open to Mr Kinnock to take advantage of fairer conditions created by the Speaker.

Select Committees in their remote garrets are prized for detailed and difficult quizzing of ministers and their Civil Service advisers. Question Time in the Chamber cannot do that, but with a touch of cool from the Labour leader it could be made difficult and specific for Mrs Thatcher. And since she is a great coper with detail, it could become actually rather instructive. Hardly anyone realises the fact, but Mr Speaker has tentatively created one precondition for a more responsible Chamber.

If the handling of Question Time is made harder for the government machine, so the incentive to draw blood with a sword-point rather than a hatchet increases. There is actually a case for going further than Mr Weatherill is free to do and confining questions to the Opposition parties. Is it possible for the silliness which has grown up partly out of frustration to recede if that frustration is met and accommodated? Only an Opposition (or Oppositions since we have the smaller parties) can answer that. One of them already has: the reputation of Dr David Owen, leader of the Social Democrats, has taken a flying leap simply on the strength of his handling of questions. Sharp, measured, but entirely civil and without the unmixed curse of a mob behind him, Dr Owen has demonstrated that Question Time *is* useful, *can* be exploited and *does* trouble the Government.

Because he can handle the despised quarter-hour while the Liberal leader, David Steel—a long-time disliker of the Chamber—cannot, Dr Owen has made himself in the eyes of the listening public and of very many Liberals the *de facto* leader of the two-party Alliance. The Chamber is supposed to be declining. Many politicians will tell you that they hate it, but it remains the squash-court wall off which the vital shots are played. It is a healthy counterforce against the élitism which affects too many MPs with ministerial ideas. It is the test of courage and quick thinking, and (disgraceful, trivialising, and shameful though this may be) it is the test of personality. It is only in the Chamber that the limitations of highly qualified men show up.

Bureaucrats forced to debate in public have a way of sounding like bureaucrats, likewise bores, likewise prigs. Dislike of the Chamber has its roots partly in fastidiousness and partly in fear of its rough democratic effectiveness.

The Speaker has behaved as an upholder of the Chamber's rights. He has made a mild assault on executive evasions of their duty to the Chamber; he has shown a slight tendency to lean towards a heavily outnumbered Opposition which is also in danger of being demoralised, and to be helpful to the Government's critics. All boats have to tack differently in different circumstances. And I would judge that, although he is not a dominant personality and is accused of weakness, our new Speaker has shown very profound long-term good judgment by helming this particular boat in a way which will make intelligent and hopeful exploitation of these public occasions more likely. The Opposition parties have been given a ball. It is up to them to run with it, not shout at it.

Thinking about the Violence in Lebanon

A Conversation between Elie Kedourie *&* Andrew Mango

Kedourie: The horrific and pitiful events in the Lebanon—events which will no doubt continue, and perhaps increase in horror—are in our minds continually. But what struck me in recent months was one event in particular: the murder of Dr Malcolm Kerr, the President of the American University in Beirut. It seemed a purely gratuitous act, of advantage to no one. It shocked me especially, because I had met Dr Kerr and such acquaintance brings home to one the savagery of the situation. When the news of his murder came I could not help reflecting ruefully on the situation which brought it about. Dr Kerr was the President of a famous university which had been in existence for decades and was considered a beacon of learning for the whole area. Did the very existence of the American University in Beirut and what it taught somehow contribute to the situation in Lebanon, the situation in the whole Middle East area, as well as to this tragic assassination in the University grounds?

The University of Beirut is an American university, a Western university, inculcating a Western ethos and Western habits of mind. Part of this ethos is the notion that politics is an ordinary kind of life, an ordinary kind of activity; that to engage in politics, to pursue the political life, is beneficial to oneself and to society at large. In its native habitat, the West, this view of politics is buttressed by a tradition and a whole range of social and political arrangements. There it makes sense; and one doesn't expect anything very horrific to result from it. But in Middle Eastern conditions, as we have seen

This is *the second in a series of conversations (see "The Middle East: Illusions Great and Small",* Encounter, *September–October 1982) between Elie Kedourie, Professor of Politics at the University of London and Editor of "Middle Eastern Affairs", and Dr Andrew Mango, who works in London as a broadcaster and is the author of three books on Turkey.*

again and again, the aspiration to engage in politics in the hope of "making things better" seems inevitably to lead to oppression, torture, murder, and terrorism. Such politics seems to envelop the most benign activities and the most wholesome instincts in a dreadful and sinister pall.

