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Cover Photo: “Looking out of a window at the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount” by Caroline Downey

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome! On behalf of our hard-working staff, I am happy to introduce to you the Spring 2018 edition of Kaleidoscope International Journal. In this edition, it is with great delight that we present to you our latest collection of photo diaries and compelling articles from a number of perspectives. This is the seventh and final publication that I have had the pleasure of producing during my time at Boston College, and I am very proud of the growth we have experienced both as a team and as a Journal.

Our journey begins with “Venezuela in Crisis: A Background” by Jorge Mejía, recent winner of the 2018 Archbishop Oscar A. Romero Scholarship, an award given to students in recognition of their academic achievement, leadership, service, and involvement in the Latino community. His piece illustrates the current economic, political, and social situations in the nation. From there, we shift our focus to the Middle East with Mitchell Donat’s piece on resource dependence. Donat offers a thorough history followed by political considerations for future economic diversification. Up next, we have our first photo diary documenting Caroline Downey’s trip to Israel. William Sutor then gives us a historical analysis of the development of ethnic minorities and their experiences in Safavid Persia. Following Sutor, Nathan Whitaker delivers a detailed account of Chinese political and economic influence and its role in East Asia. In a unique piece entitled “Behind the Zoomorphic Style: A Study of Cultural Adaptation between Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations on the Silk Road,” Zhuolun Xie offers a creative historical account of life along Asia’s largest trade route. Our second photo diary by Kirsten Agla features photos of striking street art and graffiti found in Ecuador. Isabel Faherty then brings to light the divide that has developed between Haiti and the Dominican Republic with “When Sugar Isn’t Sweet: Hardships in the Bateyes.” Finally, Sarya Baladi brings us home with her article on Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im and Human Rights.

Over the past four years, the Journal has evolved in more ways than I ever could have imagined. With the guidance of wonderful mentors and staff members, Kaleidoscope has expanded its presence on the Boston College campus and acted as a medium through which students of all backgrounds can share their insights. I began my time with Kaleidoscope the first semester of my freshman year as a copy editor, moving my way up as Junior Managing Editor, Senior Copy Editor, and eventually Editor-in-Chief, learning many valuable lessons in teamwork and leadership along the way. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our advisors, copy editors, layout designers, administrators, and readers, without whom this experience would not be possible.

Enjoy the Spring 2018 edition of Kaleidoscope International Journal and thank you for your continued support. I look forward to following Kaleidoscope’s further evolution in the years to come.

Alexis Hamill
Editor-in-Chief
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A woman tries to hinder the Bolivarian National Guard’s advance during a demonstration.

VENEZUELA IN CRISIS: A BACKGROUND

By Jorge Mejía, MCAS ‘19
Political Science
“Today, Venezuela is the sick man of Latin America.” This observation by Moisés Naim, a Distinguished Fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, highlights the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela under current President Nicolás Maduro Moros. The country’s crisis — distinguished by food shortages, political instability and hyperinflation, among other things — has garnered the attention of observers worldwide and is perhaps the region’s most pressing issue in the twenty-first century. Venezuelan history indicates that this development was not all together unexpected, as shown by three distinct, yet related political phenomena: Puntofijismo (1958-1998), Chavismo (1998-2013), and Maduro (2013-present). The collapse of Puntofijismo, Venezuela’s post-transition style of pacted democracy ("partryarchy") and its oil-dependent petro-state, coincided with the rise of Hugo Chávez’s 1990s political project known as Bolivarianism. Chávez’s regime continued and ruptured with Puntofijismo through clientelism, exclusionary politics, and the creation of an illiberal hybrid regime. The current protests, military violence, and humanitarian crisis grew out of this context.

To talk about Venezuela today requires a discussion on the collapse of the system of public governance that characterized Venezuela from 1958 to 1998: Puntofijismo. International Relations scholar Daniel Hellinger writes, “most of the recent works on Venezuela concentrate on the collapse of the Punto Fijo system and on the character of Chavismo and the Bolivarian government.” Venezuela’s transition from the military dictatorship of Marco Pérez Jiménez to democracy began in 1958 after representatives of Venezuela’s three main political parties — Democratic Action (AD), the Social Christian Party (COPEI), and Democratic Republican Union (URD) — signed a formal agreement to accept the results of the December 1958 presidential election of AD candidate Rómulo Betancourt. This “Pacto de Punto Fijo” enshrined what political scientists term “consociational democracy,” a power-sharing arrangement whereby parties agreed to alternate the presidency, respect election results, equally apportion government agency positions, and prevent single-party hegemony. It additionally affirmed petroleum’s dominance in the economy. The resulting institutional arrangement is Puntofijismo.

Puntofijista democracy had several important characteristics that contextualize the subsequent erosion of Venezuelan democracy. Scholars of Venezuelan history have underscored two defining qualities — the notion of the “petro-state” and “partryarchy” (or pacted democracy). Stanford professor Terry Lynn Karl defines a petro-state as the distinctive type of institutional setting produced by an outsized dependence on petroleum revenue. Petro-states such as Venezuela, a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), are noted for their extractive and distributive state capacities. Such reliance on non-productive and capital-intensive resources affects political arrangements. Oil dependence influences social classes, regime types, state institutions, and the decision calculus of policymakers. Regime type is subject to oil dependence due to the “symbiotic interaction between the...incentives created by the petro-state and a particular type of democracy.” The latter hints at the second characteristic of Puntofijista democracy: “partryarchy,” a term coined by Michael Coppedge in his 1997 book, Strong Parties and Lame Ducks. This term refers to Venezuela’s post-transition tradition of corporatist elite bargaining, intra-elite compromise, and economic conservatism in managing petroleum revenues and state-society relations. As Hellinger notes about AD and COPEI’s talks at Punto Fijo, “the issue was not whether some type of system would be better...than democracy, but whether this particular democracy was delivering on the promise of ‘sowing the oil’ in a project of national development that would include all Venezuelans.” From 1958 to 1979, Venezuela’s petro-state and pacted democracy resulted in a system of consistent economic growth, strong political parties, and governability.

During the 1980s, this stability began to erode. This erosion may explain how Hugo Chávez and his ideology of Bolivarianismo (Bolivarianism) successfully channeled this institutional anemic and social demand into a revolutionary political platform. In his 2002 article, “The Decline and Fall of Democracy in Venezuela,” Daniel Levine notes that the synergy between the dynamics of the petro-state and the machinations of pacted democracy reinforced certain systemic ills in Venezuela, such as corruption, truncated political participation, corporatism, patronage, presidentialism, and bureaucratization. Thomas Friedman captures these ideas in his famous “First Law of Petropolitics,” which posits that the price of oil and the pace of freedom move in opposite directions in oil-rich states. Indeed, in 1983, when oil prices dwindled,
the stability of these arrangements weakened. A series of 
subsequent events ended the legitimacy of Puntofijismo. 
Among these was the Caracazo, the Caracas-based riots 
on February 27, 1989 in response to the government’s 
structural adjustment program. The attempted military 
coups of 1992 coupled with the impeachment of former 
President Carlos Andrés Pérez in December 1993 were 
also crucial to this phenomenon. Levine explains that 
the implications of these events “[reflect] the dimensions 
of decline: economic decay, political ossification and 
immobility, and rising protest.”10 The 1980s brought an 
end to Venezuela’s Puntofijista democracy. The qualities of 
petro-state and pacted democracy — economic growth, 
stability, governability, controlled organized social life, 
and military subordination to civilian rule — were no 
longer guaranteed. Factionalism, social outcry from civil 
society, and polarization were underway.

This collapse of Puntofijismo ran parallel to the 
emergence of an alternative political project of special 
relevance to contemporary Venezuela: Hugo Chávez’s 
Bolivarianismo. Bolivarianism refers to the political thought 
embodied in the military movement called the Movimiento 
Revolucionario Bolivariano (MRB), which was involved in 
the coup d’état against President Pérez in 1992. In his 
essay, “Explaining Political Change in Venezuela,” Pedro 
Sanoja observes, “the ideas of Bolivarianism are derived 
from contradictions inherent to existing institutions, 
and can only be understood in relation to the values 
and practices embedded in them, which Bolivarianism 
aimed to replace.”11 He is referring to the opportunities 
presented by the decay of the Puntofijista institutional 
order. These opportunities included the inability of AD 
and COPEI to placate social demands in the corporatist 
pre-Chávez institutional setting. This breakdown of social 
consensus is seen in the rise of civil society groups during 
the 1980s, such as human rights organizations, barrio 
(district) associations, local church groups, and insurgent 
unionism, which all assumed an anti-establishment 
disposition.12 Coincident with this social activism was 
party disaffiliation and competing political programs 
alongside Chávez’s MRB, such as Convergencia and Causa 
R.13 This political opportunity was what Laclau terms a 
“populist rupture.”14

Hugo Chávez’s ideology of Bolivarianism 
successfully channeled this opportunity into a political 
project. Chávez’s Bolivarianism invokes the philosophies 
of figures from nineteenth century Venezuela, specifically 
the “Trinity” of the “liberator” Simón Bolívar, his tutor 
Simón Rodríguez, and Ezequiel Zamora, a military 
leader during the Independence Wars against the Spanish 
monarchy (1810-1823). It also incorporates Rousseauian 
notions of direct democracy, socialism, Christianity, and 
tercermundismo (“Third Worldism”).15 These ideologies 
amount to an effective critique of Puntofijismo.16 This 
project critically recognized civil society’s unifying plea — the overhaul of Puntofijista democracy — by linking
the Venezuela of 1830 with the Venezuela of 1990 so as to paint an unfinished Manichean struggle for freedom. In short, Chávez’s Bolivarian ideology during the 1990s made strategic use of anti-Puntofijista sentiments in society. Ultimately, when Chávez became the democratically elected President of Venezuela, he institutionalized Bolivarianism and its repudiation of pacted democracy in December 1998.

Chávez’s fifteen-year-long administration (1998–2013) was distinguished by a reformist rupture with previous institutional arrangements, but also a continuity of past governance structures, norms, and practices. This duality, while seemingly contradictory, helps to situate contemporary Venezuela within its prior development (e.g., pacted democracy and a rentier economy), while also accounting for contingencies (e.g., Chávez’s 1999 constitutional reform and regime hybridity). This perspective allows for a more complete understanding of the current humanitarian crisis in Venezuela under President Nicolás Maduro.

Chávez’s government shared several characteristics with the Punto Fijo system. According to comparative politics scholar Julia Buxton, “while the political crisis has been…portrayed as a new phenomenon that emerged as a result of Chávez’s policy programme and style of government…the conflict has deep historical roots and…has been shaped by the legacy of political organization in the pre-Chávez era.” One such legacy is what Buxton calls the “politics of exclusion.” She views the policies and social constituency of Chávez and Chavismo as a product of the state apparatus molded by the historically dominant parties (AD and COPEI) — of rent distribution, inter-elite compromise, restricted political choice, and oil dependence. Puntofijista governance relied on restricted access to the state. Venezuela’s “Fourth Republic” prevented the poor from organizational representation — the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV), for instance, concentrated welfare benefits among urban workers affiliated with Democratic Action. Buxton asserts that Chávez’s “Fifth Republic” while increasing electoral access to the politically disenfranchised such as Afro-Venezuelans, also excluded beneficiaries of the partidocracia such as urban elites. Exclusionary politics was just one characteristic of the pre-Chávez era that continued into the Chávez era.

The nature of the Venezuelan economy under Chávez was similar to the one that had existed since the 1920s: the oil-dependent petro-state, which some scholars refer to as ‘rentier socialism’…”

**An infographic detailing recent changes in Venezuela’s economy**
Buxton notes, “Chávez is very much a symptom of the political crisis in the country.”

Meanwhile, Chávez strayed from Puntofijismo in several ways. According to Javier Corrales in Dragon in the Tropics, Chávez’s constitutional reforms constructed a “hybrid regime.” The first change Chávez made in 1999 was to rewrite the 1961 Constitution into the Bolivarian Constitution of Venezuela (CRBV). This document monumentally reorganized political life. It called for recall referendums for public officials, replaced the bicameral legislature with a unicameral National Assembly, extended the presidential term from four to six years, and allowed for re-election of the president. These amendments, Corrales argues, ended pacted democracy in Venezuela, allowing for increased access for the politically disempowered, but they also transformed the country into a hybrid regime. These are political systems that combine democratic traits (e.g., free elections) with autocratic ones (e.g., political repression). The 1999 Constitution allowed for Rousseauian council-based democracy, but also created a “high-stakes” political system that reduced checks and balances and centralized political leadership. The advantages of holding executive office were amplified, but the cost of remaining in the anti-Chavista opposition proved increasingly overwhelming because state resources were deployed to party loyalists. Such clientelism or opportunistic social spending, Corrales posits, results from increased political competition and declining institutional constraints, both of which were especially true after the failed 2004 recall referendum. Corrales calls this, “crowding out the opposition.” Ultimately, Chávez’s death in March 5, 2013 left Venezuela with a regime that not only reiterated features of thirty-year-long Puntofijismo, including politics of exclusion and rentier socialism, but also produced contingent dynamics of its own, such as an illiberal and authoritarian hybrid regime.

