of Islam

The Europeans worked assiduously to enable the tide of this materialistic life, with its corrupting traits and its murderous germs, to overwhelm all the Islamic lands toward which their hands were outstretched. An ill destiny overtook these under their domination, for they were avid to appropriate for themselves the elements of power and prosperity through science, knowledge, industry, and good organization, while barring these very nations from them. They laid their plans for this social aggression in masterly fashion, invoking the aid of their political acumen and their military predominance until they had accomplished their desire. They deluded the Muslim leaders by granting them loans and entering into financial dealings with them, making all of this easy and effortless for them, and thus they were able to obtain the right to infiltrate the economy and to flood the countries with their capital, their banks, and their companies; to take over the workings of the economic machinery as they wished; and to monopolize, to the exclusion of the inhabitants, enormous profits and immense wealth. After that, they were able to alter the basic principles of government, justice, and education, and to imbue political, juridical, and cultural systems with their own peculiar character in even the most powerful Islamic countries. They imported their half-naked women into these regions, together with their liquors, their theatres, their dance halls, their amusements, their stories, their newspapers, their novels, their whims, their silly games, and their vices. Here they countenanced crimes they did not tolerate in their own countries, and decked out this frivolous, strident world, reeking with sin and redolent with vice, to the eyes of deluded, unsophisticated Muslims of wealth and prestige, and to those of rank and authority. This being insufficient for them, they founded schools and scientific and cultural institutes in the very heart of the Islamic domain, which cast doubt and heresy into the souls of its sons and taught them how to demean themselves, disparage their religion and their fatherland, divest themselves of their traditions and beliefs, and to regard as sacred anything Western, in the belief that only that which had a European source could serve as a model to be

emulated in this life. These schools took in the sons of the upper class alone, and became a preserve restricted to them. The sons of this class consisted of the mighty and ruling group, and those who would shortly hold within their grasp the keys to all important matters that concerned these nations and peoples. Those who did not complete their finishing in these local institutes found all that would guarantee them this finishing in the continuing series of student missions.¹ This drastic, well-organized social campaign had a tremendous success, since it was rendered most attractive to the mind, and would continue to exert a strong intellectual influence on individuals over a long period of time. For this reason, it was more dangerous than the political and military campaigns by far, and some Islamic countries went overboard in their admiration for this European civilization and in their dissatisfaction with their own Islamic character, to the point that Turkey declared itself a non-Islamic state and imitated the Europeans with the utmost rigor in everything they did. Aman Allah Khan,² King of Afghanistan, tried this, but the attempt swept away his throne, and in Egypt the manifestations of this mimicry increased and became so serious that one of her intellectual leaders could say openly that the only path to progress was to adopt this civilization with all it contained of good and evil, sweet and bitter, the appealing and the hateful, the praiseworthy and the reprehensible. From Egypt it began to spread rapidly and vigorously into neighboring countries, until it reached Morocco and circumambulated the very shrines in the purlieus of the Hijaz.³ We may subdivide the Islamic countries, according to the degrees to which they were affected by this materialistic civilization and the domination of its materialism over them, into three groups:

1. Countries in which this influence has reached serious proportions, penetrating even the mind and the feelings, apart from outward forms and conventions. Among these countries are Turkey and Egypt, where even the slightest trace of Islamic ideology has disappeared from all social situations, and has been driven off to take up quarters inside the mosques and Sufi establishments and retreats.

2. Countries which have been influenced by this civilization in their official observances and conventions, but in which it has not triumphed over their inward sensibilities. Such are Iran and the countries of North Africa.

¹ These were the famous student missions inaugurated by Muhammad Ali Pasha in Egypt. Groups of promising Egyptian students would be sent to Europe to learn modern Western languages and sciences, so that they might be able to translate works dealing with these disciplines into Arabic and Turkish on the completion of their studies. Many also taught in the new government schools on their return to Egypt. See J. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*.

² Ruler of Afghanistan from 1919. His premature attempt to emulate Egypt and Turkey by instituting modernist reforms in his country led to open revolt and his forced abdication and exile.

³ The region of Mecca and Medina. [Ed.]

3. Countries which have not been influenced by this civilization, except for a particular class consisting of the well-educated and the ruling group, to the exclusion of the common people and the masses. Such are Syria, Iraq, the Hijaz, many sections of the Arabian Peninsula, and the remainder of the Islamic countries.

Nevertheless, this wave is spreading out with the speed of lightning to reach into minds, social classes, and mores that it has not yet penetrated. Enemies of Islam can deceive Muslim intellectuals and draw a thick veil over the eyes of the zealous by depicting Islam itself as being defective in various aspects of doctrine, ritual observance, and morality, besides accommodating a host of rites, superstitions, and inane formalities. What helps them to carry out this deception is the Muslims' ignorance of the true meaning of their religion, so that many of them are satisfied with this presentation, rest content with it, and accept it. For so long a time has this been true of them that it is difficult for us to make any of them understand that Islam is a perfect system of social organization which encompasses all the affairs of life. As a result, it is possible for us to say that Western civilization, with its materialistic ideology, has triumphed in this social struggle over Islamic civilization, with its sound ideology comprising both spirit and matter, in the very territories of Islam, and in a ruthless war whose battlefield has been the spirits and souls of Muslims as well as their beliefs and intellects, exactly as it has triumphed on the political and military battlefields. It is no wonder, for the phenomena of life are not fragmented: what is strong is wholly strong, and what is weak is wholly weak. "These are the days which we apportion to mankind in turn" [Q.3:140]. And even if the ideology and teachings of Islam have gone astray, it is powerful in its essential nature, abundantly fertile and vital, attractive and enchanting in its splendor and beauty, and it will remain so because it is the truth, and human existence will never achieve perfection and virtue through any other means. And because it is of God's creation and under His care: "Lo, We have sent down the Reminder, and lo, We are its Protector" [Q.15:9]; "God refuses aught but that He should perfect His light, though the unbelievers feel aversion" [Q.9:32].