The murder of Dr Kerr in the grounds of his own university put me in mind of some lines by W. B. Yeats, who of all modern poets that I know is the most subtle in his understanding of political deceptions and the horrors attending the life of politics.

Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?
Did words of mine put too great strain
On that woman's reeling brain?
Could my spoken words have checked
That whereby a house lay wrecked?

The kind of question that Yeats asks with reference to the Civil War in Ireland at the end of World War I is the same kind of question that one has to ask about the inculcation of Western ideas on politics in Middle Eastern schools and universities.

MANGO: *But do you think that what we are facing in the Middle East is really the effect of Western political thought? Or is it a fairly normal conflict between groups with different interests, groups which find very little common ground, which are affected by outside influences—the West, the Soviet Union—and which are much more concerned with their own material prospects than they are with theory? Theories there are in plenty; but theory may well be a cover for something very much more primordial. The American University in Beirut has been called one of "the cradles of Arab Nationalism", and Nationalism is a potent force. But was it Nationalism which created the modern Middle East? Wasn't it, rather, the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire, then the withdrawal of the British Empire, and the creation of the Israeli State and its repercussions—these comings and goings, invasions and counter-invasions, intrusions and departures, and their effect on territory, on the distribution of people, on the power of groups—which were more important than the ideas you have been emphasising?*

KEDOURIE: Certainly there are all kinds of groups with traditional attitudes, hatreds and fears of one another, and this is now coming to the surface. But, to my mind, the influence of "theory", as you call it, is that it has made these existing, or latent, or even manifest conflicts more embittered, much more difficult to compromise, because belief in a particular theory has meant that frenzied people would go to the very end in order to realise the vision embodied in the theory.

MANGO: *And yet the most spectacularly potent theory which we've seen at work recently—and the assassination of Dr Malcolm Kerr was your starting point—is in a way the oldest theory. Aren't the Shi'ite assassins and terrorists of today the direct lineal descendants of the* **Assassins**, *the Ismaili Assassins of the Middle Ages? They are not moved by any new-fangled political theory; they are moved by the most elemental medieval forces—what we used to call "Religious Fanaticism." In our more ecumenical mood nowadays, we don't use the word "fanaticism"; so let's call it* **zeal**.

KEDOURIE: The Ismailis were a very small sect; they certainly did not control a whole country, and their notions were not accepted by very large numbers of people. They were, and remained, a very small group. But this modern theory—which I suspect does have similarities with the kind of notions inculcated by the leaders of the Assassins—does not have an Ismaili inspiration. It has a European inspiration, and that is why one has to mention Europe and the effect of Western notions about what can be gained from politics, and the possibility of salvation through politics. It is this which exacerbates the existing conflicts and the existing hatreds.

I DON'T DENY *the importance of these European theories, at least not totally. But I would say that more important than the importation of European ideas or ideologies has been the arrival in the Middle East (and in other parts of the Third World) of lethal Western arms. After all, the Assassin normally killed by using a dagger, and killed one person at a time. The modern Shi'ite extremist, with his trucks packed with explosives, can kill hundreds in one blow. And it's not just trucks full of explosives; there's the spectre of kamikaze planes, of destruction on a very much larger scale. We've already had the bombardment of East Beirut, and now of West Beirut. The ability of people with a largely medieval mentality to destroy their opponents wholesale has introduced a qualitative change into the situation.*

KEDOURIE: Again, I agree. But, if what you say is true, there seems to be no reason why one area of the Middle East after another should not be subjected to the same kind of destruction. After all, these hatreds and conflicts exist everywhere in the Middle East, and there seems no possibility of anyone, any power, restraining these violent local forces. And this is what is so sinister: that one cannot see how any individual or any state, inside or outside the area, can either by power or by policy exercise a restraining influence and say, "Stop! This is the order that I want!"—and make that decision stick.

MANGO: *I don't agree—I don't believe it is a totally new situation. In the last decades of the British Empire, one term recurred constantly. It consisted of three words: "an agreed solution." British policy, certainly in the closing years of the Empire, did not take many initiatives, or seek to impose settlements. British policy existed, it was said, in order to assist parties locked in conflict to arrive at "an agreed solution," and to create the conditions within which that solution would be found. Now, in most cases no agreed solution was found. I'm not even sure if diplomats believed in it; but let us say they did believe. But what actually happened was quite different.*

For example, after the end of World War I the Greeks and the Turks were locked in battle in Anatolia, the Greeks having landed there with a large degree of support from the victorious Allies. No agreed solution was found. The Turks defeated the Greeks, and that result was accepted by Britain and the other Allies. There was no agreed solution in Palestine, where it was apparently sought for a long time—Palestine was partitioned.

