

JUSTIN GEST, *Apart: Alienated and Engaged Muslims in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). Pp 256. \$35.00 cloth.

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Much hubris motivates the misleading discourses about Western Muslims (Muslims who live in Western Europe, North Africa, Australia, and New Zealand) in the media and politics of Western countries. Such discourses are often based on false assumptions (e.g., Muslims are all like-minded), malice (on the part of far-right parties), and ignorance. They spiral out of control because of groupthink and a lack of desire by those who weave them to consult members of the Muslim minority, except perhaps individuals such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali who aggressively distance themselves from their cultures of origin. European Muslims in general lack the organization, savvy, and education to challenge the persistent onslaught of aggressive anti-Muslim discourses. American Muslims, who do have the sophistication and organization to do so, face formidable opponents (Evangelicals, aggressive pro-Israel groups, ultraconservatives, etc.) who aggressively hound their organizations as they try to challenge the malevolent narratives. This leaves a minority of courageous politicians and public officials (e.g., Dennis Kucinich, Keith Ellison, Colin Powell, and Cem Özdemir), journalists, and the majority of academics who research Western Muslim affairs as the only voices of reason with the ability to have an impact.

Groupthink today is such that when a scholar or a survey organization finds something perfectly normal or banal about Western Muslim communities and individuals, it causes a stir and often an aggressive reaction from those wedded to demonizing Muslims and portraying them as a source of threat. Without the work of these researchers, however, the anti-Muslim discourse could become so dominant that Muslims may become increasingly subject to discriminatory immigration and law enforcement practices, violations of civil rights, or the abrogation of social services. The stakes are critical, and the role of researchers is essential. This is the context in which Justin Gest's *Apart*, a fine exemplar of a well-researched book on Western Muslims with urgent and meaningful import to policymaking, has been published. Beyond its scholarly value, the book shows how misinformed, counterproductive, and misleading are the current policies meant to increase security in Europe and the United States.

The goal of *Apart* is to explain why some "Muslim" (the category could be misleading because of the internal variation it hides) male youths in the West adopt anti-system attitudes while others value their countries' institutions and why some in each of these two groups are passive while others are active. Gest opts to focus on young men instead of older men or women because male Muslim youths tend to be perceived by Western publics as particularly threatening. The simple, compelling, and intuitive explanation that Gest provides is that those who perceive that their attainments in life meet their expectations tend to actively engage democratic institutions, while those who do not feel the two are congruent actively engage in anti-system behavior. Those who have low expectations of the political system simply become passive. To test his theory, Gest interviews a total of ninety members (including sixty young men) of the Bengali community in Tower Hamlet, an East London borough, and of the Moroccan migrant community in southern Madrid.

The first three chapters of the book get somewhat bogged down in a pedantic, sometimes irrelevant, discussion of theories of alienation and a dissertation-style defense of the book's rather simple methodology that some may find to amount to overkill. Chapters 4 and 5 present enjoyable and valuable overviews of civic and political life for Tower Hamlet's Bengali community and Madrid Sur's Moroccan community, respectively, which richly benefit from

the author's interviews. Chapter 6 leverages the interviews from the two communities to convincingly substantiate the argument of the book.

Gest's argument is intuitive and most likely correct, but he sometimes leaves the reader with the impression that his research is insufficient to support his thesis. His theory is internally consistent and logical but relies a little too much on Ted Gurr's classic *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970). Although Gurr's work is valuable in many ways, Gest does not take into account the many criticisms it was subjected to over the years, including selection bias that undermines generalization in the cases that inspired it and that may also affect Gest's own findings. Gest does indicate that his results may not be generalizable, but he often generalizes from them nonetheless. Young Muslim men from other communities do not necessarily have to develop attitudes in ways that are similar to their peers among Tower Hamlet Bengalis or south Madrid Moroccans. There may be something specific to being a Bengali Muslim in the United Kingdom, for example, that determines the attitudinal pathways that youths adopt. In fact, the attitudinal patterns that Gest observes in Spain mostly fit a branch of his theory (passive and disengaged) that is different from the ones he identifies in the United Kingdom (mostly active, whether engaged or anti-system). What if a "culture" of engagement or alienation develops among youths in every community that influences personal decisions? While, again, Gest's theory is most likely correct, it would be better to have greater variation in attitudes within the same environment or generally similar environments to test the theory.

