

The Importance Of Hugging

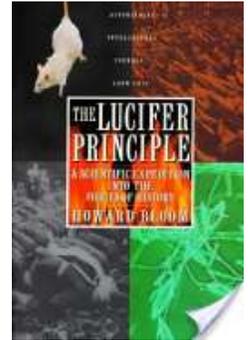
Why do some cultures seem abnormally prone to revel in violence?

From

The Lucifer Principle

By Howard Bloom

One possible answer comes from the patriarch of American psychology, William James. Says James, civilized life makes it possible "for large numbers of people to pass from the cradle to grave without ever having had a pang of genuine fear." James implies that without the omnipresent sense that at any moment they may lose their lives, the beneficiaries of civilization feel far less of the savage animosity, the fierce hatreds, and the deep desires to mutilate and kill that terror inspires.ⁱ James' notion is intriguing. But let's not forget that we, too, have our hatreds and our violent moments.



Another answer may be found in a survey of 49 primitive cultures conducted by James W. Prescott, founder of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's Developmental Biology Program. Some of the cultures Prescott studied took great pleasure in "killing, torturing or mutilating the enemy." Others did not. What was the difference? Says Prescott, "Physical affection--touching, holding, and carrying." The societies that hugged their kids were relatively peaceful. The cultures that treated their children coldly produced brutal adults. Or, to put it more technically, a low score on the "Infant Physical Affection" scale correlated with a high rate of "adult physical violence."ⁱⁱ

You can see elements of Prescott's "Infant Physical Affection" factor at work in Islamic society. Islamic mothers tend to be warm and nurturing. But Islamic fathers treat their children harshly. They are cold, distant and wrathful. Their justification is an old religious proverb: "father's anger is part of God's anger."ⁱⁱⁱ When he reaches puberty, an Arab boy is expelled from the loving world of his mother and sisters into the realm of men.^{iv} There, hand holding between males is still allowed, but physical affection between men and women is frowned upon. A vengeful masculinity stands in its place. The result: violent adults. For an indirect glimpse at how the principle works, let's meander into the world of the Bedouin.

Bedouin culture is the mother of all Islam. The Bedouin are desert wanderers who, until recently, traveled with tent and camel through the Middle East and across Northern Africa, driving their flocks of sheep and goats, and organizing caravans. The city children of Mecca, where Mohammed was born, were given out to Bedouin nurses to be suckled. Mohammed himself was nursed by one of these Bedouin "foster-mothers," and spent his childhood years among the shepherds of the desert.^v The Bedouin also made up the bulk of the armies with which Mohammed's followers went out to conquer the world.

The old Bedouin ways have by no means disappeared. In 1978, an American graduate student of anthropology went to study "interpersonal relationships" among the Bedouin of the western Egyptian desert. Her name was Lila Abu-Lughod. And she had a unique advantage in penetrating the most intimate aspects of Bedouin life. Abu-Lughod's father was an Arab. In fact, he accompanied his daughter to Egypt and introduced her to the head of the family she would study. Why? Had Lila appeared outside the nomads' tent, pads in hand, explaining that she was a scientific researcher, her quest would have been over before it began. The Bedouin would have noted that she was a woman alone. That could only mean one of two things. Either her family cared nothing about her, in which case any man who ran across her could do with her as he willed. Or she had committed a deed so immoral that her family had thrown her out. In which case any man who ran across her could, once again, do anything with her that suited his fancy.^{vi}

With her father to make the introductions, however, Abu-Lughod was accepted as a good, Arab girl and was taken into the household as a step-daughter, living among the Bedouin women as one of them. In the process, she saw details of Arab society from which Westerners are ordinarily shut out.

Abu-Lughod returned with some extremely revealing observations, including the manner in which Bedouin society outlaws close, warm relationships between men and women. Romantic love is "immoral." Wives are expected to act aloof and uncaring about their husbands. A wife refers to the gentleman with whom she occasionally shares a bed simply as "that one" or "the old man." When a husband brings in a new bride, the previous spouse is supposed to show no jealousy, no emotion, no sense of hurt.

