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Patron: Moore, Martin

Journal Title: **Journal of contemporary
Asia.**

Volume: **25 Issue: 3**

Month/Year: **1995**

Pages: **441-444**

Article Title: **Malek, M; TORTURE AND
MODERNITY - SELF, SOCIETY AND
STATE IN MODERN IRAN - REJALI,DM**

ILL Number: 68111193

Tuesday, August 17, 2010

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MUSLIMS, THEIR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES:**VOL. 2 THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD** by Andrew Rippin, (London: Routledge, 1993)**TORTURE AND MODERNITY: SELF, SOCIETY AND STATE IN MODERN IRAN**

by Darius M. Rejali (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994)

There is a school of thought which maintains that any attempt to properly explain a contemporary phenomenon would be futile, as we would be too involved in passing judgements on something which still would be in the process of making. This book will provide partial evidence in support of such proposition. It would be an ambitious project to try to explain the religious beliefs and practices of Muslims (or any other major faith for that matter) which is the fastest growing religion in Western Europe and is practised as the major religion in 23 different countries (excluding India and China which have substantial Muslim minorities) in just 145 pages. Inevitably when the topic is so extensive and complex the book would look at best like a shopping list of questions rather than a reasonable coverage of the relevant issues and an honest attempt to answer some of the questions. The book is not about modern Islam as claimed in the preface, but is more about the perception of the author on how Muslims deal with modernity project. Here modernity (or to be precise modernism) has been taken in its narrow technological sense i.e. the Coca-Cola, McDonald and Mercedes Benz in contradistinction with the camel milk, dried dates and donkey, rather than its broad meaning of "rationality and enlightenment project." The book tries to be sympathetic to the people up to the point of being patronising!, even overlooking and at times providing excuses for the Islamic fundamentalism. The principal question raised by the book is also an old but still a relevant one. How has modernity made its impact on the Muslim world? The answer comes as bland as one expects: Muslim faith is a complex phenomenon, just as any other religion. One does not need to read a book to come to this profound conclusion. The relevant question would have been how do Muslims (who do not just live in the Middle East) come to terms with living in a world where the agenda is not set entirely to their satisfaction? How do they compromise? How do they reconcile the conflicting allegiance to being a good (national) citizen and a good member of (religious) Islamic umma? These all come back to the religious beliefs and practices of Muslims which should have been addressed and are overlooked. The book is also ostentatiously silent on perhaps the only factors which apart from Islam unite people across all geographical areas with all different cultural backgrounds i.e. the questions of inter-relationship between the Islamic citizens and that of the Islamic state. Democracy and freedom (or lack of it to be more precise) is of fundamental importance to all citizens of Islamic countries. The only reference to democracy is:

...democracy as a system of government, in the argument of many people, has lost its glamour and its moral claim to supremacy (p. 16).

I beg to differ. Democracy and freedom of expression are at the top of the agenda, certainly for the intelligentsia of the Muslim countries. They are the only issues which are recognised to be at the heart of the lack of reformist movement in these countries. On the other hand what unites the Wahhabi regime of Saudi Arabia with the zealot Shi'ite regime of Iran? They both are fervently against introduction of freedom and democracy which would undermine the legitimacy of these regimes. It does not serve the true Islam or Muslims across the globe, if one presupposes that all Islamic tenets have to be analysed with the Islamic yardstick. Human rights supersede some of these tenets and although they might be perceived as Western principals, their universality should not be questioned. Lack of freedom of expression is the single most important factor hindering discussion on the reform of contemporary Islam. Not everybody is willing to risk life and limb for his/her views and be served with an Islamic *Fatwa*. The authors bow to the pressure from mainstream Islamic ideology when they consider two important socio-religious Islamic attempts of Ahmadiyya and Baha'i as movements "outside Islam." These mass movements are declared non-Islamic and their missionary movements outlawed, simply because they openly have ventured to reconcile Islam with the requirements of 20th century citizenship's. The genealogy of Baha'ism and its relationship with Islam is almost identical to that of Christianity and Judaism. Islam as a mass movement (and not as an intellectual persuasion) has largely remained unreformed. Whether this is good or bad (and I stick my neck out to say that it is harmful) needs to be debated, openly, freely and without fear of excommunication or worse still execution. For this, freedom and democracy, are issues around which Muslims of all countries across the political spectrum should unite. Islam cannot be construed in the way in which hard core Marxists were arguing about Marxism 20 years ago, unless you were a Marxist you could not criticise it. The *Cordon Sanitaire* around this has to be broken to allow a fruitful and constructive discussion to bring the analysis to the 21st Century. If this is Westoxication so be it, no apologies are offered.