There was no agreed solution in India—India was also partitioned. There was no agreed solution in Cyprus—Cyprus was partitioned: much later, but that was the end result of all the conferences on Cyprus.

What I'm suggesting is that in all these past problems it wasn't ideas that mattered. Western policy mattered, but Western policy did not impose decisions. It provided some sort of framework, usually a very weak one, within which local forces battled it out and one of them won. When President Reagan speaks of creating a "broadly-based and representative Lebanese Government", of achieving conditions of stability in which American aid could be resumed, those "agreed solutions" once again come to mind; and I feel we are back where we were with the dissolution of the British Empire—in the end we're seeing the local forces asserting themselves, finding their own level, and creating a situation which we will have to evaluate at some time in the future.

KEDOURIE: Yes, "an agreed solution" is an execrable joke, and one which is repeated again and again. In the absence of countervailing power, the absence of a power which can impose itself, these conflicts can go on and on; and there seems to be no reason why they should ever stop. This is the case in the Lebanon, and in the Arab-Israeli conflict. So the fact that there is no outside power which can impose order means that no order is possible, for there is no indigenous source of order.

MANGO: *In Eastern Europe, let alone in Western Europe, centuries of warfare have produced an order. Why can't you foresee a situation in the Middle East where an order—in which there will be victors and vanquished, not necessarily a just order or one which satisfies everybody—will hold, and will produce material conditions within which the population of the region can live reasonably calm lives and possibly achieve well-being and prosperity? Consider Turkey, not so long ago. There have been wars in Turkey, civil commotion after the creation of the Turkish State; but one cannot say there is no prospect of a solution to the basic problem of law and order and of creating a stable society. The framework of law and order does exist in Turkey. Why exclude the establishment of stability—perhaps not one to our liking, but* **some** *sort of stability—in the Middle East?*

KEDOURIE: One can never exclude any such outcome, but in the present circumstances I do not see where such a stability is to come from. For centuries on end, stability in Eastern Europe depended on the existence of large Powers which could impose their own order and strive to live as amicably as possible with their neighbours. If a state of peace could not endure, then occasionally they found themselves at war; but these were essentially limited wars which would end in compromise, in some kind of settlement which might last for the time being. Again, in Western Europe the European Powers had some notion of a society of states whose members could certainly be involved in conflicts but could also live side by side with one another in some form of "international order." Now this kind of notion about "international order" in a society of states is entirely missing in the Middle Eastern tradition. In the Middle East there has to be an overlord; if there isn't, the thing is not workable. The notion of a society of Middle Eastern States, the notion of a balance-of-power between and among these States, simply doesn't exist.

DOES ONE NEED *a balance of power, or can small states and large states co-exist more or less peacefully? I'll return to my Turkish example. The scenes that took place in February when West Beirut was captured by "Moslem Militias" (as they were called) reminded me—to some extent; there are differences—of the scenes in Izmir in 1922. There, too, there were Allied fleets, cruising off the Turkish coast as the Turkish troops entered the city, having vanquished the Greeks. There was an exodus of the population; the city was largely destroyed; Allied plans were frustrated. And yet out of that destruction a new order was born (though certainly not one to the satisfaction of the Greeks). Might not what we see in Lebanon today be simply the destruction of Maronite ascendancy from which a new order, in which the Maronites have a smaller place or no place at all, will emerge?*

KEDOURIE: Perhaps; but the Turkish situation is, I think, exceptional in that there was a Turkish ruling class, and it was the heir of long centuries of Ottoman dominion. It was a ruling class which had a notion of political order and could enforce that notion; it could also rely on a population which was on the whole passive and willing to be guided by its rulers. This is the first point.

The second difference from the rest of the Middle East is the Greeks. The Greeks were massacred and evicted from Izmir, and Izmir today is a wholly Turkish city. The Greeks had somewhere to go—they went to Greece. But where are the Maronites to go? Where are the Druze to go, if the Maronites get the upper hand? And there are similar situations all over the Middle East. Again, outside Turkey there isn't that kind of traditional ruling class which can impose its order (or its view of order) on a population. These populations are no longer passive; they have been—how shall I put it?—indoctrinated. Indoctrinated by governments, indoctrinated by media, indoctrinated and made activist by what they hear and see all around them.

