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## BOOK REVIEW

*Torture and Modernity: Self, Society, and State in Modern Iran*, Darius M. Rejali. Westview Press, 1994. 307 pages.

This is an extensive presentation and critical review of Darius Rejali's book, *Torture and Modernity: Self, Society, and State in Modern Iran* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994). Drawing on Michel Foucault's postmodernist ideas about discipline, Rejali uses Iran as a case study for demonstrating the pervasive disciplinary nature of modern rationality. The emergence of the modern nation-state in Iran is accompanied by the rationalization of social life through the use of discipline. Contrary to the expectation that modern science and rational institutions would eliminate the use of torture as a means of social control, the world today is witnessing a much more sophisticated application of torture. In the past, torture was used publicly and ritualistically as a symbolic demonstration of the power of the state and its sovereignty. Today, torture has moved to private chambers and is administered according to the latest medical and technological developments. It is construed rationally and applied administratively in all disciplinary societies.

With the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran, there was hope that torture would be eliminated. This did not happen because torture is not a function of the ideological character of the state. The disciplinary nature of torture and the structural conditions which necessitated its

application in the Pahlavi state are still present in Iran. Consequently, the rationality upon which torture is construed is the same as the rationality of modern society and its various institutions: discipline and control. According to Rejali, it is not just the Islamic state that has failed to live up to its ideological claims; even liberal developmentalists, humanists, and Marxist thinkers have been wrong in assuming that their utopias would eliminate this violent and inhumane practice.

Rejali's book is an excellent testimony against the pervasive and controlling character of the rationalization of social and political institutions. Using a comparative perspective, Rejali is able to demonstrate the symbolic significance of torture in both traditional and modern societies. His analysis of the impact of modernity and its disciplinary nature on human social relationships is both sophisticated and thoughtful.

Despite this contribution, there are methodological and theoretical problems with the way in which Rejali constructs his analysis. His selective and synthetic methodology in dealing with some concepts and accounts leads to historical and social decontextualization, seriously weakening his interpretation. His postmodernist perspective is really inadequate for addressing some of the major issues surrounding the political and historical function and significance of torture in Iran. His discourse succeeds in showing how torture, as an objective extension of the disciplinary nature of modern rational institutions, is embedded in the very structure of those institutions. However, it fails to explain the relationship between the structural necessity of this practice in an authoritarian modern capitalist nation state and the historical and ideological forms of resistance to its existence. After all, what has contributed to the opposition of many Iranians to both the Pahlavi and Islamic regimes in Iran is the inhumane and barbarous treatment of their political and ideological enemies and not the application of disciplinary practices of modern social institutions.

Rejali's postmodernist discourse about torture has little to say about the problem of agency and the active meaning of resistance to the disembedding effects of the Iranian state. It gives no clue to how to reconstruct the experiences of those tortured in order to reclaim their identity as historical subjects. Victims of torture in Iran must look elsewhere to find solace for the scars left on their body and soul.

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