Husbands and wives are not to be seen together in public. Kissing or hugging openly is considered disgusting, indecent, almost inhuman. A couple who indulge in such a moment of warmth would be subject to contempt, fury, and hatred. Men spend very little time with their wives and scarcely ever mention them.^{vii}

In relationships between the sexes, a display of caring is despicable. Anger is what wins you respect. The new wife of Rashid, one of the young men in the village Lughod was observing, ran away. Rashid was distraught. But among the Bedouin, a man is not allowed to reveal his emotional wounds--especially if they are inflicted by a woman. Rashid's pained reaction was considered weak and scornful. Even his relatives scolded him. Later Rashid began to rage. Now everyone approved. This was the manly thing to do! Then the abandoned husband demonstrated a response that the other members of the tribe could be proud of. He began to search for someone to blame. Rashid interrogated women and children to see if one of them had annoyed the runaway wife so badly that she had been impelled to depart. Finally, he concluded that the girl had fled because of sorcery. The one behind the evil deed: his senior wife. The furious Rashid cursed his first wife and punished her by refusing to talk or visit with her. With this act of retaliation, everyone was happy.^{viii}

Author Leon Uris, who reviewed considerable anthropological research to compile his vision of Arab family life in The Haj^{ix}, believes that this same coldness extends to the way Arab village dwellers raise their kids. Children, Uris claims, are seldom shown warmth. But they are frequently punished. And the punishments are harsh. Hisham Sharabi, Omar al-Mukhtar Professor of Arab Culture at Georgetown University, goes a step further and claims that Arab children are "repressed" to an intolerable degree.^x

Like the Bedouins, Middle Eastern city-dwellers put a premium on violence, anger, and revenge. One young Palestinian discovered that his unmarried sister had become pregnant, irredeemably sullyng the family honor. The virtuous young man wiped away the shame by killing the girl and cutting open her belly with a knife. According to French sociologist Juliette Minces, who has lived and researched extensively in the Middle East, incidents like this are extraordinarily common.^{xi} No wonder the noted Arab social scientist Halim Barakat has blamed the plight of the Levantine on the structure of its families.^{xii}

The Arab peasants who stumbled across the famous Nag Hamadi Gnostic Gospels in an Egyptian cave in 1945 were just a few weeks away from a far more "important" deed at the time. They were planning to avenge the death of their father. A few weeks after their accidental contribution to archaeology, Muhammad 'Ali and his brothers tracked down their father's killer, murdered him, cut off his arms and legs, then ripped out his heart and ate it. The cheerleader urging them on was none other than their mother. And it's quite likely that the man on whom these faithful sons were venting their rage had done away with their father out of obedience to the same ancient laws of vengeance.^{xiii} The British Orientalist Sir Charles Lyall sums up the Arab lust for violence with one blunt aphorism: "who uses not roughness, him shall men wrong."^{xiv}

Could the denial of warmth lay behind this Arab brutality?

It wouldn't be the first time that a lack of physical affection has gone hand in hand with a love of inflicting pain. In sixteenth and seventeenth century England--the England of Shakespeare and Elizabeth I--displaying love to your kids was considered utterly inappropriate. Young humans, cursed by the original sin of Adam, still carried the devil within them. His Satanic majesty could be chased away only with a good thrashing. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" was a deadly serious maxim.^{xv}

The youngsters of England in those days displayed a brutality the Bedouin would have understood. They tethered chickens in the yard, then pelted them with stones until the tortured creatures finally died. They burned cats alive. They pitted animals against each other, encouraging the beasts to tear each other limb from limb. And all of this was considered good, healthy fun. Said one approving poet about cock-throwing--tying a bird to a stake or burying it up to its neck in the ground, then letting school-children stone it to death--"Tis the bravest game."^{xvi}

When the 16th and 17th Century British reached adulthood, they didn't get over their love of violence. Englishmen set dogs on bulls for sport. The dog would clamp its teeth on the bull's nose, tear off its ears and shred its skin. In the end, either the dog would slash the bull's throat, ripping its jugular and killing it slowly but painfully, or the bull would gore and trample the dog to paste. One way or the other, the crowd would be amused.^{xvii}

The British didn't restrict their delight in pain to animals. They whipped and hung their criminals in public. And huge audiences showed up with picnic baskets to watch.

But a few hundred years later, the British ganglion of memes evolved, and parents changed their mind about how children should be raised. They offered a bit more affection. Soon the scenes of brutality in English streets came to an end.^{xviii}

In much of Arab society, the unmerciful approach of fathers to their children has still not stopped. Public warmth between men and women is considered an evil. And a disproportionate number of Arab adults, stripped of intimacy and thrust into a life in which vulnerable emotion is a sin, have joined extremist movements dedicated to wreaking havoc on the world.