The issue of torture of political prisoners during the reign of Mohammed Reza, the last Shah of Iran, became an international issue. The Shah had raped the Iranian soul, and Reza Barahani, the contemporary Iranian poet and critic, maintained that the torture was the sexual extension of the Shah's rule. It is not surprising therefore, if the Evin prison where the political prisoners were kept, became the target of the revolutionary aggression in the early days of the uprising in 1978, and was liberated even before the radio and television stations were captured. One can easily imagine the general disappointment with the new Islamic Republic when it was found out that the use of torture on political prisoners had continued unabated after the overthrow of the last Shah. This book by an Iranian scholar with profound knowledge of the history of that country, is an attempt to answer this paradox. It is context specific but its implications go beyond Iran, as according to Amnesty International one third of the present day

governments are engaged in the business of *systematic* torture. It is an honest, self-critical and soul searching odyssey which starts from the events in mid 19th century up to the present day situation. The most startling feature of the book is the discovery by the author that torture had been accepted as an integral part of life in Iran.

The book opens up in the tradition of Michel Foucault by describing two historical events, quoting from the reliable sources. The first one goes back to 15th August 1852 when thirty members of the outlawed Babi religion were found guilty of attempted plot against Nasser Uddin Shah and apostasy and were tortured to death in the most brutal manner. The second example concerns Shokrollah Paknezhad, a political activist caught, tortured and imprisoned during the Shah. Released after revolution, he was again caught, tortured and executed by the post-revolutionary Islamic Republic in 1981. Highlighting the differences as well as the similarities the book gives a fascinating account of the Iranian penal history during Qajar dynasty and its disappearance just before the Constitutional Revolution of 1907. From the classical torture he moves to disciplinary practices and construction of disciplinary institutions before discussing at some length the nature of modern torture and its relation with discipline.

This is a fascinating book following Foucaultian method of analysis, albeit not uncritically, and it seems that the result of the research has surprised the author as much as it is unexpected to those familiar with the literature and the Iranian social history. The author confesses:

When I began this study, I expected that changes in punishment would mirror changes in the state, and in this I was disappointed. Instead, I found that changes in punishment often preceded changes in the state by a decade or two. More specifically, I identified three periods where I expected to find dramatic changes: the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1909), the regime of Reza Shan (1925-1914), and the Islamic Revolution (1979-1981). During the constitutional revolution, I postulated that punishment would become more humane in contrast to Qajar punishments. During the reign of Reza Shah, I expected punishment to become more disciplinary. Following the Islamic Revolution I expected to see punishments, including torture, to conform more closely to Islamic law than to the arbitrary practices that preceded them. None of these expectations proved to be correct in the end (p. 135).

The author concludes that it must be the case that punishment has its own periodisation and social history quite independent from the state.

The Iranian penal history casts a very different light on the development of state power in this respect. It suggests that one should pay less attention to who exercises power and more to how power is exercised. Revolutions may change who rules but not necessarily how one is ruled (p. 136).

The book ends with a chapter on "how not to talk about torture" which critically examines four different approaches to study of torture. These are: the Humanist, the Developmentalist, the State Terrorism and Nietzsche's conceptualisation. The author found all these approaches to have some partial explanatory power, but not altogether satisfying, although no comprehensive alternative theory is offered. The book also

contains an appendix of some 40 photographs with appropriate footnotes on the way disciplinary power has been exercised during the study period. The language of the book is polemical in the best tradition of the orient and the author is not afraid to stick his neck out, although he is careful not to claim to have exclusive right to Truth. It is a breath of fresh air when safety has dictated to stick to the middle ground, to see a scholar exposing his soul in a journey of self discovery.

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CHESTER BOWLES—NEW DEALER IN THE COLD WAR

by Howard B. Schaffer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993)

In this compulsively readable, highly entertaining, judiciously balanced, meticulously crafted, and startlingly researched book, Schaffer has labouriously ploughed into Bowles's private as well as public life to portray Bowles as he was during his long diplomatic career and pre-diplomatic career.

Was Bowles ideologically an interventionist or an isolationist? Was he an idealist (Wilsonian-type) or a realist or both? Why did he have unpleasant time with the successive American Administrations (Kennedy, Johnson) under which he had to serve as twice ambassador to India during Nehru and Indira Gandhi period? Was he a hostage to the dirty game of American bureaucratic politics of his time? Why did he get himself "overidentified" with the Third World in general and India in particular? Why was he obsessed to develop a closer U.S.-Indian security relationship as a cornerstone of U.S. containment policy in Asia? But, then, why did it get no favour from the Administration? Were his basic premises on which he based his policies flawed? Why did he put less stress on American military power at a time when the key policymakers of the American Administrations were in favour of it? Conversely, why did he put more emphasis on economic power of America and opt for a Third World Marshall Plan for the economic upliftment of the Third World countries? Were it because of differences of perception and attitude between the Administrations and him? Were his missions successful? Schaffer, who incidentally served as a second Political Secretary under Bowles in the 1960s in India and was an ambassador to Bangladesh in 1984, has instituted, among others, the preceding queries in his book and then has offered some provocative answers to them.

The volume, which has 19 chapters besides introduction, has a very useful index.

Through the nineteen impressive array of wide-ranging chapters, Schaffer has touched upon and perceptively examined the various issues with which Bowles was directly involved.

Starting from Bowles's childhood, college, early career, career in advertising, marriages, governorship of Connecticut, ambition for presidency to his association with UNESCO, search for job in foreign policy, first and second Ambassadorships to India, health, retirement, and death have been dealt with.