On April 19, 2013, current President of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro, inherited this complicated legacy. The vicious circles of pacted democracy and the petro-state have conditioned the calculus of Maduro’s decision-making — what some Latin American observers have termed Madurismo. The petro-state’s statist, oil-centric, and rentier development continue to define Venezuela’s economy. Likewise, partidocracia furnished Maduro’s government with self-sustaining practices, such as exclusionary politics, rentier socialism, and clientelism. Chavismo, while conditioned by AD and COPEI’s Puntofijista legacy, introduced its own dynamics including control of the media, Manichean ideology, and the creation of a “high-stakes” political system such that the opposition is isolated. Of course, the petro-state can never be divorced from its political sibling (Puntofijismo, Chavismo, or Madurismo), especially when global oil prices crash, the way that they did in 2016 to twenty-six dollars a barrel. This would again provide a new opportunity for a shift in Venezuelan politics. As under Chávez, this would be a shift not toward liberal democracy but illiberalism and, increasingly, autocratic rule. Maduro’s current regime is the product of a decades-long combination of elite intentions, institutional legacies, and historical contingencies.

Madurista governance is not just a replay of Chavismo. Unlike Chávez, who used oil revenue to weaken oppositionists, Maduro has used political repression as he faces diminished oil revenues and scant savings. Since Maduro narrowly defeated MUD (Democratic Unity Roundtable) candidate Henrique Capriles in 2013, over 800 public protests have occurred in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, mostly led by students. Maduro has both purged opponents and employed military repression. Moisés Naím calls this Venezuela’s “Plan B: Strip virtually all power from every institution it [has] lost control of,” namely the National Assembly, where the opposition obtained two-thirds of the seats in 2015. In response, Maduro jailed the mayor of Caracas Antonio Ledezma and fired both the Minister of Defense Diego Molero and the Minister of the Interior Miguel Rodríguez Torres in 2017. The previous year, when the opposition requested a recall referendum, the loyalist-dominated Supreme Court cancelled the process, and in March 2017, nullified the National Assembly. A joint communique issued by several Venezuelan human rights NGOs, such as Todos por la Libertad, reports that as of December 2017, there are over 400 political prisoners. Amnesty International reports that the military has been conducting arbitrary detentions and illegal raids. Opposition leader Lilian Tintori frequently uploads videos to her Instagram account featuring the police attacking protesters with bats, tear gas, water hoses, and marble pellets. In December 2017, Maduro forbade certain opposition parties from participating in national elections. In short,

Lilian Tintori is a member of the Voluntad Popular opposition party. Her husband, Leopoldo López, co-founded it and is facing a fourteen-year prison sentence for the incitement of political violence.
Maduro’s regime is known for its dictatorial, autocratic, and repressive one-man rule. Venezuela’s crisis, however, is not just political and economic — it is also humanitarian. Poverty is now back to pre-Chávez levels. Infant mortality in 2016 increased thirty percent and maternal mortality sixty-five percent. Malaria, previously eradicated, has reemerged. Also in 2016, Venezuela saw its highest-ever number of homicides, with 28,479. At an October 2017 panel hosted by the Organization of Latin American Affairs at Boston College, Venezuelan student Rodolfo Postigo shared that many youth are now dropping out of high school and college. Hundreds are now also fleeing to neighboring Colombia. Debt rising to 196 billion USD dollars has prompted Venezuela to seek aid from Russia, as China’s Sinopec in November 2017 sued PDVSA for 23.7 billion USD dollars in unpaid loans. In December 2017, Maduro initiated negotiations with opposition leaders in the Dominican Republic on a six-point agenda, including the release of political prisoners. The nephews of the first lady, Efraín Flores and Franqui Freitas, have been jailed in the U.S. on drug charges. The list of cataclysms under Maduro are endless, but they all indicate one thing: Madurismo is neither Puntofijismo nor Chavismo. It is a quintessentially new phenomenon that Venezuela has never seen before. It is the latest chapter in the unraveling of a discredited pacted democracy, feeble petro-state, clamorous civil society, and hybridist Chavismo.

Venezuela is ultimately a country in crisis. Such contemporary tumult is rooted in, conditioned by, and inseparable from Venezuela’s mid-twentieth century history. This history is one of Puntofijismo between AD and COPEI from 1958 to 1998, defined by two interrelated pillars: the petroestado (petro-state, an oil-dependent economy) and partidocracia (pacted democracy, a system of inter-elite bargaining). The former has rendered state-society relations in Venezuela dependent on the extraction and distribution of oil rent; the latter has created restricted political participation, corporatist civil society, patronage, presidentialism, and bloated bureaucracies. What happened during the 1980s warned of a forthcoming storm in Venezuela — one of social demand, radical reform, and high political competition. When oil prices dwindled in 1983, civil society actors emerged calling for an overthrow of Puntofijismo and its exclusionary politics, and Hugo Chávez’s Movimiento Revolucionario Bolivariano (MRB) successfully channeled this demand into a democratically elected political project. This “Bolivarian Revolution,” however, proved just as exclusionary and clientelistic through misiones bolivarianas, while simultaneously creating an illiberal hybrid regime via his rewritten 1999 Constitution. Nicolás Maduro has inherited this regime, but diminished oil revenues have caused him to become increasingly autocratic, purging political opponents, using military violence, isolating the country diplomatically, and engaging in drug trafficking. This instability indicates that Venezuela truly is at a tipping point.
MOVING AWAY FROM RESOURCE DEPENDENCY: POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

BY MITCHELL DONAT, MCAS ’18

Political Science & History
Many Middle Eastern states are victims of the “resource curse” of natural resource dependency, but they have failed to diversify their economies and remain reliant on oil. The typical scholarship regarding the resource curse places the blame on a lack of democracy being a consequence of resource dependency—yet this does not explain why states, as rational decision makers, do not pursue economic diversification. Although some states have attempted to tackle their resource dependency, the general narrative remains the same; diversification is a necessary goal, but few states commit themselves to it. For example, a monarchical form of government allows for states to diversify by allowing institutions to organically develop in the absence of colonial involvement. The presence of immediate external threats to sovereignty or stability make a state less likely to diversify. Analyzed collectively, these considerations explain Kuwait’s and Iraq’s lack of economic diversification, and the United Arab Emirate’s relative success.

Rational States and Economic Decisions

The definition of a rentier state is often debated, but regardless of the definition, oil-exporting states in the Middle East qualify for it. A rentier state is defined as a state that derives a vast majority of its income from the extraction and exportation of oil. Middle East North Africa (MENA) countries that qualify for this are Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar, Iran, Algeria, and Libya. The “resource curse” describes a country’s excessive reliance on natural resources, in which real exchange rates on other economic sectors appreciate as a result of the natural resource, inflation rises, consumption falls because of high commodity prices, the government spends its wealth inefficiently, overall producing poor economic performance.

The impact of the resource curse was first documented by The Economist in 1977, analyzing the effects that natural gas discoveries in the Netherlands had on other economic sectors. Economic diversification, simply defined, is when a state produces a growing number of economic outputs and expands both its markets for exporting and widens its sources of income. Diversification, as argued by Siham Matallah, is a “shield against the resource curse by widening the country’s economic base in a way that progressively delinks economic growth from resource abundance.” Examples of diversification include de-regulating and providing incentives for new economic markets, and opening up a state’s markets for foreign investment—anything that generates jobs and income for citizens in fields other than oil. The need for diversification has been clear since the decades following the post-World War II era, yet MENA states have seen varying degrees of success.

Democracy fails to consider the public, stable economy. In a rentier state, citizens are hesitant to openly accept foreign investment in order to maintain employment. Economic diversification must include some degree of opening and encouraging foreign investment, which means foreigners can own property and do business within the state. This would increase immigration and threaten economic and political standing of current MENA citizens. The “Dubai Model” helps us understand the dilemma. Over the course of the economic diversification process in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), foreigners have moved to the state in the thousands—UAE citizens now compose only around twelve percent of the population. The foreign influx has taken a toll on the consciences of Emirati citizens, who feel alienated in their own state due to the massive demographic imbalance. The case of Dubai leaves other Middle Eastern states with a dilemma: are the benefits of diversification worth a loss in national identity? Supplementing the foreign fear is the fact that “diversification is time consuming…returns are not always immediate in accruing.” In a populace accustomed to the quick returns and easy cash provided by oil, a change to longer-term investment is justifiably worrisome. A pro-democracy argument for economic diversification fails to consider the public interest in their own economic security and the potential consequences of a more open economy. Democracy, instead, is another roadblock to economic diversification.

A constitutional monarchy provides the grounds for economic diversification more than democracy or authoritarian rule. While a constitutional monarchy can be authoritarian, this is not the case in Middle Eastern states like Bahrain, the UAE, or Qatar; states that all are relatively freer than their larger monarchical neighbors. A stable constitutional monarchy allows breathing room for the government to focus on economic diversification and not fall victim to popular opinions. These monarchies, especially in the Gulf States, “are not relics of an ancient past...but more suited for and resilient to the strains of contemporary rule.” The need to distinguish between the types of Middle Eastern monarchies is significant, because “[i]n Arab autocracies… repression is selective and heavily mixed with mechanisms of representation, consultation, and cooptation.” Monarchies can provide the stability, breathing room, and legitimacy to pursue economic diversification.

The presence of functioning institutions in a state is necessary for economic diversification to even be considered. Such institutions are, more often than not, a result of the historical colonial involvement in that state. David Fromkin argues that “the Middle East became what it is today...because Britain and France failed to ensure that the dynasties, the states, and the political
system they established would permanently endure.”\textsuperscript{11} Fromkin’s argument holds true for the regions in turmoil we see today, but this does not consider the Gulf States where the British were involved that have remained stable. Siham points out that the institutions left behind persisted after independence because of the “ruling elite’s goals and worries.”\textsuperscript{12} Oil was discovered around World War II in several Gulf States, where the British had more strategic positions established, rather than a focus on direct involvement or resource extraction.\textsuperscript{13} Improved institutions could develop with British interest to cooperate with stable local governments. Positive qualities within institutions include voice and accountability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, and a control of corruption.\textsuperscript{14} As a result of logical decision-making of states, there is no reason to even consider diversification if the government does not have the proper institutional framework. In addition to regime type, valuable institutions, that often emerged due to colonial presence, provide the framework and rational for a state to diversify its economy. 

Finally, the presence of immediate foreign threats to a state affect a ruling elite’s decision to maintain or change the economic status quo. There are several reasons that account for this; first, breathing room is required for any real economic shift. Years of stability can focus public interest on economic change, and the stabilizing of an economy can make the process and benefits of diversifying more evident to the public or a ruling elite. Secondly, threats often produce distractions to economic change. The Arab-Israeli conflict, an example of an internal threat, is one that “provides a ready and convenient means of diverting public frustration away from the corruption…of Arab regimes.”\textsuperscript{15} Neighboring threats make maintaining the economic status quo appealing to a ruling elite and easy to accept for the masses. The regional instability of the Middle East, with failed states, terrorist insurgencies, frequent warfare and revolution, compounds our understanding of the Middle East’s neglect of diversification as a priority.

The following analysis compares the efforts of two Gulf States: the UAE and Kuwait. This will be supported by analyzing regime type, structure and the effects of regional instability. The monarchies with little representation, like the UAE, attempt diversification. In contrast, a state that faced many sovereign threats throughout the decades, such as Iraq, presents a lack of diversification. Finally, turning to diversification is not currently apparent in Saudi Arabia for its fears of neighboring and regional instability. The table below demonstrates competing arguments and the different Middle Eastern States.

**Regime History Makes the Difference: The UAE and Kuwait**

The difference in economic development of the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait creates an interesting puzzle. In two of the smallest, richest Gulf States with huge supplies of oil, progress in diversifying their economies has been enormously different. The UAE, according to the International Monetary Fund, surpassed all other states of economic complexity and came second only to Bahrain for its export diversity index.\textsuperscript{16} Kuwait, on the other hand, scored last for its economic diversity index, and below average marks for economic complexity. Kuwait’s development as a more repressive state and its history of foreign threats and invasions explain Kuwait’s lacking economic diversity. The UAE’s monarchic system, fewer foreign threats, and history of independence, like Kuwait, lead to successful economic diversity.

Regime type is the backbone of our understanding of the differences between Kuwait and the UAE. Kuwait’s history of representation in government originated before oil, when the Kuwaiti ruling family “assembled...
a broad pre-oil coalition because the family was weak in 1938 when it faced a major challenge from below, [and] Kuwait received little help from Britain, its patron at the time.” Kuwait went further and established a parliament, the National Assembly, in 1962, as a means to “make up for the lack of population, the small area, and the limited military power.” An effort for democracy inspires foreign sympathies, especially from the United States, who can generate public support for similar regime type. Immediately, the government was aware of the need for economic diversification, as evidenced by the Planning Board’s first five-year plan of 1967, which contained the “long term goals… [of] building a diversified self-sustaining economy, with emphasis on sectors other than oil.” Not only do the goals of the first five-year plan discredit claims that Middle Eastern states are ignorant of the need to diversify, but they also pose the complication that Kuwait has diversified less than any other oil-producing state, as evidenced by their IMF standings. Herb accounts for this economic status quo, illustrating that the National Assembly hinders progress, as it represents “the majority of Kuwaiti voters; this majority is composed of state employees dependent on oil revenues with little immediate stake in diversification.” The UAE, on the other hand, has nearly all of its power in the ruling elite, and no elections or representation. Instead, the “confederal nature of the UAE has made the [ruling family] particularly focused on economic diversification.” The differences in regime type begin to explain the differences in the UAE’s and Kuwait’s attempts at diversification.