MANGO: *Where are the Maronites to go? I wouldn't like to see it, but it is conceivable that they will emigrate to the "New World"; they might simply have to leave the Lebanon. But it hasn't come to that, of course. And where are the Druze to go? Groups of population have disappeared, or been absorbed, or been dispersed in the past. I agree that the Arab Middle East today does look very much like stains of oil on a glass slide—coalescing, splitting up again, unable to form any pattern at all. But behind that appearance there may be the very unpleasant process—in the sense of the suffering it causes people—of "homogenisation": that in fact some groups are being defeated, being relegated to the margin of the state, and others are becoming dominant. In the Lebanon, of course, one prime example of that has been the growth in the power of the formerly despised Shi'ites, the peasants of the South. The idea of the Shi'ites occupying "Westernised, civilised West Beirut" would have* *been inconceivable some time ago. Now they have become an important element, even if they never dominate a new homogenised population.*

Perhaps the main difference between Turkey and the Arab Middle East is that a Turkish Nation is more easily definable within its territory; somehow one knows where it starts, more or less, and where it ends. Whereas an Arab Nation is perhaps still only a fiction, existing only in theory; and the travail needed to produce—or to fail to produce—an Arab Nation is what creates instability in the Middle East.

These are fundamental issues which have to be kept in mind if one is to try and make sense, in some fashion, of what is going on now in the Lebanon and elsewhere. How successful is any attempt by the media (and it is only the media who can attempt it) to convey a sense of the complexity of the potential disasters which lie lurking in this area? The media have two tasks: to present what they see, to give an account of what is going on around them; and to try and give some kind of appreciation of the meaning of what they see. Though reporting of what goes on is, on the whole, vivid and well done, the analysis seems to fall woefully below what is required. Why do you suppose this is?

Mango: *Basically because this is an alien environment, to which the Western media bring their own domestic preoccupations. I am not speaking, of course, of Eastern media, which only print what the rulers want them to print, or portray, or convey—the indigenous media which serve the defined purposes of those who control them. But as far as the independent and prestigious Western media are concerned, one problem is that they are bred in the adversarial tradition of "the Fourth Estate", the power that questions the Establishment. Their attitude to those in power stems, I think, from the Romantic tradition. To some extent, every Western journalist worth his salt is a descendant of Byron lambasting Lord Castlereagh. They feel they are there to expose the deceits of the rulers, to make sure at least that those in power do not get away with untruths. And of course in the Middle East, where Western governments have been trying (and failing) to impose some sort of order, the media have concentrated on the inability to impose that order. They have put the worst possible construction on the motives of those governments, they have criticised them throughout the operation, and they have selected those facts—or those appearances—which strengthen their general anti-Establishment stance. As far as the media are concerned, the Lebanon is a continuation of Nicaragua, or Viet Nam, or a variety of other areas of conflict where the West has tried—and failed—to impose its views. Reporters and TV-cameramen arrive, and say that this is a forlorn and possibly (in the minds of some of the journalists concerned) an immoral enterprise.*

Kedourie: If this is so, then the media are failing in their duty, which is to convey objectively and dispassionately to readers, listeners, and viewers what is going on in the world. I was very struck recently by the reports of the *coup d'état* in Nigeria. The whole of the press, radio, and so on, was full of details of the corruption that had existed in Nigeria under the Constitution, stories of rigged elections, etc., etc. Probably all these stories were true; but what struck me was that when this so-called "constitutional order" existed in Nigeria—elections, a president, a parliament, an independent press—we saw and heard very little about Nigerian corruption. At the time of the recent Nigerian elections nobody said that they were rigged; and nobody, although it was familiar to experts, reported the scale of corruption. Today—rightly—there is great indignation about attempts by Unesco to create what is called a "New Information Order" which would be a fetter on uncensored reporting from Third World countries. The fetters are there *now*; but they are self-imposed fetters, and result in the same kind of misinformation, giving a misleading picture of the outside world, which a Western-subsidised "New Information Order" will simply organise and make more uniform and more prevalent.

