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Tarāshidam, Parastidam, Shekastam: Goftār-hāi dar Siāsat va Hoviyat-e Irāni

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wisdom of these traditions can draw humanity back into a natural path of living, which accords both with the metaphysical reality of the human being and its relation to God, and which can be a source of loving compassion in the world.

Written in the style of scholarship for which William C. Chittick is well known, this text relates seemingly disparate concepts and presents complex metaphysical ideas in simple, accessible language. The diversity amongst the sources translated in this text, and the manner in which Chittick puts them into conversation with major philosophical debates will prove interesting to readers with a variety of intellectual interests. Needless to say, *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought* is a significant contribution to the scholarship on Islamic thought.

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Tarāshidam, Parastidam, Shekastam: Goftār-hāi dar Siāsat va Hoviyat-e Irāni (I Carved, Worshipped, and Shattered: Essays on Iranian Politics and Identity), Mehrzad Boroujerdi, Tehran: Nashr-e Negāh-e Mo‘āser, 2010, ISBN 978-6-0057-4704-1, 206 pp (paperback).

In *Plea for Intellectuals*, a collection of lectures delivered in Japan during the mid-1960s, Jean Paul Sartre pronounced, “no society can complain of its intellectuals without accusing itself, for it has the intellectuals it makes.”² Mehrzad Boroujerdi, in his 1996 book *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, utilizes this quote to distinguish Sartre’s position from Jalal Al-e Ahmad’s writings, also from the mid-1960s, in which the latter harangued Iranian intellectuals as unattached to society and treasonously servile to power. A society gets the intellectuals it deserves, one might answer. Nevertheless, Sartre’s lectures also included a definition of the intellectual as a modern technician of practical knowledge who, by questioning the dominant ideology of the ruling elite, “interferes in what does not concern him.” After all, the use of the term “intellectual” spread first as a pejorative during the Dreyfus Affair in the Third Republic, only later to be taken up as a badge of honor by Zola and his coterie. The intellectual, in the eyes of the elite, is a “monster,” according to Sartre.³ In this sense, Al-e Ahmad, a bête noire of the Pahlavi monarchy by any account, was at his most monstrous in his attacks on the postwar Iranian intelligentsia, a clarion call that resonated for reasons which Boroujerdi himself aptly laid out in his monograph. In *Tarāshidam, Parastidam, Shekastam*, a collection of Boroujerdi’s essays and interviews for a Persian-reading audience, the US-based social scientist expands his study of intellectuals to two other periods of Iranian history.

²Jean-Paul Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism* (London, 1996), 246.

³Ibid., 244.

One set of pieces focuses on the generation that came of age during the interwar period, out of the chaos of the post-constitutional struggles to the order of Reza Shah's reign. Another set, directly or indirectly, pertains to the trajectory of the post-1979 generation of intellectuals inside and outside the country, a group that includes Boroujerdi himself. The connecting question that runs through the book's chapters, originally published between 1994 and 2008 in either English or Persian, is a formidable one: what types of intellectual monsters did these two periods produce, and which was more important for the development of political and social thought in Iran?

First to acknowledge the material point at hand—I encountered Boroujerdi's collection of essays in a Tehran bookseller on Revolution Street in the summer of 2011, next to new translations of Marx, Durkheim, and Bourdieu. While it appears the Ministry of Culture made a sweep of the text and removed a few harsh passages concerning the Iranian state (and which are mostly rectified on Boroujerdi's website where he posted the pre-censored originals), this book has hardly been sanctified. Its publisher is well known for previous works by Hoseyn Bashiriyeh, Mostafā Mālekiān, and Seyyed Javād Tabātābā'i, and so one can only guess at the combination of perseverance, luck, and flair possessed by its editors. As a result, in this book we come across Boroujerdi's essays and interviews from such "dangerous" and now defunct outlets as *Kārgozārān*, *Kiyān* and *Shahrvand-e Emruz*. Even with Iran's more restrictive publishing environment over the past few years, we should take heart that a young inquisitive student can walk into a bookstore, chance across such a volume, and soon find a challenge to the shibboleths of her age. Up until the economic troubles of 2012, it was all quite inexpensive to boot.

Boroujerdi's earlier book placed the success of a "nativist" discourse of authenticity among 1950s–60s Iranian intellectuals within the failure of the postwar Pahlavi monarchy to generate or incorporate an intelligentsia that could produce a legitimating state ideology. In the era of decolonization and state formation in Asia and Africa, elites across the Third World, consciously or otherwise, pursued a strategy the Cabo-verdean thinker Amílcar Cabral called a "return to the source"—the gleaning and invention of tradition, history, and cultural tropes for the purposes of mass mobilization, nationalist centralization, and political self-determination. This understandable response, however, tended to trap states and their in-house intellectuals in a precarious situation, as Boroujerdi notes in two essays in this collection. If the new nation was indeed destined for glory, mythically tied if possible to an ancient but strained precedent (e.g. Timbuktu, Great Zimbabwe, Babylon, Luxor, Persepolis), then perceived failures were taken that much more seriously by the state's subjects. Boroujerdi showed how Mohammad Reza Shah, as much as he strived, never could get in front of his critics' accusations of betraying the nation to foes both internal and external. Iran's dissident literati considered the move towards "indigenization" as the suitable answer to a "Faustian" relation with an essentialized Western modernity that had, in the eyes of everyone, shackled the country in both psychological and political fetters. For Boroujerdi, this process laid the groundwork for the rise of insubordinate

mid-ranking Shi'a clerics as the organic intellectuals of the 1979 revolution and its contentious aftermath.