Kuwait faced serious threats to its sovereignty by its neighbor, Iraq, cumulating in Iraq’s invasion in 1990. The UAE, on the other hand, face some threats that were not as serious. Kuwait actually dissolved the National Assembly in the late 1980s and proved that power was still in the hands of the ruling family—many predicted a turn to absolute rule. The Iraqi invasion of 1990 forced the family to restore the constitution to demonstrate to the United States that it benefited from the support of its citizens. This set Kuwait on a course of path-dependency. As the assembly became more ingrained in Kuwaiti identity, the ruling family faced more difficulty to return to absolutism. Rather than external threats creating a distraction for economic diversification, the presence of these external threats reinforce Kuwaiti institutions that prevented diversification. The threat of Iraq forced Kuwait to maintain a degree of political participation: a form of participation that dims prospects for economic change.

Britain maintained protectorate treaties with both the UAE and Kuwait through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a form of political protection and strategic outpost. These outposts were never entirely for oil, as it was not discovered until the post-World War II era that it was a strategic pursuit instead of being originally commercial. Throughout the greater Gulf region, Britain’s policy to treat and negotiate with local rulers as true statesmen, not as subservient to their empire, legitimized and institutionalized local rulers’ authority. This strategy allowed functioning government institutions to develop organically, with the security of foreign protection and luxury of institutions that agreed with local norms and customs rather than a foreigner’s ideas. This organic development set the foundation for the well-functioning states seen today. Britain attempted to increase its influence in Kuwait following the discovery of oil by trying to force Kuwait to invest in British firms that charged high prices for little work. Instead, Kuwait emerged from near bankruptcy with more careful spending policies; evidence of functioning government institutions. Therefore, we can still expect a degree of economic diversification from Kuwait, for it has the institutions to tackle economic change.

Kuwait’s history of economic development shows minute strides toward diversification. Ninety-four percent of the government’s revenue and over half of its national income traces back to the oil industry. Kuwait’s government, however, with the beginning of the five-year plans, invested its oil income in local industry, banking, and overseas property and industry. The overseas investment brought in more income than the direct sale of oil in the 1980s, and even allowed Kuwaiti government in exile to function for months following the Iraq invasion. Kuwait’s Planning Board has been creating five-year plans since 1967; the first one brought in a wave of industrialization, and the second one, in 1972, attempted to follow suit and promote diversification. This plan caused inflation and shortages, leading to the government’s abandoning of the second five-year plan. Kuwait’s National Assembly has expressed hesitancy in pursuing diversification. Kuwait has the government institutions to approach diversification, evidenced by its five-year plans, but its democratic nature and external
“Kuwait has the government institutions to approach diversification, evidenced by its five-year plans, but its democratic nature and external threats have slowed the process...”

threats have slowed the process.

The UAE could be an economic success story of the Middle East. The UAE has an absolutist government, no history of invasive colonialism, and little in the way of external threats; therefore, we would expect to see the most diversification from the Emirates. Diversification “has been a clearly stated government policy” since the UAE was formed in 1971. The Emirates now act as a global center for trade and finances, contain branches of multinational institutions, boast extremely popular tourist destinations, and host a strong real estate market. One could speculate that the threat of an invasive Iraq, or an early twentieth-century invasion by Britain or France to set up a foreign colony, could have completely changed the economic trajectory of the UAE.

In conclusion, two relatively similar states in terms of oil reserves, size, and history, stand today with significantly different economic stories. Kuwait has the institutions for economic change, but its parliament, kept in place by path dependency and a foreign threat, is a serious roadblock to major economic change. The UAE has the institutions, independent history, and security to pursue diversification, which it has done and continues to do today.

Unlimited Roadblocks: Iraq’s Economic Shortcomings

Iraq’s history of British invasion and involvement, foreign threats, and authoritarian governments explain its failures to diversify its economy. The current instability of Iraq provides us with little to discuss economically; Iraq and the United States have other factors to consider beforehand, such as regional stability and the elimination of the Islamic State. Instead, we can look at specific instances in Iraq’s history when governments planned to move forward with economic changes which failed to come to fruition. The major differences to consider between Iraq, the UAE, and Kuwait are its origins as a poorly run British colony, its positioning between the aggressive states of Saudi Arabia and Iran, and a more complicated history of authoritarian rulers.

Iraq’s current economy can be traced back to the British invasion immediately following World War I. In contrast to the protective and strategic positioning of Britain in the Gulf region, the British had a more specific interest in managing the affairs of Iraq. British rule in Iraq was experimental; a doomed attempt at exerting influence in the region by relying on superior technology and firepower. Britain entered the area with the intention of securing oil supplies and making its Indian possessions more secure, but it had to be done with limited resources and contrary to the public’s opinion following World War I.33 V.G. Kiernan indicates how, in Iraq, “reliance was being placed on the new military technology to magnify manpower… the aim was to turn Iraq… into a showpiece of the new philosophy.”34

British invasion resulted in chaos and conflict instead of “liberalization,” as promised in the Proclamation of Baghdad in 1917.35 This proclamation “papered over profound differences among the British officials and disguised their lack of decision on policy.”36 Britain added air forces to an area with no infrastructure for a “short cut to control.”37 Without this organic infrastructure, a key element to the institutions argument necessary for economic diversification, Iraq was destined for major roadblocks to economic diversification.

Iraq’s independence in 1958 from Britain was a major roadblock. Security never seemed to follow; rather, Iraq’s political history following independence was a series of coups and countercoups.38 Any form of economic change requires breathing room—stability can lead to economic diversity in resource rich countries; there is no evidence of the reverse. Like Kuwait, Iraq’s economic agenda was formulated with a series of five-year plans. Unfortunately, Iraq’s “frequent changes in leaders and cabinets led inevitably to prolonged delays in plan formulation, adoption, and execution.”39

The very first five-year plan, in 1965, specifically and urgently called for economic diversification.40 A recent five-year plan, in 2013, called for diversification again with a similar level of urgency.41 Clearly, diversification is not a new phenomenon, but it is still delayed since it becomes an impossible task without the space for a stable government. Iraq’s frequent instability and unsuccessful economic planning supports the theory that some degree of breathing room is necessary for diversification.

Iraq’s ineffective diversification is further apparent in the war in Iran. From the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iraq has played a role in every war in an attempt to project its influence and court popularity in the region.42 Unlike Kuwait or the UAE, Iraq has the means to wage warfare in the region, as evident in the Iran-Iraq war of 1980. Iraq’s oil fields were an easy target...
for the Iranian forces, devastating the Iraqi economy. As Iraq suffered, its five-year plan of 1976 made clear that its government tossed plans for economic development; for 1981-1983, the government earmarked 19.8 billion USD for development, but the oil revenues supposed to fund that development were only 4.7 billion USD. These development plans strengthened and showed promise in the 1970s as oil prices went up. With the war, however, politics came first; “in order to ensure its own political survival, the Baath regime had to sacrifice the country’s development program.”44 The Baath regime, or any ruling elite in charge of Iraq, would not jeopardize its own security to promote economic diversification. Iraq would feel threatened by its neighbors regardless of the presence of active fighting because its oil fields are such an easy target. Iraq is stuck in an endless cycle; its easily targeted oil supply and dependence on that oil creates a sense of national vulnerability that leads to preemptive strikes, inevitably creating more damage than any envisioned security.

Finally, we can trace Iraq’s lack of diversification to its authoritarian government. Since Iraq’s formation as a recognized state in 1921, its government has mainly been authoritarian.45 Authoritarian governments reap the benefits of oil economies, and have little self-interest in economic diversification. It is unclear how a different form of government would change economic efforts in Iraq. Iraq’s authoritarian rule contributes to its historical failure to diversify, and can be traced back to the root of the British colonial mandate. This set the precedent not only for authoritarian governments to reap oil benefits, but also for the failure of institutions that are necessary to create a path for diversification.

The messy involvement of the British in Iraq, a history of authoritarian governments, and presence of perceived threats in the region all serve as a form of distraction from economic diversification in Iraq. External threats, lack of institutions, and authoritarian regimes are roadblocks to diversification which support the theories put forward.

**Conclusion**

As a result of the complexities of the Middle East, the economic policy of diversification against oil dependency receives almost unanimous approval from scholars, economists, and politicians. Extracting, processing, and exporting oil brings in large profits, but having an entire state’s economy dependent on that money leaves it at the mercy of an unpredictable oil market. In the long-term, as more alternative energy sources become popular, rentier states need diverse economies in order to react to market changes.

Patterns of international relations and politics help us answer why some states have diversified more than others. Diversification is more likely under states with constitutional monarchies, as opposed to states with a democratically elected parliament or under more authoritarian rule. Without effective institutions, which are often a result of colonial involvement in the Middle East, economic planners cannot begin to wrestle with the idea of economic diversification. The final important factor that discourages a state to diversify its economy is the presence of immediate external or internal threats. Regime security will always come before diversification, despite differences in regime type.

The chaos in the Middle East throughout the last decade and other regional conflicts hinder economic diversification in the near future. If oil truly does decline in global importance, as it is expected to do, then many Middle Eastern states could develop diverse economies organically, as they will not be subject to the resource curse anymore. More frightening is the potential that states could be left without any resources, creating instability in the region and potential migrations. Despite external threats, serious economic diversification is still possible and desirable. At the risk of the more frightening scenario, economic diversification needs to be made a priority in every oil rentier state. It is the best fail-safe to withstand conflict and volatile markets, and comes with few downsides. Diversification often leads to more regional economic trade, fostering better relations among states. Economic diversification “need not be visualized as ‘all or nothing.’ Various Arab attempts at coordination have suffered from this attitude.”46 Diversification can be broken down into economic incentives for private development, regulatory laws that promote new businesses and encourage competition, investment opportunities for foreign companies, or just creating the institutions to build a path to diversification. Lastly, a change in narrative is imperative. Rather than being hypercritical of regimes and their economic shortcomings, scholars should be analyzing the political and historical circumstances that may be stalling economic diversification. It is imperative to find options to combat those features before moving on to major economic reform.

Further study on economic diversification should look at its relationship to human capital development, a necessary feature to accompany diversification. Scholarship should analyze if there is any relationship between human capital development and regime security—are smarter, wealthier people more likely to protest? Answering this question can help us understand why states hesitate to diversify.
ISRAEL:
THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

By Caroline Downey, MCAS ‘20
Political Science & Economics
Last August, I traveled to Israel with a group of students for two weeks. We visited Tel-Aviv, the Golan Heights in the North, the Gaza Strip, Galilee, the Dead Sea, the Jordan River, Jerusalem, and many kibbutzim, small collective communities, along the way. During our time there, we learned about the continuing complex geopolitical conflict with Israel and Palestine and the religious diversity of the region. The mainstream media portrays Israel as a land plagued by constant violence, political unrest, and bloodshed, but what I encountered in Israel was just the opposite. Israel is rich in history, culture, and amazing people. Its cities are centers of innovation, vibrant and bursting with life - even its most arid deserts have been transformed to be suitable for agriculture. Israel truly is the land of milk and honey!
An Israeli soldier guards one of the entrance gates to the Temple Mount complex, Jerusalem, one of the most important holy sites to all three Abrahamic religions.
The Dead Sea, the lowest point on Earth and the saltiest body of water.

On top of the biblical Mount of Beatitudes, overlooking the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus Christ is thought to have delivered his "Sermon on the Mount."
A view of the fresh-water Sea of Galilee in Northern Israel, with the small town of Tiberias in the distance.

Walking down a hill in Jerusalem, with a view of the “white-washed tombs” from the New Testament Book of Matthew in the back.
A sign in the Golan Heights along the Israel-Syria border
ETHNIC MINORITIES IN SAFAVID PERSIA

By William Sutor, MCAS ‘19

History

Shah Ismail’s Empire in the sixteenth century
Before the sixteenth century, Iran had been dominated and ruled by a series of foreign invaders including the Arabs of the Islamic Caliphate, the Mongol hordes of Genghis Khan, and subsequent Turkic peoples such as the Selçuks and Timurids. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Iran was still recovering from the devastating invasions of Tamerlane and his visions of a Neo-Mongol Empire, when Shah Ismail Safavid united Iran and founded the Safavid dynasty. Safavid Persia was the first distinctly Persian state to rule Iran in nearly a millennium, yet this empire owed much of its success to non-Persian minorities. Ethnic minorities such as the Armenians, Georgians, and other people of the Caucasus, as well as the Turkic Qizilbash played important roles in the development of the Safavid state. The treatment of these ethnic groups ranged from outright persecution to ambivalent toleration and even favoritism at times. While their ethnicity was critical, these non-Persian groups’ identities were not purely ethnic; religion was also a major component of their identity. During the Safavid Period, Persian identity was in flux, due to both the waning influence of Turkic peoples and the Safavid adoption and imposition of Shia Islam. Ethnic minorities in Safavid Persia had to navigate a quagmire of different political, military, and religious pressures.