Mango: *Perhaps we should distinguish between superficiality (and reporting of Africa is perhaps one example of superficiality) and misconstrued or wrong interpretations. In Africa there aren't many Western journalists around. When they do go there (and they go rarely), they see the appearances, they report on the appearances, and they usually draw unwarranted conclusions. But in the Middle East there are droves of Western journalists. Factual reporting is fairly full: one gets to know, for the most part, what is physically happening—who is actually firing what guns, who is being shot at, bombed, or massacred. The bias and distortion tend to occur in the commentary and interpretation, and stem from the tendency of reporters to see a foreign journalistic assignment as part of a campaign to prove the fallibility of their own rulers in Washington, or elsewhere—to see the fall of West Beirut in the light of the fall of Saigon. This certainly dramatises the story. But the story is not only dramatised; it is also ideologised in an attempt to draw "moral" or "idealistic" conclusions, and very often wrong and irrelevant ones.*

Kedourie: To me it seems less an attempt to draw moral conclusions, and more like an unprofessional campaign to sit in judgment and indict officials and ministers and the powers-that-be. They are, in effect, trying to act as a kind of universal judge. This is the kind of pretension which in history is associated with figures such as Innocent III, Boniface VIII, and the like. We know what happened to these historic claims to sit in constant, relentless judgment over everybody. I don't think this is a stance which can be sustained by our Fourth Estate. The more the attempt is made by what is called "investigative journalism" to sit in judgment on governments and on politicians, the more public suspicion and popular dislike are likely to be aroused. The situation in this respect is much more extreme in the United States than in Britain; but here, too, the same kind of arrogance and presumption and the same kind of reaction to these pretensions are more and more to be seen. And there is another element which goes hand in hand with this attempt to "rush to judgment" on the world and on the behaviour of governments. This involves the political passions; it involves "taking sides", assuming that one particular faction or ethnic group is much more worthy (or enlightened, or "progressive") than the others, and that therefore all energies should be bent to supporting that particular side.

I was interested to see in the recent Fleet Street memoirs by Harold Evans a reference to some journalist on *The Times* who, as a demonstration of sympathy, put up a PLO poster in his office. This seems to me to go clean against what journalists should stand for. What they should really stand for is again encapsulated for me in some lines of Yeats's which are worth quoting because once more he seems to go to the heart of the matter on political issues. He is not speaking here about journalists, but it is fully applicable to journalists and ought to be their motto:

> *Bound neither to Cause nor to State,*
> *Neither to slaves that were spat on,*
> *Nor to the tyrants that spat.*

Both tyrants and slaves should be scrutinised by journalists with an equally cold eye.

MANGO: *They should be, but journalists are human and have views of their own: some are often very silly, but sometimes—rarely—they are wise. The point is that the media irritate, and perhaps it's right that they should. By "muck-racking", by continuing the ceaseless campaign of questioning their own governments, they may stop their governments "getting away with murder" (as the phrase has it) or doing other unsound things in the long run. I don't think the danger lies here.*

The danger lies very much more in the fact that this ceaseless criticism is inhibiting all action. Just now, this to some extent necessary, but irritating and dangerous attitude of journalists is particularly to the fore because we have conservative governments (with a small c) in the United States and in a number of European countries—in Britain, in West Germany. These are governments which would in any case be the butt of journalistic criticism. What is more, these governments are assured of a certain stability—at least, they seem to be in place for the foreseeable future. So journalists can, in the last analysis, feel safe in allowing themselves a greater degree of licence to criticise—in the confident knowledge that Nanny will still be there to protect them. And it is, of course, the very government which they criticise so sharply that they expect still to be there to protect them and save the situation if they were ever to go "too far"—if, through their media-bravura, trouble were to increase dangerously. As Hilaire Belloc put it in one of his "Cautionary Tales", they

> *. . . . always keep a hold of Nurse*
> *For fear of finding something worse.*

Their skins can be saved; but what of the situation they leave behind?

Defying Gravity

I can scarcely bid you good-bye,
even in a letter. I always made
an awkward bow. God bless you!

JOHN KEATS

Between the decorous lips
of *Henry James in Cambridge*
a book-mark lolls like a tongue
unstrung, still trying to say
something:
Remember that day
when you, too, come to take leave;
remember reading aloud
to her, as she darned your sleeve;
remember the hands and how,
defying gravity, she rose—
"Let's leave Henry James for now"—
bending her head to receive
the last but one kiss on her brow;
making, lest you should grieve
at the curtains' perceptible close,
an imperceptible bow.

Jon Stallworthy