the Islamists’ ideology and practice which is their relationship to totalitarianism and violation of human rights. The Islamists have proved to be champions of totalitarianism and human rights violations. This is not only reflected in the writings of their founding fathers, Abū ‘l-A‘lā Mawdūdī and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1386/1966)**, but also in their collaboration with such dictatorial regimes such as that of General Gaafar Numairi in the Sudan (1969–1985), Zia ul-Haq in Pakistan (1977–1988), and in their recent seizure of power by force in the Sudan as symbolized by General ‘Umar al-Bashir’s military coup (June 30, 1989).

For those who grew up reading and following the political and intellectual contribution of this new breed of Islamists, the book might revitalize certain events and provide an opportunity to revisit the identity of those individuals as it has been cast as a project by a group of scholars who suffered less from the Islamists’ intolerance and aggression. For those who are not familiar with the ongoing developments of this movement in the Muslim world, the book might present an introduction to certain aspects of the life and times of a group of Islamists. However, there are many other aspects of the Islamists and their movements that are not by any means benign or civil.

Abdullahi A. Gallab


Iran is in the middle of an ongoing conflict: the conflict between westernist reform and religious conservatism. President Khatami, elected for his promise of reform, is continually resisted by the orthodox judiciary and other

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* Apart from spending about five years of imprisonment, Mawdūdī was awarded death sentence in 1953 by a military court, which was later commuted to life imprisonment. After having spent about two years and a half in prison, the government decided to release him. Ed.

** Sayyid Quṭb suffered more than ten years of imprisonment, mostly rigorous, under orders issued by a special court appointed by the Revolutionary Command Council, headed by Lt Col Gamal Abdel Nasser. Lt Col Nasser’s government also arrested and relentlessly persecuted thousands of its political opponents, mainly those associated with al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn, and awarded death sentence to Sayyid Quṭb who was executed in 1966. Ed.
hardliners who enjoy a hegemony over what constitutes the ‘correct ideology’. In short, the question is whether westernisation is making a comeback through reform or not? This being so the book under review is very important because it helps us understand what ideas prevailed in Iran before the Revolution.

The author, an Iranian academic working in the United States, has offered fresh insights into the nature and status of westernisation in Iran which explains the final triumph of the ayatollahs.

Boroujerdi begins with the phenomenon of ‘othering’ which refers to treating other social groups as so different from one’s own that the former is hardly thought to be human. The phenomenon involves creating stereotypes and reducing the complexity of human beings to a single dimension in which good and evil could be painted in black and white. He points out that this phenomenon is explained by the French philosopher Michel Foucault and the Arab-American intellectual Edward Said. Said’s argument is that ‘orientalism’ was a way of ‘othering’, misrepresenting, and finally subjugating the East.

From this analysis, the author moves to his central hypothesis that Iranian intellectuals used ‘nativism’ — which is a kind of orientalism in reverse — to confront the West. Nativism is based on resisting acculturation, privileging one’s ‘authentic’ identity and desiring to return to a state of cultural purity. The problem, however, is that this ‘authentic’ identity is constructed and this construction is as political in nature as the construction of similar categories by western orientalists. Anyway, nativism is the primary source of inspiration among Iranian thinkers and often it is expressed in Islamic terms. In short, at least for intellectuals, it was not Islam that was the major source of inspiration but the compulsions of nativism.

To prove these assertions, the author looks at the lives and ideas of some prominent Iranian intellectuals, both of the secular and the Islamic type. Providing a who’s who of Iranian intelligensia, he places these intellectuals in the dominant milieu of their time. He begins with the argument that the Shah of Iran created a ‘rentier state’ which derived most of its revenue as rent from foreigners. This meant that while the state was flush with petro-dollars, it had not developed just systems of distribution of wealth. There was much dislocation and as young Iranians got educated they became more and more alienated from the repressive state. Militant organisations, such as the Feda’iyân and the Mujahedin-i Khalq, were formed in the late sixties and early seventies. Universities, print media, and even religious seminaries became hotbeds of revolutionary ideas. The state’s response was to unleash Savak, the secret police, on the dissidents but even barbarity could not contain them. The intellectuals continued ‘othering’ the alien state of the Shah.
The Shah’s enforced westernisation perhaps increased the intellectuals’ alienation from the West. In 1962, Jalal Al-e-Ahmad wrote *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxication) which came to be regarded as a canonical work regarding the blind aping of the West which the Shah was supposed to be promoting. Another intellectual, Fakhrroddin Shadman, believed that the West should be appropriated but in Persian so as to retain a sense of one’s Iranian identity. Yet another intellectual, Ahmed Fardid (1912–1994), advocated understanding the core of western civilisation by understanding its philosophy.