The Turkic Qizilbash group was the fiercely loyal soldier-caste that was instrumental in the formative conquests of the Safavid state. The early Qizilbash were a deeply religious Shiite military order based in Ardabil in Greater Azerbaijan. They were distinctly identifiable by their red headwear: Qizilbash literally translated to redhead. The headwear represented the Twelve Imams, the spiritual and political successors to the Prophet Muhammed, and adherence to the Twelver School of Shia Islam as well as their spiritual leader, Shaykh Haydar, the founder of the Qizilbash’s Safaviyyeh Order and father of Shah Ismail.¹ The Safavids began as leaders of the Sufi Safaviyyeh Order in the fourteenth century and gradually merged with other Shiite orders in the region until they became both the spiritual and political leaders of the Safaviyyeh Order and its militant Qizilbash followers. The militant Shiite orders of this period were distinct in their mystical fanaticism and Sufism. This focus on mysticism set them apart from Sunni Muslims, who generally had more legalistic practices and orthodox beliefs. The Qizilbash held that their leader was divine, a deeply unorthodox belief out-of-line with mainstream Islam. Most traditional interpretations of Islam argue that worshipping any figure other than Allah, including the Prophet Muhammed, is deeply sacrilegious. Nevertheless, the Qizilbash believed that Shah Ismail was a messianic, even divine individual.

In 1501, Shah Ismail invaded Shirvan, a state roughly located in present-day Azerbaijan, in order to avenge the murder of his father, the Shaykh Haydar. After successfully conquering Shirvan with around 7,000 Qizilbash troops, Ismail then seized the important city of Tabriz from the White Sheep Turkmen Tribe and proclaimed himself shah of Iran. Over the next ten years, Ismail and the Qizilbash conquered Greater Iran and major parts of Eastern Turkey and incorporated this new territory into the new Safavid state.³

One of Ismail’s first acts was to proclaim Shia Islam the state religion of his new empire, drawing from a multitude of Shiite and Sufi orders for support. Ismail’s nascent Persian empire was extremely multiethnic, containing not only Persians, but also Armenians, Georgians, Azeris, and Turkmen, along with other Iranian peoples such as Kurds, Afghans, and Baluchs. By strictly enforcing conversion to Shia Islam, Shah Ismail was able to forcefully unite a diverse range of peoples. Ismail’s propagation of Shia Islam had the effect of politically and socially consolidating Iran as well as creating a distinctly Persian identity. While adoption of Shia Islam in Safavid Persia was not universal, it distinguished Persia as the only major Shiite state in the Middle East and sharply contrasted it with its Sunni rivals, the Ottoman Turks. As a Shiite country, Persia benefitted from a great influx of Shiite scholars, jurists, and intellectuals from across the Islamic world who had chafed under Sunni rule by using them as administrators in the empire.

The Turkic Qizilbash were crucial to the development of the Safavid state, as their military prowess quickly entrenched them in the Safavid government. Traditionally, 

“During the Safavid Period, Persian identity was in flux, due to both the waning influence of Turkic peoples and the Safavid adoption and imposition of Shia Islam...”
Persian statesmen to the position of Vakil, an office that was essentially the head of state and the most powerful government figure next to the shah. The office of the Vakil was traditionally held by the Turkic Qizilbash, who deeply resented the Shah's usurpation of their customary privileges. The Qizilbash responded to Ismail's Vakil appointments by murdering these new Persian occupants. After Shah Ismail's death in 1524, the Qizilbash fought amongst themselves for control of the Persian state for nearly ten years until the Safavids reasserted themselves under Shah Tahmasp in 1534.

When Shah Tahmasp inherited the throne, Persia was in an extremely precarious situation. The Turkic Qizilbash were an extremely powerful faction within the Persian government that opposed the Shah as well as native Persians. Like Ismail before him, Shah Tahmasp sought to reduce the power and influence of the Qizilbash, but he pursued a different strategy. The Shah decided to bring in a massive influx of Caucasian peoples to mainland Iran in order to create a third level of Safavid society and government that counterbalanced the influence of the Qizilbash. These Georgians and Armenians were to be enslaved as an elite fighting force loyal to the Shah and then converted to Islam. These Caucasians initially only served in the royal guard and the harem but came to fill many of the traditional roles of the Qizilbash. This process of creating highly educated slave-soldiers, known as Ghulams, greatly mirrored the Janissary system of the rival Ottoman Empire, which transformed young Christians into elites and loyal soldiers for the sultan.

The policy of bringing Armenians, Georgians, and Circassians to Iran was continually practiced and the Qizilbash's devotion to the shah was fanatical. During Shah Ismail's reign, there were reports of the Qizilbash engaging in cannibalism, which was documented in both Safavid and foreign sources. Cannibalism had important significance in medieval Islam as well as the millenarian Shiism that was dominant among the Qizilbash. While enemies like the Ottomans might make up accusations of cannibalism to demonize the Safavids, it is less clear why Safavid sources would report instances of cannibalism if they were not true. Bashir Shahzad argues that the Qizilbash did not shy away from these reports because they believed their acts of cannibalism were acts of fanatical allegiance to the Safavid Shah. At the very least, the later Qizilbash pointed to their purported history of cannibalism was seen as evidence of their extreme loyalty to the Shah, a tactic the Qizilbash hoped would help them in factional struggles for influence in the Safavid government.

Until the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, the Qizilbash had a reputation as a nigh invincible fighting force. Prior to Chaldiran, the Safavids used their religious and military authority to encourage Shia Muslims in Eastern Anatolia to revolt against the Ottomans. The Ottoman Sultan Selim sought to end this Safavid challenge and sent a force that outnumbered and defeated the Qizilbash. Chaldiran deeply ruptured the long bond between the Shah and his Qizilbash, ending notions of Ismail's divinity and the Qizilbash's invincibility. With their military status greatly diminished, the Qizilbash became even more entrenched in the Safavid government despite Shah Ismail's attempts to reduce their influence. Ismail's biggest efforts to diminish Qizilbash power were his appointments of Persian statesmen to the position of Vakil, an office that was essentially the head of state and the most powerful government figure next to the shah. The office of the Vakil was traditionally held by the Turkic Qizilbash, who deeply resented the Shah's usurpation of their customary privileges. The Qizilbash responded to Ismail's Vakil appointments by murdering these new Persian occupants. After Shah Ismail's death in 1524, the Qizilbash fought amongst themselves for control of the Persian state for nearly ten years until the Safavids reasserted themselves under Shah Tahmasp in 1534.
reached its zenith under Shah Abbas the Great during the seventeenth Century. While this policy was by no means progressive or tolerant by modern standards, the Ghulam system offered ethnic minorities and religious minorities unprecedented opportunities for social advancement that were found nowhere in Europe or the Middle East, except in the Ottoman Empire. Perhaps the most prominent beneficiary of the Ghulam system was Georgian-born statesman Allahverdi Khan. Khan was a Christian who converted to Islam after being abducted and brought into the Ghulam system. His competence and political acumen allowed him to rise through the Ghulam ranks, eventually resulting in his governorship of several major Persian cities, the elimination of his main Qizilbash rival, Farhad Khan Karamanlu, and his appointment as head general of the Safavid army.10

Shah Abbas’s influence greatly enhanced the Safavid policy of favoring ethnic Caucasians. Abbas sought to use this Caucasus policy to benefit Persia politically, militarily, and economically. During Abbas’s reign, he reportedly brought between 140,000 and 200,000 Georgians and Circassians and nearly 300,000 Armenians into Iran. In a punitive raid into a rebellious Caucasus province, Abbas forcefully brought 8,000 Jews and roughly 20,000 Armenians to populate the new city of Farahabad in Mazandaran. Nevertheless, Shah Abbas’s most significant relocation of ethnic groups was during his reconstruction of the medieval city of Isfahan, the site of his new capital.

Isfahan became the home of many non-Muslims and non-Persians. Most significantly, thousands of Armenian artisans, craftsmen, and traders, were brought to the city by Shah Abbas and settled in the Armenian quarter of New Julfa. The Zoroastrians, followers of the old pre-Islamic Iranian religion, mainly settled along the south side of the Zayandah Rud. A minority of Zoroastrians were present in Isfahan along with a handful of Jews. These two groups were periodically subject to mob persecution aimed at their forcible conversion to Shia Islam. Jews were victims of typical stereotypes and beliefs that painted them as greedy and immoral, particularly due to their practice of lending money, which was forbidden for Muslims in traditional interpretations of Islam. Zoroastrians were subject to particularly harsh instances of violence stemming from century-old beliefs labelling them as heathens and idolaters, despite their legal definition as a protected “People of the Book.”

The persecution of Jews and Zoroastrians did not imply persecution of all non-Muslims; the significant populations of Armenians and Georgians enjoyed special privileges in Isfahan and largely retained their Christian religion.

During Shah Abbas’s campaigns against the Ottomans in the late sixteenth century, he visited the Armenian city of Julfa and was impressed by the Armenians’ vibrant economy and wide range of business contacts. The Armenians of Julfa had trade connections with Europeans as a result of their shared Christianity, and their network included many large centers of trade from Ottoman Istanbul to Portuguese-controlled Goa in India to Russia and Poland. Abbas thought that those connections would be useful in reinvigorating Isfahan and decided to transplant the entire population of Julfa to the city. Another military and political motivation for this decision was Abbas’s fear that Julfa might fall into Ottoman hands through war, a result which the Shah clearly wished to avoid. Moving Julfa would both deny the Ottomans a valuable center of commerce and greatly benefit the Persian Empire.

Shah Abbas had a cold, pragmatic approach to ethnic minorities within Persia. In moving Armenians to Isfahan, Abbas endeavored to create an economic class of people directly under his control who would participate in his formation of new state monopolies. As such, he was able to undercut the traditional privileges and influence of the bazaari merchant class and their allies in the ulama, who resented the implementation of state monopolies. This policy of favoring ethnic minorities was in line with the earlier reorganization of the Persian Army and the creation of the Ghulam system, each aimed to the reduce the influence of the powerful Qizilbash within the old Persian capital of Qazvin. Shah Abbas freed himself from the old rivalries and self-interested factions that dominated Qazvin and greatly increased his personal power and the efficiency of his government by moving to Isfahan.

Significantly, the wholesale transplantation of Armenians and Georgians into Iran was the source of much suffering and not a purely positive development in the history of Iran. Armenian sources during the period, such as Augustino Badgetsi, and the Spanish Ambassador, Antonio de Bavea, wrote about the difficulty and pain that these people experienced. One migration during the harsh winter of 1604 was particularly arduous as the
Armenians suffered from disease and starvation, and even had to resort to cannibalism. Stepannos Vardapet, the Patriarch of Armenians in Constantinople, stated, “Poor, Armenian people, innocent and without advice. Dispersed, hungry, thirsty and naked. On your way to captivity in Khurasan. You endured hundreds and thousands of ills but you did not set foot out of your sweet country. Now you are abandoning your fathers’ and mothers’ graves and surrendering your houses and churches to others.”11 For the Patriarch, the loss of the Armenian churches was especially tragic, and he feared for the souls of the Christian Armenians who were to live in a region far from home and dominated by Muslims. The Patriarch was clearly concerned with the possibility that these Armenians would either forcefully or voluntarily convert to Islam. This fear was not unprecedented, given the forced conversion inherent in the Ghulam system and the historical legacy of forced conversion within Iran.

Some of the special privileges Shah Abbas granted to the Armenians, however, related to the retention and protection of their Christian faith. Shah Abbas allowed the Armenians to build new churches, elect their own mayor, and even ring church bells. This is extremely significant because a typical interpretation of Islamic law explicitly forbade the building of new Christian churches and the ringing of church bells. This Islamic prohibition was upheld even amongst the most liberal Islamic empires, such as in the Christian Balkan provinces in the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, Islamic countries, including Persia, typically placed restrictions on how non-Muslims could dress, a policy that specifically cemented the social inferiority of non-Muslims within their society. Abbas removed all restrictions on Christian dress in Isfahan, allowing the Armenian community more social equality and mobility than anywhere else in the Islamic world. In typical Islamic courts of law, the word of a Christian citizen was valued less than the word of a Muslim citizen, yet Abbas routinely intervened in court cases to favor Armenian claimants. While Abbas’s policies were by no means humane or tolerant by modern standards, they were remarkable because they broke with traditional Islamic customs and prohibitions to benefit Christians.

The Armenians of Isfahan came to have a significant economic and cultural presence in Persia. The wealth and entrepreneurialism of this community greatly expanded foreign trade in Persia and allowed much of the profits to stay local to the country’s benefit. Armenian merchants were able to outcompete many foreign merchants, and the historian, Vartan Gregorian, credits the merchants with delaying foreigners’ economic domination of Persia by almost fifty years.12 As European domination of Persia increased throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many Persians looked to Armenians and Jews as scapegoats responsible for their economic ills, an irony considering that Armenians and Jews were equally if not more harmed by the Europeans’ economic stranglehold on Persia. The later Shahs and Abbas at the end of the Safavid dynasty, however, did not share his religious pluralism or tolerant policy regarding ethno-religious minorities within the country.

