

Power, Islam, and Political Elite in Iran: A Study of the Iranian Political Elite from Khomeini to Ahmadinejad

By *Eva Patricia Rakel*

Leiden: Brill, 2009, 291 pages, ISBN 9789004171763, \$142.

The problem with this book is that it does not deliver what the title promises. In a study of any country's political elite one expects biographic data and discussions of geographic origins, educational achievements, socio-cultural characteristics, and career patterns of a set of individuals identified as constituting a country's political elite, followed by analyses of how certain members of society are recruited into the elite and socialized into its *modus operandi*. Very little of that can be found in this book – elite recruitment, for instance, is addressed in less than a page. Instead, we have a narrative of how domestic and foreign policy in Iran have evolved over three decades, analyzed through the prism of factional rivalries.

In the first two chapters, the author approaches the political system of Iran from the perspective of political science. She identifies the three main factions that have been competing for power in Iran and traces their evolution and changing fortunes over the last three decades.

The book is ambitious in that it attempts to cover all policy areas that matter: economics (chapter 3), culture (chapter 4), and foreign policy (chapters 5-7). While very little in these chapters is new, the information they contain has been painstakingly assembled, logically presented, and dispassionately explained. The book is thus very useful as a reference work: if one wants to know, for instance, what relations with the Middle East were like while Khomeini was alive, how the press was

treated under President Khatami, or what efforts Europeans have made to diffuse the nuclear crisis. Because one can quickly locate the sections that contain competently written summaries of relevant data, events, and statements.

The book's last two chapters are its most original. In chapter 6, the author discusses Iran's policy towards Europe, and in chapter 7, she examines the policies of the member countries of the European Union toward Iran. In this last chapter, the author gives us a fascinating overview of the different policies pursued by the major players, Italy, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, and provides useful and hard-to-find data about trade flows. She also explains how these national strategies interact with policy initiatives of the European Union.

The best that can be said about this very expensive book is that an awful lot of work went into it. The bibliography of secondary sources, all of whose items are dutifully cited in the book and have therefore been read by the author, is 18 pages long. Anybody looking for an article or book about any subject relating to politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran is likely to find something useful in this bibliography.

There is nothing objectionable about this book, aside flagrant mistakes when it comes to transliteration and translation. For example, there are enough English-language books about Iran for everyone to know that *Showra-ye Negahban* is commonly translated as "Council of Guardians," not "Council of the Guardian" – a

quick perusal of Iran's constitution, official translations of which are available on the Internet, would have yielded that information too. The author apologizes for "inconsistencies" in the transliteration of Persian

words and names; the problem is not inconsistency but the fact that too many transliterations are just plainly wrong.

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Hold on to Your Veil Fatima! And Other Snapshots of Life in Contemporary Egypt

By *Sana Negus*

Reading: Garnet Publishing Company, 2010, 371 pages, ISBN 9781859642382.

"Hold on to Your Veil Fatima!" takes the reader on a journey into 21st century Egypt. The book provides an overview of the forces on the ground, which animate social and political life in the streets of Cairo today. While the issue of veiling is central to at least two chapters of the book, and is sometimes addressed with an Orientalist twist, the issues of rights, citizenship, political participation, social protests, gender and sexual identities, are tackled through a variety of methods including interviews, participant observation, as well as the author's immersion into Egyptian society and exposure to street politics at the aftermath of the American-led invasion of Iraq and the ongoing Palestinian struggle for statehood.

Thus, Negus offers a nice overview of the types of debates taking place among Egypt middle classes and the social forms of organization of protest and gender dynamics in Egypt's metropolitan city, Cairo. The journalistic style of the book makes it very accessible to a general reader, and to anyone looking for a quick glimpse on Egypt's recent history, and economic transformation under the "revolutionary" era of Gamel Abdel Nacer's and the liberal and neoliberal eras of Presidents Anouar Sadat and Housni Mubarak.

Because of the descriptive style of the book, the book lacks an organizing argument, which diminishes its appeal to an academic audience. However, since the book nicely weaves stories, news, and events with historical snapshots it offers a nice intrusion into Egyptian daily life, social struggles, and gender dynamics as observed, experienced, and interpreted by a western female journalist.

The first chapter provides a historical overview about the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood under British colonialism, their appeal to the revolutionary zeal of the Free Officers, and their tension with the regime of Gamel Abdel Nasser. It also details the internal divisions among the various jihadis and non-jihadi groups, and the centrality of the Palestinian struggle, which led to the assassination of President Sadat in 1981. The chapter provides also an overview of the struggles by various jihadi groups against the state power under Mubarak's regime, as well as their splits around issues of violence and armed response to foreign intervention.

The next two chapters are devoted to gender dynamics and the question of women's rights. The author describes her own exposure to questions of gender transgres-