Meanwhile, a number of politically oriented ‘ulamā’ — Motahhari, Beheshti, Bazargan1 and, above all, Khomeini — became active in the sixties. They wanted to confront the state as well as the West but to do so they first wanted to reform the ‘ulamā’ who were preoccupied with theological debates of the medieval era. Khomeini’s *Velāyat-e Faqīh* (1971) was one such effort and the most successful one at that to establish the theoretical basis of creating an Islamic government. The clergy also opened a network of schools which proved very valuable for Khomeini in his struggle for power against all his rivals.

Then there were religious intellectuals of whom Ali Shariati (d. 1977) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr are very well known. Both were born in religious families and later took degrees in social sciences and philosophy. Shariati tried to reinterpret Islam from the perspective of social revolutionary so that his work became the source of anti-Shah inspiration. Hossein Nasr turned to mysticism. He, too, interpreted Islam in a new light. Both were critical of modernity and thus contributed to strengthening nativist thinking.

Chapter six of Boroujerdi’s book deals with more nativists, especially those from the academia. Ehsan Naraqi, Hamid Enayat and Durush Shayegan are discussed in some detail here. Naraqi emphasized indigenous social research. Enayat suggested that the Iranian intellectuals were alienated from their Islamic heritage and, therefore, unauthentic. Durush Shayegan argued that nihilism is the outcome of western technology. He too, believed that Islam was the primordial source of Iran’s identity.

After the 1979 Revolution the intellectual debate took another form. The questions which now came to the forefront were as to how Islam was to be defined as a law and how the state was to be run on its basis. Among the debaters were Raza Davari and Abdolkarim Sorush. They discussed the philosophical arguments in Karl Popper’s *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, which had just been translated into Persian then. Sorush took the position that knowledge is being constantly transformed so Islamic law (*fiqh*) is also open to new interpretation. He was supported by Mojtahed Shabestari, a clerical

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1 Bazargan was an engineer by profession. Ed.
intellectual. Davari, on the other hand, opposed the application of the scientific methodology to fiqh. The debate continues.

The major achievement of Boroujerdi’s book is that it provides understanding of the complex process through which intellectual viewpoints and discourses were articulated. Crucially significant is the argument that nativism rather than Islam was the major inspiration for most of the intellectuals but it came to be expressed in a religious idiom. This is worth critical attention, not only because this is a new insight into Iranian intellectual history but also because it helps us understand Islamic revivalist movements elsewhere in the world. In Maulānā Mawdūdi’s work, too, there is much that is inspired by his reaction to the West. Mawdūdi’s revivalist work also has the nativist element since it is not a continuation of the old medieval Islamic debates which preoccupied the traditional ‘ulamā’ of his time.

The epilogue tells us how nativism emerged as the sole ideological candidate which united most segments of the intellectual polity. However, now in the hands of the clergy, it has become a sacerdotal device to suppress other discourses. Moreover, nativism, like orientalism, is itself based on wrong theoretical premises. And yet it flourishes because of being a response to the West’s overwhelming power.

The book is very valuable for both theoretical insights as well as empirical information about Iranian intellectual and political life. I recommend it to scholars and informed non-specialist readers alike. It is a book which anyone interested in Islam and modernity should read and understand in the light of their own society. However, it is perhaps especially relevant for Pakistan, which has a highly developed intellectual discourse on Islam like Iran.

Tariq Rahman


Most research on Islam and Muslim communities has been distinctly ‘Sunnī-centric’, based on the assumption that Sunnī Islam presents the ‘authentic’ Islamic ‘orthodoxy’. Consequently, Shi‘ah Muslims and their history have