European powers, such as Britain, were able to convince later shahs to bypass the important overland trade routes passing through Isfahan. This move greatly reduced the economic power and influence of these communities. Having lost this economic power, the minority communities of Isfahan became subject to much more discrimination on both local and national levels. With the Afghan invasion of 1666 and the Qajar relocation of the Persian capital to Tehran, the Armenians of Isfahan ceased to be the influential community that they previously were under Shah Abbas. While many Armenians did convert to Islam, many retained their Christian faith. A great number of these Christian Armenians later immigrated to the Russian province of Armenia centered around Yerevan, and the Russian Empire hoped to reduce the power and influence of the Turkic and Iranian Muslims in their provinces in the Caucasus.

Throughout the Safavid Period, attitudes towards non-Persian and non-Muslim ethnic minorities often varied greatly. During the nascent years of the Safavid Empire, the Turkic Qizilbash were extremely close with Shah Ismail and worked to build the new Shiite state. After the Battle of Chaldiran, however, the relationship between the Safavid Shah and the Qizilbash became quite antagonistic, and the Qizilbash came to constitute a corrupt and self-interested faction within the Safavid government. Qizilbash tribal allegiances and infighting weakened Iran. The Shah Tahmasp then began a policy of greatly reducing the power and influence of the Qizilbash by bringing Caucasian peoples to serve in the Safavid government since he saw the destructive tendencies of the Qizilbash reduce Persia to near anarchy.
The Georgians, Armenians, and Circassians brought in by Tahmasp created a new layer in the Persian state and were able to oppose the Qizilbash factions through their roles as slave-soldier Ghulams and royal administrators. Shah Abbas expanded Tahmasp Caucasian policies by transplanting *en masse* entire Caucasian communities into mainland Iran. The Shah’s policies towards these people shifted from mere toleration to outright favoritism, as these Georgians and Armenians came to constitute a vital part of both the Safavid state and the economy. Many of these people assimilated to Persian culture but nevertheless left a lasting impression on Iranian politics and culture. The policies of the Safavid shahs empowered ethnic minorities and transformed the country into one that was uniquely meritocratic and pluralistic for its time.

“While Abbas’s policies were by no means humane or tolerant by modern standards, they were remarkable because they broke with traditional Islamic customs and prohibitions to benefit Christians...”
This nighttime view shows the limited energy production in North Korea.

**Chinese Political and Economic Influence in East Asia**

**By Nathan Whitaker, MCAS ‘18**

Political Science & Economics
The formation of the modern Chinese communist state following the Chinese Civil War sent shock waves across East Asia. The Soviet Union had a clear interest in maintaining and expanding Chinese holdings, while recently liberalized countries in the area, in cooperation with the United States, had a clear interest in limiting Chinese expansion. As a result, the formation of a successful communist party in such an economically and politically dominant country had major regional implications. This political upheaval particularly affected three countries.

First, Singapore was forced to evaluate its economic and political relationship with the country that once controlled it. As a small nation-state, Singapore was especially vulnerable to outsized Chinese influence. North Korea’s regime also faced obvious ramifications from the rise of the Communist Party of China (CPC). The new leader in North Korea had studied political techniques as a bureaucrat under Mao, and the politics of his country reflected his learnings. Taiwan was perhaps the most directly affected by the results of the Chinese Civil War, as the Kuomintang government (KMT) was exiled to the island, totally changing the economic and political climate of the country. Although Singapore, Taiwan, and North Korea have vastly differing governments, they all also share important political and economic similarities, both to each other and to the CPC in China.

Unlike Taiwan and North Korea, Singapore is an example of an attempt to counter regional Chinese influence. Early in the country’s history as an independent nation, both economic and political measures were taken to ensure independence from China. “By the time of separation, Singapore had taken steps to build...economic planning, industrialization, [and] manufacture for export.”1 This planning eventually lead to the economic strategy of the golden triangle. Singapore promoted trade with both Malaysia and China, preventing any one country from having undue economic influence. If China tried to limit trade with Singapore for political reasons, Malaysia could be relied upon as a stable trading partner. Conversely, as long as the country contained Chinese foreign-held assets, China had an incentive to not intervene militarily in Singapore. By pursuing an aggressive growth strategy, the country experienced what political economists Jose Edgardo Campos and Hilton L. Root characterize as “unusually rapid growth.”2 Singapore’s economic strategy demonstrates Chinese influence, as their trade policy was largely set in response to the looming Chinese economic threat.

Singapore shares many political similarities with communist China. Although Singapore does not have an official one-party system like China, a single party, the People’s Action Party (PAP), is dominant. Usually, in a party-dominated system, one party has short-term governing capabilities; however, the authoritarian nature of the PAP closely resembles that of the CPC in China. This similarity could indicate direct Chinese political influence, but the independence of Singapore has rested on this authoritarian structure. The dominance of the party over regional representatives of ethnic minorities allows the country to remain politically united against Chinese influence.

Taiwan was perhaps more directly and immediately affected by the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek than any other country in the region. The KMT did not arrive in Taiwan with any intention of long-term political or even economic dominance. After their military defeat, a large influx of Han Chinese party leaders fled to the island to escape the CPC. Their arrival immediately created important political and economic changes to the island. Taiwan served as a political sanctuary for the KMT in the aftermath of their defeat on the mainland, and the influx of relatively poor Han KMT supporters found themselves in a position of power over the comparatively wealthy natives. In terms of resources, Taiwan provided the raw materials of heavy industry critical to the KMT’s efforts to rebuild their military and retake the mainland.

This sudden and overwhelming Chinese influence produced a variety of similarities among disparate East Asian countries. The political influence of the KMT in the configuration of Taiwan is reminiscent of the democratic authoritarianism of China. Although the KMT did not maintain the complete political control like their Chinese counterpart, “even after the end of authoritarian rule, the KMT remained in power, a rarity among...newly emerging democracies.”3 Even though the political power of the KMT was not formalized in electoral institutions as it was in China, the KMT still displays some party dominance that makes the country a valuable comparative example to Singapore with respect to China. Important economic similarities also exist between Taiwan and China. After the KMT gained control of the
Chinese Influence

“Heavy governmental involvement in domestic corporations mirrors both historical and recent policies implemented by the CPC in China...”

country, the government developed strict policies on corporate structure and development in order to foster political loyalty. This heavy governmental involvement in domestic corporations mirrors both historical and recent policies implemented by the CPC in China. Economically and politically, Taiwan has implemented policies and institutions as both a reaction and influence from China.

The origins of the modern North Korean state are perhaps more dependent on the history of China than on that of any other East Asian country. Chinese influence began before the rise of the CPC, when Cheng Kai Shek still held political power over the various warlords controlling regions of China. At this time, the entire Korean peninsula existed as an extractive colony for the impending Japanese invasion of China. The use of the peninsula as a buffer zone between China and Japan has become pattern, but this particular occupation was important to the later economic decisions of both North and South Korea. Because the North was closer to China, Japan built heavy industries in the region, while the South remained highly agrarian to ensure a steady food supply to the Japanese troops waiting to invade. Thus, North Korea had an economic advantage upon its establishment at the end of the Korean War.

The political foundations of North Korea display important aspects of both Maoism and Stalinism. In fact, Kim Il-sung studied for a time under the newly established CPC. Today, despite rumors of tensions between the two countries, North Korea remains in a close relationship with China, although this relationship may not be voluntary. The threat of a nuclear-capable North Korea remains the primary source of funds for the government in the form of foreign aid, as the influx of resources remains a vital aspect of maintaining political stability in the dictatorship.

Although the presence of corporations in North Korea is almost non-existent, the government gives special access to certain high-ranking entrepreneurs in the government to import some contraband items. This resembles both the co-opting of elites and heavy government economic involvement in China, Singapore, and Taiwan. Politically, the importance of the peasants and class distinctions in North Korea also resembles those of Taiwan and China. As a result of its close influence from China and the variety of political and economic similarities to other, mostly disparate East Asian countries, North Korea is an excellent comparative example.

There are three important macroeconomic patterns common across Singapore, Taiwan, and North Korea that developed because of the Chinese influence over these countries. When the CPC assumed power in China, they oversaw a period of rapid industrialization and expansion. The economies of all three countries contain government control to varying degrees, whether through economic planning, collusion between government and industry officials, or personal relationships influencing government and corporate decisions.

The governments of Singapore, Taiwan, and North Korea, are heavily involved in the role of corporations as a means for development. The story of Singapore's development depends on the relationship of government and mostly foreign corporations. The government, under the People's Action Party (PAP), had made “the decision to concentrate on multinational corporations (MNCs) as the main agents of industrialization… small and medium business did have… a subordinate role.” The government played a direct role in deciding on the nature and location of the corporations composing their economy. Although this was not a unique pattern in this region, many of the previous liberal economies after which Singapore was modeled maintained a strict neutrality of government in favoring certain corporations.

Taiwan also displayed heavy government involvement. Since its beginnings through today, the island's government has attempted to manipulate corporations in very specific ways to further their foreign policy. Even in the 1990s, attempts to divert investment away from mainland China toward Southeast Asia displayed the potential to influence the foreign direction of domestic corporations. This effort far exceeded the traditional protectionism and embargos that characterize most liberalized economies because of its specific direction towards a particular region.

North Korea has a completely opposite policy from Singapore and Taiwan. It is unclear whether the dictatorship prohibits corporations outright or has simply failed to manage the economy in a way that promotes the growth of business. Either way, the ruling family is content with the current situation, so the lack of corporations can be construed as an informal policy. Instead of controlling...
companies, the government has decided that a lack of formal business would be the best. Like Taiwan and Singapore, this is far beyond anything Western countries, regardless of regime, have implemented.

All three of these countries have different incentives, but Chinese influence appears to be the unifying factor. Singapore, Taiwan, and North Korea all struggle to survive around a thriving and potentially aggressive China. As such, corporations and development appear to have been commoditized as a policy tool to manipulate foreign relations and either promote or stifle domestic industry.

Both Singapore and Taiwan offer valuable examples of government-preferred corporate structures that benefit their respective regimes. These structures allow the rulers of each country to carry out their political objectives while ensuring support from the business community. For Singapore, this meant an aggressive pursuit of multinational corporations, particularly in the financial services industry, to operate in the country. This appears to be a direct response to the threat of Chinese growth internationally. MNCs, however, went beyond lending legitimacy to a young Singaporean economy. Favoring these companies was a form of insurance policy for the small city-state. If China intervened, economically or otherwise, powerful world financial players to whom the MNCs belonged would act in the interests of preserving the country to save their own corporations. Most Singaporean firms were only small or medium-sized and existed to service the larger international firms. The government created tax incentives and economic policies to favor the international corporations to ensure their own sovereignty.

Although the goal of the Taiwanese government was the same as that of Singapore, their methods were very different. The KMT established its economic policies after their abandonment of extractive, heavy industries on the island in favor of competitive, authoritarian domestic political control. They sought the assurance of their sovereignty not from China, but rather from the local population. Since the inhabitants of the island, mostly identifying as and speaking Japanese, were much wealthier than the ruling exiles of the KMT, corporations were a threat to be managed instead of a tool for control. Corporations were limited in scope and size. Unlike the Chaebols of South Korea or the Kiretzus of Japan, Taiwanese companies had a limited scope in one area with few subsidiaries, similar to many Western businesses. Few reached the size of some modern Japanese or Korean international corporations, although many expanded their borders beyond Taiwan. Both Singapore and Taiwan continue to shape their business development policies around the role of China in their country. Singapore now occupies a solid developmental status that protects it from the influence of the Chinese government, while Taiwan has struggled to maintain a consistent policy regarding their international economic policy in the region.6

Economic political favoritism is one of the most direct influences of China originating from the civil war. In China, Mao defeated the KMT because of his ability to rally peasants, to whom he promised pieces of land. He won the war because he promised economic favoritism in exchange for political, and in this case, military support. While the exchange is not as dramatic in any East Asian country today, the trade still regularly occurs. In Singapore, the undemocratic outcomes seen from the PAP originate from the transactional political propositions of party candidates.7 PAP candidates can claim that only they will be able to secure the funding for public projects in their district, because the PAP enjoys an almost guaranteed electoral majority every election. Thus, the PAP uses economic threats as an important tool in their system of electoral dominance. Similarly, in Taiwan, one of the major political differences between the KMT and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is that the latter no longer participates in the economic favoritism of the government. The KMT opposes the CPC and thus favors an isolationist business relationship with China, whereas the DPP seeks closer ties with the East Asian region. This is an important dispute because both parties carry a certain amount of ethnic identity, the KMT for Han Chinese and the DPP in representing the interests of the natives. Despite these differences, both parties display the economic favoritism of politics in Taiwan. The low level of economic development in North Korea is due to favors that are often given directly to cabinet members who often have personal relationships with the Kim family. The members of this oligarchy gain exclusive rights to smuggle goods into the country that the basic economy fails to produce. In exchange, the importers remain loyal to the current members of the ruling family. This is the most directly transactional and personal economic favoritism of all three countries.

