

# Makers, Fakers, & Takers

by Richard Kostelanetz



Especially in the north of Israel the traveler can visually identify the border by land that is cultivated for agriculture. On the other side of the border, whether in Syria or Jordan, land with the same qualities is barren, simply because the people residing there can't make it work. Farming isn't expensive, as Nature does most of the work in turning seed into food; but exploiting its gifts does require considerable organization and attention, not to mention respect for organization and attention. For various cultural and historic reasons, some people can make and bake while others can't. Along the same playing field at the Israeli border the traveler observes visibly unequal results.

Back in 1899, a young writer named Winston Churchill acutely observed that "wherever the followers of the Prophet rule or live...the effects are improvident habits, slovenly systems of agriculture, sluggish methods of commerce, and insecurity of

property.” He continued: “Individual Muslims may show splendid qualities, but the influence of the religion paralyses the social development of those who follow it.” Whether forces other than religion contribute to this social backwardness I’ll let others decide.

Stepping back, taking an economic view, consider that some people are makers while others are takers. Some of the latter try to take from their neighboring takers, though it’s more profitable for them to take as much as they can from those who make wealth. This principle informs my understanding of the Middle East. The sad truth is that nearly all Muslim economies are disasters unless they have abundant natural resources. In that case a privileged class controlling the resources lords over most of their impoverished countrymen.

One difference recently is that the takers try to enlist outside forces to support their efforts at taking. Unable to attract sufficient charity from their wealthier Muslim neighbors or to conquer them, certain Arab peoples try to appeal to elements in the West, especially in the United Nations, in their efforts to appropriate Israeli wealth. Takers fake when their leaders try to blame poverty on external forces, rather than internal cultural insufficiencies. With the Israeli deannexation of Gaza the takers succeeded politically, only to squander their takings with mismanagement and wonton destruction, incidentally undermining the Western sentiment that outside forces can create preconditions for more equal social results. (By contrast, when Malaysia dumped Singapore, it became wealthier than its sometime master.) Should any reader doubt, consider visiting these Middle Eastern scenes and seeing for yourself.

These machinations aren’t new, as one recurring truth of Jewish history is that takers fake whenever they try “legally” to appropriate Jewish makings. Remember Spain in the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century, Russia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and Germany in the

third and fourth decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The truth is that the charity of outsiders seems doomed until benefactors insist that takers cease faking and are, instead, encouraged to be makers. Only then will the results from level playing fields begin to appear more equal.