Generalization is also problematic in the book's otherwise valuable conclusion where Gest leverages the findings of his field research in London and Madrid to make broader policy recommendations, particularly as concerns Muslim Americans. He argues based on his theory that American Muslims, who are well integrated, are the type that could either become democratically engaged or actively participate in anti-system behavior, depending on how their expectations about political entitlement and professional attainment compare with reality. The Patriot Act's restrictions of civil rights and encouragement of intrusive policing, Congressional hearings stigmatizing Muslims, and Islamophobic discourses uncover very few real threats while increasing the gap between expectations and reality, thereby driving more young Muslim American men to engage in anti-system behavior. In sum, our rash reaction to threat makes us more, not less, vulnerable. And while others (e.g., Georgetown's David Cole) have made this argument before, Gest is the first to explain the processes behind the phenomenon.

Although it is highly likely that Gest is right in the case of American Muslims as well, at least in terms of individuals on the margins who have the potential to be attracted to anti-system behavior, there is no logical basis to extend the findings from London and Spain to American Muslims without further research. It could be, for example, that those who do well professionally (as many Muslim Americans do) are less likely to be driven to anti-system behavior because of institutional discrimination, something he could not test for in his research on impoverished communities in Europe. The United States also has such large and diverse political institutions (local and state) and labor markets that discrimination by some employers or mistreatment in some locales would not keep ambitious and mobile young Muslim men from accomplishing some of their expectations, even if they had to work harder than non-Muslim peers. Gest's recommendation to facilitate the integration of members of Muslim minorities instead of intrusively policing them and stigmatizing them is perfectly sensible, but he needs more research to convincingly extend his insights across the Atlantic.

This is an excellent book in many ways, but its findings are not surprising—we could even say that they are trite. But again, banal research findings about Muslims (that Muslims are logical and strategic, that they have individual hopes and dreams, and that, similar to most, they may be resentful if mistreated or frustrated by the system) are particularly valuable precisely because the dominant discourse about Muslims ascribes to them derogatory attributes that

are unreasonable. For this reason, and for its policy relevance and thorough examination of two significant Muslim communities, I recommend this book to scholars of minority studies, those interested in policy matters related to minorities, and to everyone who wants to gain some perspective on Western Muslim men—their experiences, hopes, struggles, humanity, and complexity.

STEPHANIE CRONIN, *Soldiers, Shahs and Subalterns in Iran: Opposition, Protest and Revolt, 1921–1941* (Hampshire, U.K.: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2010). Pp. 344. \$95.00 cloth.

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“History,” Voltaire famously observed, “is a pack of tricks we play on the dead.” Attempting to correct this well-observed perversion of the past, Otto von Ranke instructed his students in the 19th century’s first “scientific” history seminar to recount the past “as it actually occurred,” basing all accounts strictly on primary source materials. The only problem with this rule of thumb, of course, is that although each event is unique, no two observers see the same thing. What one sees depends on who, what, when, and where one is. So history, necessarily, is a construct, a recounting of the past that owes as much to its writer—and how he or she reconciles conflicting sources—as it does to the actual events described.

Since the 1920s, conventional wisdom about Iran has held that the Qajar dynasty (1796–1925) presided over a weak state unable to cope with modernity, consequently exposing the country to pillage by Western powers, especially Russia and Britain. Following the failure of the Constitutional Revolution and the chaos of World War I, order was restored and a strong state built up by Reza Pahlavi, a Cossack officer who seized power in a 1921 coup d’état and subsequently made himself minister of war, prime minister, and—after a failed effort to create a republic as Mustafa Kemal had done in Turkey—king. Reza Shah modernized Iran; he established a strongly centralized secular state based on a military and civil bureaucracy that he personally controlled. After his 1941 abdication, the state was further developed by his son, Muhammad Reza Shah, and then by the Islamic Republic of Iran, heir to the Pahlavi dictatorship, after the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

Although there is much truth in this conventional view, it may not be “the whole truth and nothing but the truth.” Indeed, it may well violate “Einstein’s razor,” the dictum that urges us to explain things “as simply as possible, *but not more simply.*”

In her well-conceived, brilliantly researched, and meticulously detailed new book, Stephanie Cronin seeks to deconstruct what she calls “the discourse of state-building and ‘the man of order’ [Reza Shah]” (p. 3). Instead, she proposes that we look at the decades of Reza Shah’s rule in terms of “history from below,” giving attention to events that other historians have neglected or dismissed as insignificant. Rather than viewing the period from 1921 to 1941 as characterized by a progressive dictator’s inevitable modernization of an “ossified and moribund ‘traditional’ environment . . . historically redundant and doomed to social extinction” she sees emerging state power being “constantly contested by a wide range of social groups with diverse forms of political representation, modes of action, and ideological vision” (p. 3). Her work seems entirely consistent with Homa Katouzian’s view that Iranian history has been a continuing cycle, “yo-yoing” between extremes of arbitrary government and chaos, as well as with Ervand Abrahamian’s seminal work on the crowd in Iranian history.