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The results from Singapore's 2006 election show the overwhelming electoral majority of the PAP.
Chinese Influence

As soon as Mao won the Chinese Civil War, he was careful to consolidate power. The new government was configured to maximize party control and to centralize authority within power structures of the national government. This directly led to the authoritarian rule of the CPC and assured Mao’s continued political dominance. While not all of the discussed regimes compare to the totalitarian Chinese state, and are not all modeled off of Stalinist ideals, they all display elements of authoritarianism and democratic centralism. Another key similarity between China, Singapore, Taiwan, and North Korea is the political importance of the peasant class to the stability of the ruling regime. It is uncertain whether the governments of other Asian countries modeled their reliance on peasants off the success of the Chinese land reforms in winning the Civil War, or if this is merely an East Asian political phenomenon. The historical events of China, however, created a template followed in both socialist and capitalist totalitarian and democratic regimes across the region. In addition to relying on the peasants for political support, the upper political class is also seen as essential to a well-functioning East Asian political system. The elites, whether involved in business or academia, are seen as an indispensable class in the politically stable governance of a country. This includes the involvement of business elites in government decisions, close political proximity of important private citizens to various public officials, and incentives for promising citizens to return to their home country and become involved in government. The model of authoritarianism, the importance of the peasant class, and the co-opting of business elites are all political factors originally present in the founding of China which are now mainstays of various East Asian societies.

In Singapore, PAP has remained dominant from the country’s founding through current times. Despite the twenty-two parties in Singapore today, the PAP enjoys the highest majority of seats in the parliament than in any other developed nation. The PAP has actively pursued electoral structures to ensure their continued political dominance and has instituted reforms in recent years after electoral setbacks. Although this configuration has less influence over the government than the CPC in China, it still remains the closest democracy in the world to an authoritarian regime.

Similarily, Taiwan offers a historical example of authoritarian, multi-party regimes in the region. Today, the role of partisan authoritarianism in Taiwan has significantly diminished in the wake of several electoral defeats for the KMT. This is due to the electoral reforms which “blend the constituency services of district systems with broad representation expected under PR.” Nevertheless, the original political configuration on the island contains strong parallels to the communist Chinese government under Mao.

Out of all three countries, North Korea shares the closest political configuration to the political environment under the CPC. Only one party is allowed and many opportunities for political favoritism exist because of the dependence of the ruling family on the commanders of the military. North Korea is a far more extreme example than either Taiwan or Singapore because it represents the only case in which a government is officially controlled by a party, or in North Korea’s case, the ruling family. This is not a surprising configuration because of the political links between the Kim family and the original leadership of the CPC.

At the start of the Chinese Civil War, the vast majority of the country was composed of a rural agrarian peasant class. Just as Lenin and Stalin faced challenges arguing for the differences between their predecessor’s and their own ideologies, so too did Mao face a radical departure from Stalinism in explaining the rise of communism in China. While Mao followed the Stalinist concept of communism, there was not an adequate urban population to support an uprising. Instead, Mao stretched the theory even further to assert that a country did not necessarily need to have industrialized before transitioning to communism. This justified the use of the large peasant population in fighting and expelling the KMT from the country in order to establish a communist state. Today, the role of peasants is still respected with partial sovereignty at the local levels like participatory budgeting. While the role of peasants has differed across other East Asian countries, they remain a fixture of politics in the region due to their demonstrated power in China. In North Korea, the role of the peasant class is essential as the country is now completely agrarian and peasants comprise almost the entire population outside Pyongyang. This population needs a basic level of resources to be provided by the government to prevent unrest, and this has fueled the blackmail and nuclear program in the country. These programs allow
“Heavy governmental involvement in domestic corporations mirrors both historical and recent policies implemented by the CPC in China...”

North Korea to justify receiving foreign aid from other countries to fuel the stability of the totalitarian regime that only resources can provide. Therefore, the foreign policy motivations of North Korea appear to be largely motivated by the desire for the continued stability of the domestic peasant class which, in China, successfully brought about regime change.

In Taiwan, the role of the peasant class was reversed. Although this segment of the population was comparable in size to the KMT, the incoming party was far more militarized and thus faced no physical threat. Instead, the natives were far wealthier from the lucrative sugar trade on the island than the impoverished and defeated KMT exiles. Thus, political control of the peasant class was essential for economic control of the country.

In Singapore, the rapid industrialization and efforts to include ethnic minorities in government has largely eliminated the peasant class from the political dynamic and the population in general. Instead, domestic Singaporean companies play the metaphorical role of ‘company peasants’, existing only to cater to the needs of the international financial services corporations and remaining small to mid-sized. China demonstrated the importance of the political control of peasants in a country to the domestic political stability.

From the beginning of the CPC, the co-opting of elites has remained an essential element of the authoritarian control over the government. In China, elites continue to serve a close, informal role to the government. Important businessmen are given titles specifically within the party. This way, the government remains under the control of the party and the wealth of the country remains loyal to the party rather than the state. This is a tradition which can be found around the region in Taiwan, North Korea, and Singapore.

This pattern has been strongly followed in Taiwan along economic lines. During the period of KMT electoral dominance, native business elites were welcomed to the party to prevent well-funded uprisings. Additionally, the KMT originally captured the island as a platform to reinvade China to again challenge the CPC. At the beginning of their rule, the KMT was focused on resource extraction and heavy industry to build a strong invasion force. This economic development would not have been possible without the cooperation and capital of the native elites of Taiwan.

Unlike Taiwan, North Korea has an almost reversed model. Instead of seeking out elites, the ruling family determines who are the elites. Under the caste system, only those in the top caste who have proven their family’s loyalty have an opportunity to work in government. Of these people, only those with a special relationship to the ruling family have an elite status similar to that of a businessman today in China, Singapore, or Taiwan. Control is not focused on these elites, but rather political inroads are firmly established between the ruling family and the military, who are the true elites of the country. They receive high budget discretion from the government and provide the only mechanism of political stability in a country often exposed to famines.

Singapore has the most formal process of co-opting of the elite class. First, successful businessmen are given a huge political advantage as they have the opportunity to be given a non-voting, speaking role in parliament without undergoing an election. Strict wealth qualifications also exist to run for president. The second path to political advantage involves academics and civil service. Citizens can receive lucrative scholarships to study abroad, on the condition that upon returning home they work in government. This fosters competency in the government and ensures a high level of human capital in the country. Across all three of these countries, the importance assigned to building elites into the government mirrors the importance of incorporating businessmen into the politics of the CPC.

In each of the aforementioned cases, the policies either originated as a reflection of a similar policy in China or by direct Chinese political influence in the country. Either way, China clearly holds a heavy influence over the political and economic systems of modern East Asia. As China is still under the rule of the CPC, the successor of Xi Jinping will determine the new direction and influence of China. The policies of that successor, as well as the continuation of the regime in China, will greatly affect China’s ability to exert influence over the region in the future.
Behind the
Zoomorphic Style:
A Study of Cultural Adaption
Between Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations on the Silk Road
By Zhuolun Xie, MCAS ‘19
Art History
On the Silk Road, transcultural exchange took place in many ways, one of which is through the spread of artistic motifs. People along the Silk Road engaged in these exchanges by incorporating alien artistic influences on local products. Such interactions between settled and nomadic people took place frequently between the fifth and third centuries BCE, but the two parties did not simply imitate one another. Through the representations of zoomorphic style, the Persians from the Achaemenid Empire, the Chinese from the Warring States, and the Scythian nomads from Pazyryk responded to foreign cultural elements through adaptations rather than adoptions; they modified foreign elements based on their local situations and personal preferences. Three examples from the cultures mentioned above could illustrate such adaptations.

The fallow deer images found on a pile carpet from Pazyryk Kurgan Five (Figure 1) exemplify how the Persians used their indigenous artistic understanding to process, modify, and incorporate nomadic elements. In Scythian nomadic art, animal motifs—for example the fallow deer (Figure 2)—are essential to the zoomorphic style. They are usually depicted on small metal objects such as gold plaques (Figure 3) or colored felt, serving as adornments and reflecting shamanistic beliefs. The nomads typically depict the animals as abstracted, stylized, and distorted figures for decorative purposes and represent them as wild and exuberant creatures with dynamism. The leaping deer on a golden plaque exemplifies such artistic style. The Persians, however, depict the animal motif in a different style from the nomadic expression: the heads of the fallow deer on the pile rug are cast down, and the legs are positioned as if they are slowly walking in an orderly fashion. Instead of portraying the animals in an active and energetic manner, the artisans who came from a settled civilization presented a more static and docile image.

The reason why such differences occur could be threefold. Firstly, the textile technique used to make this pile carpet limits the type of images that can be embedded. The artisan had to manually tie threads around each warp to form tiny knots, and thus it is extremely hard to maintain any continuously curvy designs no matter how many pixels there are. Secondly, the living environment of settled people prevented them from seeing animals running freely in nature. Many of these artisans may have never seen leaping deer, but learned about the image of leaping deer through nomadic artifacts. Thirdly, the settled people were less interested in the activeness and energy of wild animals, whereas the nomads regarded such activity as a representation of nature’s power. Therefore, after processing the animal motif with their intrinsic knowledge, technique, and preference, the Persians chose to accommodate the nomadic influence with their own
“Even though they were actively seeking to emulate and accept nomadic motifs, they could not avoid the filtration of foreign ideas through local value systems...”

Similar to the deer figures on the pile carpet, the horse image on a Chinese belt plaque (Figure 4) also demonstrates settled people’s cultural and artistic adaptations of a nomadic motif. The fact that the Chinese were producing metal belt plaques, along with the presence of animal motif, proves that they had active interaction with nomadic culture during the Warring States Period. Chinese products often imitated nomadic animal plaques, specifically those of horses (Figure 5). The style of the Chinese horse, however, echoes that of the Persian deer, as they are both rendered in a static manner. They both have their heads cast down, indicating domestication. The horse on the Chinese plaque has folded legs, illustrating a meek and static recumbent position, which forms a sharp contrast to the leaping gesture and bursting energy of the horse image on the nomadic plaque. Local context and preferences are important to the formation of these differences. Swift and wild horses may not have been common in China, so the Chinese needed to trade these plaques with the nomads for such horses. Thus, just like the Persian artisans, the Chinese did not have sufficient knowledge or experience to render the image in the similar style as nomads did. Because the horses were primarily used for warfare and thus had to be obedient, the Chinese might not have wanted to reflect wild and rebellious qualities on their images of horses. This example sheds light on how Chinese people experienced cultural adaptations when they interacted with the nomads. Even though they were actively seeking to emulate and accept nomadic motifs, they could not avoid the filtration of foreign ideas through local value systems, producing objects that captured a foreign motif in an indigenous style.

Though the settled peoples were receiving significant influences from nomadic cultures, the exchange was not a one-way system. The Scythians also used this opportunity to become exposed to new cultures and ideas from sedentary civilizations. The felt saddle excavated from Kurgan One (Figure 6) serves as a great example to illustrate such influence on the nomadic culture. The pattern on this felt saddle depicts animal combat, a typical theme in Scythian art, but the figure attacking the ibex is a griffin. As a mystical motif with wings and an animal head, the griffin originated in the ancient Near East and was transmitted to the nomads by means of Achaemenid art. Griffin imageries are also depicted on the inner frieze border of the Persian pile carpet. Due to differences in techniques and value systems, Persian and nomadic artisans depicted the griffin differently. While both griffin designs are abstracted and denatured, the combatting griffin on the felt saddle is stylized differently—
it is intertwine with the ibex, and together they curl up into a circle, conveying a sense of dynamism. In addition, as proposed by Liudmila Barkova, the motif of fighting animals may represent the concept of death as an act of violence perpetrated by a powerful force of nature. Nomadic artisans highlighted the griffin's aggressiveness and energy so that this foreign motif could fit well into the zoomorphic style as well as the belief system of the nomadic people.\textsuperscript{15}

Although they borrowed the griffin image and translated it into their own style, the nomads did not imitate the Persian textile technique and used applique to depict the design instead. The process of applique involves cutting off a design pattern and sewing it on top of a finished material such as felt. The Persian pile carpet, on the other hand, was made by tying 250,000 tiny knots around the warps in order to attain varied ornamental patterns.\textsuperscript{16} Not only does the applique technique save time, it also generates curvy patterns that are crucial to convey the lively, energetic designs preferred by the nomads. In addition, it is much more practical to the mobile lifestyle, as applique does not require the nomads to transport large looms. After receiving exposure to the Persian griffin motif, style, and textile technique, the nomads incorporated the griffin element into their own artistic vocabulary of animal combat, but presented it with the energetic style and applique technique that accommodates nomadic values and lifestyle.

In conclusion, the three examples through zoomorphic style demonstrate that settled people transformed nomadic artistic expressions to suit their sedentary civilizations; similarly, the steppe people modified the settled culture for their own nomadic values and purposes. The transforming and modifying processes of foreign influence illustrate adaptations rather than adoptions for both groups of people. More importantly, they serve as valuable examples of cultural exchange from the fifth to third century BCE along the Silk Road.