^{i.} William James, Will, Emotion Instinct and Life's Ideals, A Halvorson Dixit Recording, Books On Tape, Newport Beach, California.

^{ii.} Judith Hooper and Dick Teresi, "Sex and Violence," Penthouse, February, 1987, p. 42. The classic anecdotal example of this principle is Margaret Mead's contrast between the Arapesh and the Mundugumor of New Guinea. See Margaret Mead, Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World, Dell Publishing, New York, 1968 (first published in 1949), pp. 76-77, 86-88, 117, 134-135. Also see the summary of Mead's findings in H.R. Hays, From Ape to Angel: An Informal History of Social Anthropology, p. 347.

^{iii.} Halim Barakat, "The Arab Family and the Challenge of Social Transformation," in Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, ed., Women and Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, 1985, pp. 27, 31, 32, 37, 44.

^{iv.} Juliette Mincos, The House of Obedience: Women in Arab Society, Michael Pallis, trans., Zed Press, London, 1982, p. 33. Soraya Altorki, Women In Saudi Arabia: Ideology and Behavior Among the Elite, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986, p. 31.

^{v.} Ibn Ishaq, Biography of the Messenger of God, excerpted in The Islamic World, ed. by William H. McNeill and Marilyn Robinson Waldman, University of Chicago Press, 1983, pp. 16-17.

^{vi.} Juliette Mincos, The House of Obedience: Women in Arab Society, pp. 33-34.

^{vii.} Cairo University professor of psychology Dr. Yousry Abdel Mohsen says that a similar coldness in the relationship between city men and women lay behind a rash of Egyptian murders during the late '80s in which wives did away with their husbands, stabbing them as many as 20 times, or cutting them in small pieces "for easy disposal." (Alan Cowell, "Egypt's Pain: Wives Killing Husbands," New York Times, September 23, 1989, p. 4.)

^{viii.} Lila Abu-Lughod, "Bedouin Blues," Natural History, Vol. 96, No. 7, July, 1987, pp. 24-33.

^{ix.} Uris spent years in travel and research preparing for The Haj. He employed a research associate on the project--Diane Eagle-- whom he credits with "pulling a thousand and one brilliant reports." His goal was to place his fiction in a thoroughly authentic, factual setting. (See the acknowledgements and introduction to Leon Uris, The Haj, [on un-numbered pages at the front of the book], Bantam Books, New York, 1985. Uris has also discussed the thoroughness of his research in personal communication with the

author.)

^x. Halim Barakat cites Shirabi's "important study of

the Arab family" which concludes that "the most repressed elements of Arab society are the... women, and the children." Halim Barakat, "The Arab Family and the Challenge of Social Transformation," in Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, ed., Women and Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, 1985, pp. 27, 31, 32, 37, 44.

^{xi}. Juliette Mincea, The House of Obedience: Women in Arab Society, pp. 29, 35.

^{xii}. Halim Barakat, "The Arab Family and the Challenge of Social Transformation," in Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, ed., Women and Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, 1985, pp. 27, 31, 32, 37, 44.

^{xiii}. Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels, pp. xi-xii.

^{xiv}. Charles Lyall, Ancient Arabian Poetry, London, 1930, p. xxiii, quoted in William R. Polk and William J. Mares, Passing Brave, p. 37.

^{xv}. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800, Harper & Row, New York, 1977, pp. 161-168. John Cleverley and D.C. Phillips, Visions of Childhood: Influential Models from Locke to Spock, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York, 1986, pp. 28-29. Leonard A. Sagan, "Family Ties: The Real Reason People Are Living Longer," The Sciences, March/April, 1988, p. 28.

^{xvi}. Elizabethan children also entertained themselves in a variety of other ways. They "caught birds and put their eyes out, tied bottles or tin cans to the tails of dogs, killed toads by putting them on one end of a lever and hurling them into the air by striking the other end, dropped cats from great heights to see whether they would land on their feet, cut off pigs' tails as trophies..., inflated the bodies of live frogs by blowing into them with a straw," and stoned dogs to death or drowned them. (Keith Thomas, Man and the Natural World: A History of The Modern Sensibility, Pantheon Books, New York, 1983, p. 147.)

^{xvii}. Keith Thomas, Man and the Natural World, p. 144.

^{xviii}. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800, p. 433. Keith Thomas, Man and the Natural World, p. 45, 186.