Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan explains his intellect is in the West but his heart is in the East

"My grandfather was born in Karachi, lived most of his lifetime in India and was the first member of the family, I think, to ever visit Europe. During the whole of his lifetime he studied Western techniques as a means of improving the standards of living of his own community....

"Ever since I was old enough to understand a little bit of one's own surroundings, I have always felt much closer to the East and till the day I die will always have these same feelings....

"I'm very far away at heart from the West ..."

His Highness the Aga Khan's remarks in the 1967 Documentary and Interview, 'Pacemakers: A Man of the World -- The Aga Khan' (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10214/

Nicholas Tomalin: Do you feel happier here in the West, or in the East?
Aga Khan: I feel happier, personally, in the East. But I must stay here to learn from the West what it can offer us.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1965 The London Sunday Times Interview, Part I, with Nicholas Tomalin (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1400/
**Question:** Do you find your deep affinities are with the Islamic peoples rather than to Western.

**Aga Khan:** Very definitely so.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1958 interview by four members of the UK Press (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1095/

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**Paul Giannoli:** It must be difficult to fill your position. You are a Muslim Leader but, by your studies and your life, you are also a ‘product’ of Western world.

**Aga Khan:** This is not completely right. Certainly I attended renowned Swiss schools and studied for three and a half years in the United States, but I have also been a student of Orientalism. I have had, in my youth, courses in the Ismaili community before studying overseas and I have a degree in Islamic history. I live physically in the West, but psychologically, personally, I am much closer to Islam.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1969 Elle Magazine interview with Paul Giannoli (France) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1527/

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**Geoffry Barker:** I’ve been told that you seem a different personality in the East. Are you aware of any change in your mental attitude when you are in the East?

**Aga Khan:** No. I think there is certainly more empathy with the East emotionally, culturally, historically. That is natural. I was brought up in the West but I don’t always understand the West.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1979 The Age interview with Geoffry Barker, (Melbourne, Australia)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10329/
**Riad Naguib El-Rais:** It's strange, you speak here so vehemently of the unity between the spiritual and the temporal in Islam and claim that it is Islam which lends you this force, whereas there are those who accuse you of being too Westernised.

**Aga Khan:** Apart from the fact that I live in the West, I fail to see how I can be qualified as Western. There are millions of Muslims who live in the West without being Westerners. But if you mean my style of work, then you are right since I do adopt a Western style of work because I was educated in Western schools. Also, it is possible that the type of work I am doing requires that kind of style which is common in the West if it is to achieve effective results. This style includes, among other things, working under pressure and seeking a minimum standard of efficiency. It could be that all these things combined give such an impression of me.... I am concerned about the effectiveness to which I aspire. In the countries of the developing world, obstacles still stand in the way of efficient work: difficulty of communication and transport, shortages of highly-qualified people, difficult work conditions. This would mean that any decision taken would necessarily be a compromise.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1986 interview with Riad Naguib El-Rais (Al Mustaqbal, Cairo, Egypt)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2074/

**Aroon Purie:** Why do you function from Paris when most of your followers and activities are in Third World countries?

**Aga Khan:** Well, I think it is important for all institutions to have a base. In my case, it is important for my base to be apolitical and by being there, I am in a position to be apolitical. Also, my father and grandfather lived there. I am not sure if I would be able to function as effectively if the head office was anywhere else.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1989 India Today Interview with Aroon Purie (India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4315/
Michael Charlton: What explains the wanderings of the leader of this great sect? Why was the Imamat itself been peripatetic? Quite recently, it was in India, with your famous grandfather the Aga Khan, after that in Switzerland, now in France.

Aga Khan: Well, I think there again the Imam has always moved right from the time of Hazrat Ali in fact. In the circumstances today, the Imamat as an Institution, I think, is freer to be effective in its work, based in a country which is not involved and nor potentially involved in turmoil and which is traditionally sympathetic to Islam.

Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation: And why did your grandfather leave his country of origin?

Aga Khan: Because, I think, he lived in a period when he was worried that the marasm [difficulties] of the Third World would interfere with what he wanted to do for his community. And he made the decision to say, if I am to serve my community, I am obliged to seek competencies of the modern world, networking with the modern world, nations of modern development to bring them to my community. And that's exactly what he did....

Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation: And is it that we have that impression -- and it's good, I think it is an advantage -- that they [the Ismailis] are more modern, modern in the Western sense?

Aga Khan: I think that it comes to the same question we discussed previously. Let's go back. How did the Westerners learn about culture, about Greek philosophy? How did they learn it? They searched amongst philosophers, scientists, theologians. They went looking amongst the
Muslim intelligentsia of that time, for translations, which had disappeared from their original state and, the Muslim world became a world of transition so that the West relearned its own history.

All right! What is happening today? I am saying to myself, that the Muslim World, at least the Ismaili community, we should not live outside the realities of our world. On the contrary, we have to absorb them make them work for us and to our advantage. And if there are organisational systems in the human society that work well today, or at least better than others, we would lack intelligence, not to say more, not to see what we can learn, what we can integrate, what we can remodel. Because we do not have to take everything. We should take what helps us. And that’s where that relation with the West looks important to me. One does not lose his identity; one does not lose his religion ... And personally, I have no shame, none whatsoever, if I have to follow today in the same footsteps that the Christians followed in their history: to learn from the Muslim World, well, so what? Why should it matter?

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"I wondered, what would have happened if al-Khwarizmi had patented or copyrighted his algorithm? ... [Western] universities have carried forward a long tradition of concentration of research and knowledge and it’s not a part of Western civilisation only -- it’s been part of Islamic civilisation for centuries and centuries also. But as your world has become more developed -- economically more powerful -- you have concentrated more knowledge, more research in the West, than we have been able to do elsewhere. And, just as you pinched Plato, from Arabic, (mischievous grin) so we intend to pinch knowledge from you today."

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http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6073/

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10725/
**Pranay Gupte:** The Aga Khan is often asked why, when the majority of Ismailis live in the Third World, his own headquarters are in the West.

**Aga Khan:** The reason is simple. My grandfather believed that the Third World, and more particularly the Islamic world, would make far more rapid progress if they were able to learn the lessons of the industrialised nations. Hence many of the development strategies such as cooperative banking and housing which he introduced to the Ismaili community were based on Western models.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1987 interview with Pranay Gupte (India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3370/

**Anthony Mann:** The great majority of your Ismaili followers are Asiatic in Asia or Africa, yet you live in Europe and have an essentially Western lifestyle. Does that cause problems?

**Aga Khan:** Frankly the Imamat as an institution is sufficiently flexible and international for these problems not to arise. If my HQ were in a Muslim country there would be a high risk of adverse involvement. That might present a problem. It is not merely from personal preference that I have my principal house in the West.

I am not affected by suggestions in print that I live a luxurious Western life, while most Ismailis live in underdeveloped Eastern countries (he went on). These are just smears by cheap magazines. Serious publications are aware of the work we do and of our achievements in many countries. Such smear stories never appear in Asian publications.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1979 Sunday Telegraph Magazine Interview with Anthony Mann (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1916/
See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the permanent relationship immigrant Ismailis have with their original, 'home countries'


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See also: His Highness the Aga Khan’s cautionary notes on Western values


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