Figure 6. Pazyryk Felt Saddle, Kurgan 1, Pazyryk

“The transforming and modifying processes of foreign influence illustrate adaptations rather than adoptions for both groups of people...”
An indigenous Ecuadorian man in a traditional poncho riding an alpaca in a field of maíz. “Maíz,” or corn, is a dietary staple in the region, and alpaca wool is used in artisanal textiles, sweaters, and other fabrics.

Ecuador:
The Writing on the Walls

By Kirsten Agla, MA ‘19
Hispanic Studies
Graffiti is more than a pop culture phenomenon in Quito, the capital city of Ecuador. It is a way for people from different backgrounds to express themselves in the most public art gallery there is – the street. While the legality of painting the walls of buildings and public parks is questionable, street art gives a voice to those who are not traditionally represented in South American culture, such as Afro-Ecuadorians, women, and the indigenous people of Incan descent. This collection of photos focuses on graffiti and murals where each piece is uniquely quiteño, from Quito, and is clearly influenced by Ecuadorian culture and society. While not all art pieces have signatures, a few were painted by Quito native Apitatan.

An Ecuadorian man carries his daughter on his back. The text reads “a volver”, to return, so they are likely returning home.
Ecuador

A shark from the Galapagos Islands. These islands belong to Ecuador and are a source of income due to tourism.

Afro-Ecuadorians dancing and listening to music.
A man wearing an alpaca head and riding his bike next to the words “continua cicleando,” or “keep cycling,” showing the importance of the alpaca and its wool in Ecuadorian culture.

An indigenous person in the Amazon rainforest wearing a shirt with a frog pattern.
When Sugar Isn’t Sweet: Hardships in the Bateyes

By Isabel Faherty, MCAS ‘21 Economics
On the island of Hispaniola, there is “a black population and a mulatto population… a Spanish speaking population, and a Creole speaking population … a Catholic population on this side, and a Vodou practicing population on the other.” Between the two cultures, small communities called *bateyes* are caught right in the middle. A *batey* is a temporary work camp located near the plantations of sugar companies so that the workers can live closer to their work. These work camps, however, have developed into permanent communities of people of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic. These sugarcane workers are marginalized in the Dominican Republic because of their Haitian descent and lack of citizenship. They also cannot return to Haiti out of fear of being shunned for leaving. These people are among the poorest in the world, but their struggles have gone largely unnoticed.

While the issue of *batey* communities has persisted for decades, legislation has worsened the situation. In 2013, the Dominican government declared that people of Haitian descent, who are born in the Dominican Republic, are no longer automatically considered citizens, retroactively applying to anyone born after 1929. Therefore, a child of Haitian descent born in a *batey* today would be denied citizenship, as would their mother and grandparents even if they were all born in the Dominican Republic.

The issues people in the *bateyes* face today involve a long history of discrimination between Dominican and Haitian people. If these issues, including racism, lack of citizenship, poor living and working conditions, and lack of education remain unaddressed, then long-term suffering and cycles of poverty will continue to plague the *bateyes* indefinitely.

In order to understand the depth of this problem, one has to address the broader historical context of Haitian-Dominican relations, which have been strained since the early 1800s. Haiti occupied the Dominican Republic from 1822 to 1844 under a cruel regime, and the Dominican Republic had to fight to gain independence, resulting in the two countries developing separately. According to Henry Louis Gates, “once they freed themselves from the Haitians, many Dominicans did their best to reject just about everything about them — their language, their culture, and to some extent their color.” Perhaps the height of these tensions was the 1937 Parsley Massacre, during which Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo targeted Haitians and dark-skinned Dominicans near the border.

As a result, tens of thousands of people were killed. Today, Dominicans fear integration of Haitian people in their country, rather than an invasion.

Despite the evident conflict between these two countries, they are economically interdependent. When the U.S. invaded both countries in the twentieth century, they first promoted seasonal, then permanent emigration from Haiti to the Dominican Republic. This eventually led to the creation of *bateyes* since, according to Saskia Wilhelms, “sugar was the backbone of the Dominican economy, boosted by the availability of cheap Haitian labor used as cane cutters.” In the 1970s, an influx of Haitian immigrants came to the Dominican Republic either through contracts between the two governments or through sugar production companies. The idea was that they would be given temporary housing, working from December to June, and then return to Haiti for the rest of the year. Haiti, however, became increasingly politically and economically unstable, and officials instead convinced workers to remain in the Dominican Republic. Moreover, the Haitian government would not pay the workers their contract money that would help them stabilize their lives after spending a year away from home. The exploitation and discrimination from the governments and sugar production companies disproportionately affected the *batey* community. Although Haitian migration peaked decades ago, and the Dominican Republic finally gained independence in 1844, the people in *bateyes* continue to face a multitude of struggles today.

The sugarcane workers face harsh labor conditions similar to those of slavery in the U.S. According to interviews between Saskia Wilhelms and the people living in one of the *bateyes* she visited, they were denied food and water from the sugar companies while on the journey from Haiti to the Dominican Republic. Shockingly, they average eight-hour workdays, seven days a week, earning a meager wage of two dollars per day, resulting in extreme poverty. A racial hierarchy also exists within the cane cutting industry in which higher paid positions are occupied by Dominicans, and the lower by Haitians. One interviewee from La Javilla proclaimed, “here everybody is mistreated… They come on Sundays and summon everybody to work. If somebody refuses, they send the guards to hit him.” The lack of opportunity in Haiti makes it nearly impossible to find a better job somewhere else, preventing bateyanos from leaving. While there are different jobs available in the Dominican Republic,
Deportation has dire consequences, as one bateyano named Marlene Mesidor describes, “immigration officials banged on the door ... I asked the officials what would become of my belongings, they told me, ‘You came to the Dominican Republic with nothing and that is how you will leave.’”

Mesidor had an entire family in the Dominican Republic, all of whom were uprooted from their lives and forced to travel all day without food across the border to Haiti. While Mesidor is not a citizen of the Dominican Republic, she claims Dominican identity. Mesidor’s story is not uncommon. In general, lack of citizenship means that people do not have employment options, cannot receive health care, and have limited access to transportation. If the conditions of the bateyes received more international attention, it is possible that institutions could place more pressure on the government, allowing bateyanos to gain more employment and social opportunities.

The lack of birth certificates and citizenship papers is a core issue in the bateyes and causes this cycle of poverty to continue. When sugarcane workers migrate, they are given papers allowing them to stay in the country during the cane cutting season. These papers, however, are only valid in the immediate surrounding neighborhoods; the bateyanos are therefore restricted to the bateyes. This unstable status means that people in the bateyes cannot rely on the law to ameliorate their conditions, nor can they rely on the police out of fear of harassment and deportation.

Deportation has dire consequences, as one bateyano named Marlene Mesidor describes, “immigration officials banged on the door ... I asked the officials what would become of my belongings, they told me, ‘You came to the Dominican Republic with nothing and that is how you will leave.’” Mesidor had an entire family in the Dominican Republic, all of whom were uprooted from their lives and forced to travel all day without food across the border to Haiti. While Mesidor is not a citizen of the Dominican Republic, she claims Dominican identity. Mesidor’s story is not uncommon. In general, lack of citizenship means that people do not have employment options, cannot receive health care, and have limited access to transportation. If the conditions of the bateyes received more international attention, it is possible that institutions could place more pressure on the government, allowing bateyanos to gain more employment and social opportunities.

Without formal documentation, it is extremely
difficult for children to access higher education. For instance, they cannot register for the annual national exam at the conclusion of eighth grade which is required for admission into secondary school. Even if they do complete secondary school without citizenship papers, they are not granted a diploma, and thus cannot apply to a university. A few years ago, the Human Rights Watch interviewed Claubian Jean Jacques, who after graduating the top of his class and receiving many education excellence awards, was allowed to stay in secondary school without proper documentation. Dominican universities, however, will not accept people without legal papers.

Pressure on the Dominican government both to ensure rights to education and to grant citizenship to these new generations of Dominican residents would significantly improve bateyanos’ lives and communities, as well as promote economic development.

Batayanos also face marginalization based on the assumption that they do not assimilate into Dominican culture. The Dominican Republic’s main language is Spanish, whereas many Haitians speak Creole, a form of eighteenth-century French mixed with various West African languages. After three generations of living in the bateyes, however, the language spoken has mostly shifted from Creole to Spanish. Despite cultural and linguistic assimilation, third-generation bateyano children are still marginalized.

The poor living conditions in bateyes lead to a bigger issue: the spread of diseases. From leaky latrines and roaming animals to cuts from sharp sugarcane and machetes, diseases and infections can easily spread around the bateyes. HIV and AIDS are the most alarming ones, yet bateyanos receive no help from the government in addressing this problem. Like many of the issues bateyanos face, Cohen explains further that the lack of response from the government is a result of bad blood between the two countries. Furthermore, health services are rare; only two out of the ten bateyes Wilhelms surveyed had clinics, and “the quality is considered to be low and people suffer from untreated medical conditions.”

Many sugarcane workers do not even use the clinics because they fear discrimination or cannot speak Spanish. Retirement benefits or medical insurance do not exist in the bateyes. In efforts to help these issues, the Batey Relief Alliance recently built a medical clinic that offers free testing, counseling, antiretroviral therapy, and medicines to treat HIV and AIDS, giving 60,000 people a year access to healthcare. Other organizations can assist this healthcare problem by building clinics, transporting people from bateyes to cities to receive anti-HIV drugs, and supporting organizations like the Batey Relief Alliance through monetary means.

Ultimately, people in the bateyes are in a unique poverty cycle caused by a history of tensions between the two countries of Hispaniola. Institutionalized corruption and exploitation in the sugar industry as well as discrimination within the Dominican Republic has left the bateyes marginalized, but not isolated. While raising awareness may be the first step toward helping these people, more investigation into the sugar industry and more pressure on the Dominican and Haitian governments would be the next step. Moreover, education is possibly the most important factor toward advancing the communities. In the bateyes, schools either do not exist, or transportations to schools in other places are unaffordable. Those that do have schools usually only have elementary education, or language classes for adults. Creating more schools in the bateyes would qualify people for higher paying jobs than cutting sugar cane. Despite lack of citizenship, improving education has the potential to help bateyanos find jobs outside of the bateyes, and accordingly give them the resources to break this cycle of poverty.
ABDULLAHI AHMED AN-NA’IM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

By Sarya Baladi, MCAS ‘19
Islamic Civilization & Societies
An-Na’im and his Philosophy

Since the second half of the twentieth century, human rights have been of paramount importance to the international community. The 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a milestone document marking the official recognition of the inalienable and fundamental rights of the person. It set a standard as to how governments should interact with various individuals and communities within and outside their borders. Some countries, however, often ignore the demands spelled out by the United Nations and neglect human rights for the sake of political and economic gains or the maintenance of certain cultural or religious norms. In particular, many Islamic countries are known for disregarding human rights. The Freedom House’s 2017 “Freedom in the World” ranking, for example, places Muslim-majority countries such as Syria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Libya, Yemen, Iran, and Somalia at the bottom of its list, and many other international organizations and think tanks are very critical of the abuses these governments routinely commit against their people and against foreigners. In effect, with the rise of global American hegemony and the failure of Arab Nationalism to stand up to colonial tendencies, many Muslims have turned to Political Islam, which is notorious for promoting a fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic texts and enforcing orthodox Islamic norms on individuals. In turn, this has led to the rise of radical authoritarian regimes and Islamist terrorist groups in Muslim countries, as well as a surge in Islamophobia in Western countries.

In reaction to this tremendous crisis facing the Muslim World, many Muslim liberal intellectuals have argued against this traditionalist view of Islam that blatantly ignores the modern values of tolerance, democracy, and secularism. They have also published and been vocal about the various legitimate ways in which human rights should be brought to non-Western nation states, and in particular, to conservative Muslim countries. Professor Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im, an influential Charles Howard Candler Islamic and Human Rights Scholar at Emory University School of Law, is one of the leading intellectuals in this field, recognized on an international level for his important work.

Human Rights and Islam

There is little divergence in the definition of human rights among intellectuals. Human rights are commonly known as individual and collective rights that must be granted to all people on the basis of their human nature, irrespective of their personal circumstances. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights consists of thirty Articles, which focus on the upholding of dignity and equality, as well as freedom of faith, opinion, and conviction for all humans. Its main goal is to ensure that ultimately all nation states uphold “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations” based on both national and international measures. Similarly, An-Na’im defines human rights as “a framework for an adequate response to the profound social concerns of persons and their communities” aimed at “creating and maintaining the space for individuals and groups to achieve justice, personal security and well-being, general political stability and economic development, and so forth.”

To go beyond this simple definition of human rights, An-Na’im uses what he calls “The Three Cs of Human Rights” to facilitate the understanding of the complex notion, which can seem abstract or even unattainable. The first C, the “concept,” supports the claim that human rights are universal since they are the rights of the human. This challenges the popular idea that views human rights as purely a Western phenomenon, since human rights are meant to be for all. The second C, the “content,” emphasizes that the human rights project is all about inclusiveness, participation, collaboration, and dialogue: human rights are not stagnant, but rather an ongoing project that should spark productive debate with the goal of arriving to a general consensus that is compatible with different groups. As a result, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights cannot possibly be an exhausted statement about the subject as a whole and should always be revisited and reformulated. Finally, the third C, the “context,” encompasses humanity as an entity, people who identify with a myriad of ethno-religious and cultural communities and who come with a variety of backgrounds and personal experiences. An-Na’im reminds us that those residing in megacities in the Global South are the individuals that the international community should pay special attention to in its global fight for awareness and human rights. He thereby challenges individuals, communities, nation states, and the international community to uphold messages of human rights and to make them more inclusive and universal, in particular with regards to non-Western and Islamic communities.