Awakening: Just as political aggression had its effect in arousing nationalist feelings, so has social aggression had its effect in reviving the Islamic ideology. Voices have been raised on every hand, demanding a return to Islam, an understanding of its precepts, and an application of its rules. The day must soon come when the castles of this materialistic civilization will be laid low upon the heads of their inhabitants. Then they will feel the burning of a spiritual hunger in which their hearts and souls will go up in flames, and they will find no sustenance, no healing, no remedy, save in the teachings of this Noble Book: "O man, an admonition from your Lord has come to you, and a healing for what is in your

hearts, a guidance and a mercy for the believers. Say: 'In God's bounty, and in His mercy: let them rejoice in that.' It is better than what they hoard" [Q.10:58-59].

IX. Our Mission is One of Reawakening and Deliverance

A. A Weighty Heritage: So, Brethren, did Allah will that we inherit this heritage weighty with consequence, that the light of your mission glow amidst this darkness, and that Allah prepare you to exalt His Word and reveal His Sacred Law and reestablish His state: "Allah will surely aid one who helps Him. Allah is Mighty, Glorious;" [Q.22:40].

B. Our General Aims: What do we want, Brethren? Do we want to hoard up wealth, which is an evanescent shadow? Or do we want abundance of fame, which is a transient accident? Or do we want dominion over the earth?—"The earth is Allah's: He gives to inherit it those whom He will of His servants" [Q.7:127]—even as we read the Speech of Allah (Blessed and Almighty is He!): "That is the Abode of the Hereafter which We assign to those who do not want exaltation in the earth, nor any corruption. The final consequence is to the pious" [Q.28:83]. May Allah witness that we do not want any of these, that our work is not toward these ends, and that our mission is not on their behalf. Rather always bear in mind that you have two fundamental goals:

1. That the Islamic fatherland be freed from all foreign domination, for this is a natural right belonging to every human being which only the unjust oppressor or the conquering exploiter will deny.
2. That a free Islamic state may arise in this free fatherland, acting according to the precepts of Islam, applying its social regulations, proclaiming its sound principles, and broadcasting its sage mission to all mankind. For as long as this state does not emerge, the Muslims in their totality are committing sin, and are responsible before Allah the Lofty, the Great for their failure to establish it and for their slackness in creating it. In these bewildering circumstances, it is counter to humanity that a state should arise, extolling an ideology of injustice and proclaiming a propaganda of oppression, while there should be no one among all mankind working for the advent of a state founded on truth, justice, and peace. We want to realize these two goals in the Nile Valley and the Arab domain, and in every land which Allah has made fortunate through the Islamic creed: a religion, a nationality, and a creed uniting all Muslims.

C. Our Special Aims: Following these two aims, we have some special aims without the realization of which our society cannot become completely Islamic. Brethren, recall that more than 60 percent of the Egyptians live at a subhuman level, that they get enough to eat only through the most arduous toil, and Egypt is threatened by murderous famines and exposed to many economic problems of which only Allah can know the outcome. Recall too that there are more than 320 foreign companies in Egypt, monopolizing all public utilities and all important facilities in every part of the country; that the wheels of commerce, industry, and all economic institutions are in the hands of profiteering foreigners; and that our wealth in land is being transferred with lightning speed from the possession of our compatriots to that of these others. Recall also that Egypt, out of the entire civilized world, is the most subject to diseases, plagues, and illnesses; that over 90 percent of the Egyptian people are threatened by physical infirmity, the loss of some sensory perception, and a variety of sicknesses and ailments; and that Egypt is still backward, with no more than one-fifth of the population possessing any education, and of these more than 100,000 have never gone farther than the elementary school level. Recall that crime has doubled in Egypt, and that it is increasing at an alarming rate to the point that the prisons are putting out more graduates than the schools; that up to the present time Egypt has been unable to outfit a single army division with its full complement of material; and that these symptoms and phenomena may be observed in any Islamic country. Among your aims are to work for the reform of education; to war against poverty, ignorance, disease, and crime; and to create an exemplary society which will deserve to be associated with the Islamic Sacred Law.

■ REFLECTIONS

We have looked at the conflict between Westernization and nationalism through windows on four different societies: Japan, India, and two Muslim societies—Turkey and Egypt. For the Japanese, the borrowing of Western institutions and ideas provided an escape from colonization. By the time India gained political independence in 1947, it had become partially Westernized by three hundred years of colonialism. Yet in both countries, as in the Islamic world, there were those who resisted Western ways, those who embraced them, and others still who developed ambivalent feelings toward the West.

This last response—often accepting the contradictions: treasuring the traditional while trying the new—may have been the most difficult, but ultimately the most useful. It must have been far easier to cast off everything Asian, as Fukuzawa Yukichi urged, or make fun of any