Several essays in this collection consider the previous generation of Iranian intellectuals of the interwar period, which lived through equally uncertain times. For the rebel intellectuals of the 1960s, however, the existence of an Iranian state was never in question. This was not the same for historians and scholars of the 1910s–20s, who experienced a period of global state breakdown, imperial scramble, and territorial uncertainty. The Warlord Era in China, the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Third Anglo-Afghan War, and the colonial usurpation of the Levant meant to the embattled constitutional nationalists that, as August Comte put it, order was the basis of progress. The relationship of intellectuals such as Mohammad Ali Foroughi, Ali Akbar Dekhodā, or Ahmad Kasravi to the “bonapartist” rise of Reza Shah, Boroujerdi argues, must be understood in this light. This did not result in “sterile” or “servile” thought; rather, the period’s cultural production created the epistemological categories which later formed the stuff of maximalist rebellion through enunciations of authenticity as well as the secularizing étatist logic of both the Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic Republic.

Boroujerdi has clearly amassed a wealth of information and primary source material here, but the essay or interview form is too limiting to fully make his case. Instead, there is a fair amount of repetition across chapters, and skeptical readers will remain unconvinced. He intimates that a book on this subject is in the works. Let us hope that he or his students carry through with the project. If not, we can at least find antecedents here for a new wave of critical scholarship on national identity, intellectual production, and Iranian historiography. This is already underway to a certain extent, thanks to recent studies by young scholars such as Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, Farzin Vejdani, and Rasmus Elling, who have critiqued the foundations of what Boroujerdi calls “heritage-ism” and what Fereyduñ Ādamiyat earlier labeled as the production of hosanna-filled “handbooks” instead of critical history.

If these chapters seek to understand the sphere of Iranian intellectual production, Boroujerdi’s essays and interviews on the Islamic Republic additionally aspire to change it. A 2000 essay from *Bukharā* implores the “champions of dialogue” associated with Mohammad Khatami to first consider the benefits of reconciliation with Iran’s expatriate diaspora, a fount of both cultural and economic capital which could be utilized to aid the reformist project. In the wake of conservative retaliation and social dissatisfaction with the ineffective reformists, a 2001 article from *Āftāb* asks, “What have we learned from Iranian politics?” The essay is valuable to read in the present, given the recurring pessimistic pronouncements on the “nature” of politics in the Islamic Republic as incapable of reform and intransigent to change. Here, Boroujerdi makes two things quite clear. First, the post-revolutionary dynamics of social and cultural transformation, largely unintended but yet still engendered by the state’s own hand, cannot be absorbed or controlled by the political elite. Second, political conflict in Iran creates only temporary winners and losers though the continual shifting of elite positions and coalitions. This seems as true in 2013 as it did in 2001, even though we still lack a cogent theoretical account of why this remains the case.

In the wake of seemingly utter defeat of the reformist project, a 2007 interview from *Ham-Mihan* more unfavorably reflects on the role and orientation of contemporary Iranian intellectuals. Here it appears that Boroujerdi forgets, at times, his own censure of Al-e Ahmad, as he states that the dislocation of Iran's intellectuals from society throughout the twentieth century has led to a host of ill-fated views, from racial chauvinism and xenophobia to illiberal populism and revanchist nationalism. It may be true that, as Boroujerdi claims, the defeat of Hashemi Rafsanjani at the polls in 2005 was aided by a previous decade of pernicious attacks on him from within reformist circles, but one is hard pressed to believe that this was the only source of such popular ire.

To put it another way, as much as the interviews and essays in this book illuminate the fault lines of political conflict and intellectual strife in post-revolutionary Iran, we are bereft of a sociological analysis that can explain how we got to this point without reproducing and reifying the very categories used by the combatants. To this reader, the endless discussions over modernity and tradition that occupied the activities of the contemporary Iranian intelligentsia are completely understandable but mostly irrelevant to understanding why these discussions took place. Scholars such as Charles Tripp have shown how similar debates took place in other Muslim-majority countries, from Egypt to Malaysia, and the contours of the conversation tend to be the same. The use of such categories as devices of political demarcation, even by self-proclaiming principlists and fundamentalists, is not traditional by any means. As the historian Frederick Cooper has argued, the metaphoric usage of "modernity" and its implied telos is something for scholars to critically unpack and historicize, not to endorse and conflate with lived reality. One product of the post-Cold War celebration of "modernity" is the now fashionable language (in Iran as much as elsewhere) of "multiple modernities," where all countries can have their cultural production confirmed as equally valid and deserving of respect in order to assuage their fears of inadequacy and inferiority in a globally connected age. Yet, as anthropologist James Ferguson points out, to most inhabitants of Africa and Asia, modernity does not mean just recognition by UNESCO, something everyone already has, but the economic convergence of life chances and wealth between nations that almost everyone knows they will never have. It is this global social fact, one which was still relatively new at the dawn of the twentieth century, that contributed to the rise of what R.W. Connell categorizes as "Southern Theory"—a grouping that includes many of the intellectuals studied in Boroujerdi's earlier work.

This is not to relativize the issues at stake in contemporary Iran, and the benefit of Boroujerdi's book for a Persian-reading audience is its critical distance from the standard hagiographies generated by both the Pahlavi monarchy and its critics. Such a perspective can now be applied towards shattering the new idols of intellectual production, the *doxa* that all sides take for granted no matter how seemingly intractable their antagonisms. Analysis of the intellectual plane, however, will never suffice for understanding the fast-changing milieu of Iranian society, and needs to be coupled with grounded empirical research by scholars inside and outside of Iran. The imaginativeness of such research, however, will depend on how scholars approach

and utilize the conceptual and theoretical toolkit at hand, and it is in these situations that Mehrzad Boroujerdi's work can be an example.

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