Although human rights are important for people from all religious and ethnic backgrounds, they are especially important in the modern world for Muslims, in both individual and communal settings. On a micro level, human rights, with their guarantee of freedom of belief and of opinion, allow Muslims to practice their faith authentically rather than to become superficial believers tied down by the rules of Sharia. Contrary to popular belief, Sharia, according to An-Na’im, is not a holy text comparable to the Qur’an. Rather, it is simply an interpretation and therefore cannot be imposed on others as the ultimate truth. Although many fundamentalist Muslim individuals believe that Sharia should be enforced
through governmental structures, intellectuals such as An-Na‘im, stand by the fact that religious belief and the interpretation of holy texts are purely personal, so the nation state is to have no say in the matter. Consequently, human rights allow him to understand Sharia under his own terms since it is a text to be interpreted, not enforced.7

Human rights are also important on a macro level for Muslims; An-Na‘im believes that one cannot ignore Islam while considering issues related to the implementation of human rights or international cooperation.8 It is crucial to take Islam into consideration when examining the question of human rights, especially at a time when multiple crises of unprecedented scale and magnitude are facing the Islamic world. Despite the grim nature of these crises, which involve lack of political freedom and discrimination against women and minorities, An-Na‘im affirms that they should be viewed as an occasion for both the Islamic world and the international community to look introspectively at their current strategies and to change them for the better. He calls this pragmatic optimism, as it is an opportunity for positive transformation in the Islamic world.

Despite this urgency within Islamic circles, An-Na‘im strongly believes that Islam should not be singled out as the only religion in need of special attention in terms of human rights. The same consideration should be applied to all groups, and it should be about believers rather than the religious group itself. There are multiple traditions and trends within each religion, making it dangerous to make generalizations about a certain group based solely on their religious identifier, as humans are conditioned to do. This mentality completely transforms the analysis, which is now concerned not with stereotypes but rather with individuals in their particular socio-economic or political contexts, and with how these contexts influence them as believers.9

The Current Human Rights Paradigm and its Flaws

An-Na‘im sees multiple flaws in the current human rights paradigm, which make it impossible for the international community to fully implement it in non-Western societies, particularly in Islamic societies. Most notably, he is against the prevailing myth that human rights are Western, and that they are thus only truly compatible with Western cultures and the Judeo-Christian tradition. In effect, human rights are generally viewed as an infallible Western phenomenon that are to be imposed on non-Western societies in order for them to abandon their outdated norms and to achieve true modernization nationally and harmony internationally...”

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themselves against the multiple “abuses and excesses of the powers of the state that gave rise to Western articulations of these rights.”

Through the prevalence of colonial and neo-colonial structures, the human rights paradigm has evolved in the same direction, in a way that conflates Westernization as universalization. This is evident through the multiple instances in which Western countries have recreated their colonial trends in the name of human rights. The American invasion in Iraq of 2003 is emblematic of this neo-colonial mentality regarding human rights. An-Na‘īm not only characterized the invasion as “illegal and immoral,” but also sees it as “a negation of the possibility of the rule of law in international relations,” since it is unfeasible for international law to prevail when world leaders are convinced that they have the power to invade and occupy less powerful countries when their opinion is validated, especially without debate on the legitimacy or legality of the issue.

One should question An-Na‘īm’s strong critique of international assistance in cases of ethnic cleansing and genocide. These horrific instances have not been uncommon in the twenty-first century, as illustrated by the suffering of the Yazidi people at the hands of ISIS, and that of the Rohingya people at the hands of the Myanmar Army. Both have received minimal military and humanitarian assistance from the international community. In a globalized context where the dignity of the individual and respect for diversity are very important values, it would be irresponsible and cowardly for powerful nations to turn their backs on people being slaughtered, as the United States and other major countries infamously did in the case of the Rwandan Genocide of 1994.

Paradigm Improvement

An-Na‘īm offers a distinct approach to the introduction of human rights in non-Western circles, particularly in Islamic circles. International leaders and organizations must first understand that the foundation and amelioration of human rights in certain societies is a slow process that can only happen over time. The way human rights are conceived changes decade by decade, and it would be dangerous to view human rights as “an established ‘given’ concept and specific predetermined normative content to be discovered or proclaimed through international declarations and rendered legally binding through treaties.” It is of paramount importance to always be thinking and rethinking the idea of human rights in order for it to be relevant and representative of modern society. There is great diversity of thought within a nation state, and it is the interactions between different groups that determine the direction in which the country moves as a whole. Although the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a landmark document, it should be taken with a grain of salt in light of the evolution of world cultures, demographics, and of the concept itself.

In light of the constant development of cultures and of human rights, An-Na‘īm is convinced that cross-cultural communication is essential for human rights to be truly upheld and to spread across the world while respecting democratic standards. While external actors should not impose their values onto others, An-Na‘īm encourages them to influence others through productive dialogue. He characterized dialogue as humanizing since it “[strives] for humane outcomes, without being naïve or simplistic about the complexity and difficulty of the task.” This will ensure that internal actors are truly receptive to these new ideas, which would then have a chance to be implemented in the most transparent and just way possible. Moreover, external actors should engage in conversations within their own communities, thereby looking for parallels between various cultures. External actors should also support internal participants in their quest to promote change rather than imposing the change onto them. The promotion of dialogue over imposition, according to An-Na‘īm, can only lead to positive outcomes, since dialogue ultimately “[promotes] the universality of shared values at a theoretical or conceptual level by highlighting moral and philosophical commonalities of human cultures and experiences.”

The seemingly impossible reconciliation between local cultural and religious traditions, and the norms of modern universal human rights, requires constant and active conversation, debate, and consensus-building within the local circles, as well as cross-cultural dialogue within the international community.

An-Na‘īm thus states that the human rights paradigm must become a people-centered process of cultural transformation and political mobilization rather than a state-centered process of political pressuring and enforcement, as this is the only way the true protection of
human rights can happen. The people-centered strategy is, according to An-Na’im, the only way to achieve this goal since it is based on individuals rather than on nation states, which can never be true protectors of human rights. The state-centered process that is currently in place is non-viable, as it is based on a neo-colonial structure that pursues unrealistic projects and on an artificial protection of fundamental rights through foreign imposition. Conversely, individuals need to be at the core of human rights. Human rights do not simply spread by officially declaring them in public institutions. It is important that people put in the effort to make certain fundamental rights prevail in the hearts of others around the world, allowing them to be recognizable among governments and international organizations. In other words, rights only become universal when individuals and societies have engaged in productive discourse and put in the work to make them so.17

An-Na’im uses the example of honor killings, which are quite prevalent in Muslim societies, to clarify his point. Amnesty International, a London-based international human rights organization, reports that this entails the murder of women in the name of honor by male relatives for actions such as talking with an unrelated male to consensual sexual relations outside marriage, being a victim of rape, seeking a divorce or refusing to marry the man her family has chosen for her. According to the report, these killings happen most frequently in regions with large Muslim populations, and are often justified by Sharia, which classifies sexual intercourse outside of marriage as a crime.18

While An-Na’im acknowledges that these acts of murder have no place in modern society, he strongly believes that international actors should not be enforcing the ban of honor killings in Muslim societies. A superior alternative would be to address honor killings “through an international discourse within communities as an essential element in a range of possible strategies to combat crimes of honor.” This would lead to individuals and groups of people questioning the place that crimes of honor have within public and private spheres of their community in the modern context of the twenty-first century.19 Nevertheless, cross-cultural dialogue, as laudable as it may be, does not deliver results in the short-term. An-Naim’s theory of “international discourse within communities” is one that is difficult to implement and cannot possibly be applied to urgent situations such as genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Islam and the New Human Rights Paradigm

An-Na’im strongly believes that Muslims, like any other ethnic or religious group, are in need of human rights and secularism to protect their liberties, to promote justice in their societies, and to ensure their happiness. An-Na’im does not see secularism as a force that steers believers away from the righteous path, but rather as an avenue that enables those of all religions to freely practice, change, or abandon those beliefs, as this is the only way the believer will be genuine in his or her faith. A secular relationship between religion and state, as An-Na’im argues, is therefore essential “for the political stability, social and economic development, and general well-being of Islamic societies.”20 He favors the American model of secularism, one that allows believers to practice their faith while giving them the freedom to do so in the way they please, hence protecting both religion and secularism.21

An-Na’im states that it is paradoxical for a nation state to claim that it is Islamic when it denies the freedom of the believer to debate ideas about Sharia, which he considers by no means to be a holy text to be viewed as uncontestable or to be imposed by the state.22 It is common for some Islamic countries to commit numerous and inhumane human rights violations, such as imprisonment or even execution for questioning the religious doctrine of the state. This not only undermines the legitimacy of the state, but also of Islam itself as a religion that has a place in the modern world, as many people in the West have come to believe. On the other hand, taking religion out of public life entails eliminating civic pluralism. Muslims, like any other believers, will take their personal beliefs into evaluation when considering matters of public policy and private choice, and at times conflate personal religious beliefs with secular issues when making political decisions.23

As a result, there is a very strong connection between religion, secularism, and human rights: they are all interdependent and “the apparent tensions between any or among all of them can be overcome by their conceptual synergy.”24 Since many believe that they are incompatible with one another, it is essential that each of them undergoes an internal transformation, so they adapt to one another, creating a society that upholds the dignity of all. This interaction and alliance among religion, secularism, and human rights can only lead to positive consequences for justice and inclusivity in the international community. Although they seem
incompatible at times, especially religion in relation to human rights and secularism, the true upholding of one paradigm leads to the possible manifestation of the other two, meaning that they are all somehow dependent on one another.\(^{25}\)

In order for this positive change to come about, human agency and individual action are absolutely essential. Islam, for example, should make use of *ijtihad*, the constant critical independent questioning or reasoning about legal or social questions, which not only would be in line with the Islamic tradition itself, but also guarantee that Muslims always question the evolution of Islam to ensure that its development is in line with the values of the modern world. Islamic traditions, therefore, should be open to internal transformations in relation to modern external political or social trends, as well as in relation to the diversity of Islamic religious traditions themselves. This can be the catalyst for positive changes within certain Islamic groups which are long overdue, in particular the development of freedom of opinion, of the press, and of religion, as well as the rights for ethno-religious minorities or for women.\(^{26}\)

An-Na’im admits that many Muslim individuals and communities have generally failed at the task of correctly using *ijtihad*, especially when confronting the issue of global Islamist terrorism. Although the responsibility of each individual for the persistence of domestic and international terrorism largely varies by circumstance, it is important that each Muslim does his or her share to contribute to the de-normalization of political violence, inequality, and intolerance within Islamic public and private institutions.\(^{27}\)

In order for this important goal to be achieved, and for Islam to be truly a religion of peace and tolerance, political mobilization within Islamic communities in both Western and non-Western countries, and in both liberal and conservative circles, is much needed. This requires constant efforts by Muslim individuals to transform their respective communities by questioning deeply entrenched assumptions about Islam and Muslims and challenging social institutions. Mobilization and productive dialogue will undoubtedly revolutionize human rights in Islamic personal circles and official institutions, eventually allowing the relationship between Islam and modernity to transform Islam on a global scale, ensuring justice and human rights for Muslim men and women.\(^{28}\)

To illustrate the power of political mobilization, An-Na’im uses the example of the Muslim Egyptian women who have taken part in a secular political movement to guarantee their rights. This example shows that religion is in need of both secularism and human rights, and that political mobilization is essential to attain this synergy. Human rights would allow these women to reformulate Islamic traditions in a way that is most suitable with the values of the twenty-first century and would also allow them to safeguard their culture if they wish to do so. In a similar way, living in a secular state would allow these women to practice the Islam they want to practice without fear of governmental retaliation, hence living out their faith in the most genuine way possible. As a result, it is clear that through the power of political mobilization, human rights and secularism can become a positive force for religions, especially for Islam. In the age of multiple crises in the Islamic world, they would help Muslims avoid the difficult choice between either rejecting their religion entirely or abandoning their own human dignity, ultimately allowing them to practice their faith while upholding the values of the modern world.\(^{29}\)

**Conclusion**

Through his multiple works of scholarship, An-Na’im has made his commitment to human rights clear as well as his strong belief in the legitimate place of Islam in the modern world of secularism and tolerance. He has dedicated his life to ensuring that Islam moves in the right direction towards the respect for the dignity of every human being, and that human rights move away from the Western and state-centric paradigm they have been stuck in and towards a people-centered paradigm of cross-cultural dialogue and political mobilization. 

“An-Na’im thus states that the human rights paradigm must become a people-centered process of cultural transformation and political mobilization rather than a state-centered process of political pressuring and enforcement, as this is the only way the true protection of human rights can happen...”
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