Review: [untitled]
Author(s): Daniel Chirot
Source: *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 23, No. 5 (Sep., 1994), pp. 678-680
Published by: American Sociological Association
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2074285
Accessed: 28/07/2010 18:34

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=asa.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

http://www.jstor.org

American Sociological Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Contemporary Sociology.*

promise of insights into fundamentalisms across traditions. Second, seven of the thirteen chapters are not even on fundamentalism but are on accommodation of innovative religious movements, peasant protest in Poland, Polish Roman Catholic movements, religious nationalism, regional peace movements in Latin America, radical religious movements, and movements of social change. Third, it follows the very large number of edited volumes in the sociology of religion in which scholars are given free rein to ruminate on their ideas. This volume arose from informal meetings and communications, but what might be a fruitful exchange of ideas is not necessarily a good book. In this book, nearly all the papers merely scratch the surface, some presenting nothing new, some presenting potentially innovative ideas but not taking the space (or making the effort) to develop them critically. The average length of the thirteen chapters is 14.5 pages each. The editors' first chapter, which at a minimum promised to provide an integrating framework, is only seven pages. Fourth, the book was not well edited. There are simply too many distracting glitches in style.

The theoretical frame presented in the introduction and chapter 1 is a conventional one. The editors claim that in the late eighties they were afraid that they were lone voices who saw "an era of fundamentalist belief fast approaching," and that for many the idea of assessing "the issue of a potential regress during the high tide of progressive hopes seemed too daunting" (p. x). But they proceeded, arguing that modernity and progress "produce a hermeneutical vacuum and debilitate the cognitive abilities of both common society members and producers of ideas alike" (p. xi). The "pace of the transformative process" and its magnitude are so great that it is impossible for people to comprehend the world: "Religious fundamentalism is an instant heuristic remedy to the situation of rapid change" (p. 5). This theoretical perspective is found in most of the chapters; those that question it in one place resort to it in others.

There are three chapters that offer interesting theoretical leads. John H. Simpson presents the interesting thesis that postmodernity's deconstruction of modernity creates the symbolic capital for diverse rejections of modernity. As a type of rejection of modernity, fundamentalism thus gains a great deal of legitimacy. To see fundamentalism as an aspect of postmodernity is intriguing, although it would have been nice if Simpson had elaborated on the distinctiveness of fundamentalism relative to postmodernity and how this argument would fare outside the United States. In chapter 6 Hank Johnston describes church histories in Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania to present six propositions about religious nationalism. While some of the propositions are not new, the strategy and direction of this work are quite promising. Doubling this thirteen-page chapter would have enabled him to elaborate and conditionalize the propositions. In chapter 10 Ronald Pagnucco and John McCarthy focus on the role of international organizations as suppliers of resources and strategies for nonviolent direct action movements in Latin America. Unfortunately, it is the wrong type of movement for a book on fundamentalism and leaves us wondering about the relations of international organizations to fundamentalist movements.

The direction in the sociology of religion is toward a comparative historical analysis of religious-political movements throughout the world, and there is increasing openness in sociology to the contributions that the sociology of religion can make. This mandate requires interdisciplinary teams with experts on different areas and traditions, such as the fundamentalisms project at the University of Chicago. But while an encyclopedic gathering of speculations about different movements is helpful, even a huge project, when lacking a coherent interpretive theoretical frame, has only limited value. The implication, I think, is that an unsystematic collection of case studies or any collection that lacks a clear innovative theoretical agenda is not of much use.

Torture and Modernity: Self, Society, and State in Modern Iran, by **Darius M. Rejali**. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993. 289 pp. $46.95 cloth. ISBN: 0-8133-1660-X. $19.95 paper. ISBN: 0-8133-1879-3.

Daniel Chirot
Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies
University of Washington

Michel Foucault had it right, even though he was, as Rejali points out, rather unfortunately

Eurocentric. No matter, because he understood that the essence of the modern state is discipline. And what better way is there for the state to take on its tutelary role than through the torture of recalcitrants?

Before modernity was introduced into Persia by those archhypocrites, the corrupt European capitalist imperialists, there were some forms of punishment which Rejali warns us might be mistaken for modern torture. But to believe that is to misunderstand the full evil of modernity. When during the reign of the Qajar Shahs miscreants were buried alive, burned to death by having candles inserted in their flesh, blown alive out of canons (actually, the book says that this was probably a British invention, so it shouldn't count), smothered in Persian carpets, dragged through the streets, dismembered, or had their eyes gouged out, this was not the modern "total coercion of the body, but the encouragement to bear one's body properly" (p. 4).

Modern execution, on the other hand, is alienating. In traditional Persia offenders were sometimes hung by the feet "mainly to allow the executioner to cut into the body." But with the introduction of modern hanging, "the exact moment of and manner of death were left to the rope on the gallows, not the executioner. In other words, instead of people acting directly on others, machines and institutions intervened between society and the criminal" (pp. 34–35).

Not all traditional punishment was directed against common criminals. Much of it was political, and the targets were guilty by communal association. Muhammad Khan Qajar once ordered his soldiers in Kirman City to

> decapitate 600 rebels, hang two heads on each of 300 other captives, march these exemplary figures 120 miles in front of the horses, execute the second group, and then build minarets out of the bodies of the 900 men. . . . After this he had their [the town notables'] ears cut off, their eyes removed, and their bodies cast from the top of the castle. He then took 8,000 children as concubines and pages for his army. Finally he ordered his executioners to present to him seven thousand pairs of eyes of the despicable [rebellious] inhabitants. (Pp. 27–28)

No wonder the late Reza Shah of Iran, who was deposed in 1979, had to have his secret police, Savak, take lessons from American and Israeli technicians in how to conduct proper torture. Or so most Iranians, including Rejali, believe (p. 78). The advanced Westerners knew how to rationalize the ugly business of state repression and separate it from communal participation.

It is a source of disappointment to Rejali that the Islamic Revolution of 1979 has not practiced what it has preached. While claiming to want to extirpate modern Western ways, it has actually conducted few public floggings (only about 2,000 a year in the mid-1980s, for such sins as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, drinking, and malicious accusations) or stonings to death. It has tortured, raped, and executed many thousands, probably far more than did Reza Shah. But there have been no smotherings with carpets or executions by the insertion of burning candles. And even in the few cases when it has amputated according to Islamic law, since the mid-1980s the Ayatollahs' judicial police has used an electric machine that "severs the hand in a tenth of a second," a regrettable example of the further use of modern, alienating techniques (pp. 124–25).

Aside from Foucault, Rejali admires and cites Friedrich Nietzsche, Edward Said, and, though he finds his tendency to blame everything on American imperialism slightly excessive, Noam Chomsky. We are, in other words, in the realm of postmodern analysis, in which the source of all evil is Western liberalism. Although it has become the prevailing mode of discourse in most of the humanities, and increasingly in anthropology and history, postmodernism has not yet secured its position in sociology. But it will do so soon, because with the collapse of Marxism it remains just about the only intellectually respectable critique of American capitalism.

This book is an excellent introduction to postmodernism. It is learned, often fascinating, and in many places elegantly witty—no mean feat when dealing with this subject. It also discusses the less than successful efforts to modernize many other key Iranian social institutions. But the analysis of torture remains central, because, Rajali feels, it symbolically and practically has played an

important role in attempts to rationalize Iranian society and stabilize its politics. To show this, he provides many examples and photographs.

This brings up a final question. If the growth of torture in twentieth-century Iran and its changing forms are caused by efforts to modernize, why do we not torture in the modern United States or Western Europe? Rejali follows Foucault in believing that we are now so internally disciplined that the state no longer needs to apply physical torture. A postmodernist would not take seriously the explanation that perhaps the absence of judicial torture is connected to Western liberalism's belief that the individual is an entity with rights worthy of being protected from communal interests and separated from communal obligations. Sometimes we may fail to enforce that belief, but at least we try, and we are ashamed when it is violated. So we allow critics to pillory us for our sins, and we fund the writing of their books. The Qajar Shahs, the late Reza Shah, and the Ayatollah Khomeini could never have conceived of such a bizarre ideological notion, much less allowing public institutions to support open criticism of their regimes' lapses into hypocrisy. So now, as in the past, Iranian intellectuals have to come to the United States or Western Europe to write such interesting books as this one.

Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World, by **Fatima Mernissi**. Translated by May Jo Lakeland. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1992. 195 pp. $24.95 cloth. ISBN: 0-201-60883-9.

DANIEL BRUMBERG
Department of Government
Georgetown University

Fatima Mernissi is a Moroccan sociologist who has written widely on the role of women in the Arab Islamic world. She is also an Islamic liberal who believes that the values of liberal democracy can be reconciled with those of Islam. In *Islam and Democracy*, she has brought her interests together in one of the most thought-provoking books to be written on Islam in many years.

In the first half of her book Mernissi tries to account for the antagonism of Arab youth to democracy by tracing the historical development of Islam. During the first decades of Islamic history, she argues, the notion of *ta'a* (obedience to God) was balanced by the ideals of rational free will (*'aql*) and personal opinion (*ra'y*). The early caliphs based their rule on a contract which held that the people could remove the leader if he abused his powers or acted outside the law. But eventually the Abbasids caliphs replaced this contract with the notion of blind obedience to the ruler, a concept that then became the norm.

Although this analysis seems to echo the idealist apologetics that have often marked Islamic reformism, it is based on a structural approach that roots the emergence of an authoritarian ethos in the growth of patriarchal states (although she doesn't use this term). The men who rule these states, she claims, have quashed the idea of a more individualistic Islam. Thus, today, the Gulf sheikdoms use "oil money" and the "cloak of the sacred to cultivate *ta'a*."

Because this analysis explains how state structures and cultural worldviews reinforce one another, it also shows how an ethos can become rooted in the soil of a civilization. Repeatedly, Mernissi's approach leads to such insightful, yet discouraging, generalizations as her remark that in the Arab world, "people experience modernity without understanding its foundations, its basic concepts."

While much of her work is informed by this pessimism, Mernissi's remedy for the malaise she analyzes is very optimistic. For example, she writes that because "concepts of political power . . . have been tightly controlled since the Abbasids," Arabs must do nothing less than "minutely" remodel the political terminology that informs their language. Yet she then proclaims that the Arab world—led by a vanguard of middle-class professional women—is "about to take off" on a journey "towards uncertainties, toward plural modernities."

Mernissi attempts to bridge this gap between her explanatory pessimism and her prescriptive optimism by arguing that patrimonialist regimes survive owing to their support in the West, demonstrated, she claims, by the war that the United States waged to liberate Kuwait. This argument leads Mernissi to the conclusion that the West must use "its power to install democracy in the Arab world." Moreover, she asserts that by forcing the