

Atabaki, Touraj (Hrsg.): *The State And The Subaltern. Modernization, Society and the State in Turkey and Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris 2007. ISBN: 978-1-845-11339-1; 256 pp.

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'The State and the Subaltern' is a collection of eleven well-crafted essays on late Ottoman, Turkish and Iranian history. It is based on a workshop at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, convened by the editor of this volume, Touraj Atabaki, in 2003.¹ Atabaki's intention is to discuss the processes of accommodation of and resistance to two cases of authoritarian modernisation, which he sees characterised by the prominence of authoritarian leadership. In fact, he suggests that after the demise of the Ottoman empire and the setbacks of the Iranian constitutional movement, 'middle classes and the intelligentsia [were left with] no other option than to look for a man of order, who, as an agent of the nation, was to modernize society, sometimes even against the will of the people, and, install a centralized, powerful ... government capable of solving the country's growing problems of underdevelopment'. Having thus established a surprisingly deterministic framework for comparison, he sets out the goal 'to have a comparative, contrasting and inclusive historical study of modernization in modern Turkey and Iran from below' by focusing on 'subaltern' groups, whose history is disregarded in official historiographies (p. xv).

As the collection is not organised around sections, and the individual chapters come with no apparent ordering principle, and for the sake of clarity, I group the essays around the five thematic clusters of Ottoman legacy, ethno-religious diversity, opposition and resistance, labour and gender. Erik-Jan Zürcher's examination of Turkey's Ottoman legacy is a key chapter, as it establishes the larger historical context. In contradistinction to Atabaki, who suggests convergence and similarity on the meta-level of conceptual de-

bates (i. e. authoritarian models of modernisation), Zürcher discusses the conditions of total war and destruction that paved the way for the emergence of the republic and that shaped the world views of its leaders. The loss of the Balkan territories, birthplace of the majority of Young Turk cadres, the next to complete extermination of the empire's Armenians, the loss of up to 2,5 million lives among the Muslim population, and the devastation of the economy of large parts of Anatolia, all these are contextual parameters crucial to understand the severity of Unionist and Kemalist authoritarianism.

Vangelis Kechriotis's examination of the gradual estrangement of the empire's non-Muslim millets from its increasingly Turkish-nationalist leaders, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), further highlights the particularity of the Ottoman/Turkish case. Unlike in Iran, where the political role of non-Muslim communities was marginal, the Christian millets in the Ottoman empire took centre stage in debates and events shaping the territorial and political future of the region. Kechriotis traces a widening disconnect: On the one side, a CUP government that sought to secularise the state in order to maximise its power, yet defining the nation as exclusively Muslim. On the other, an Orthodox community, that was secularising its institutions and power structures, while clinging to old-established 'privileges'. If after the 1908 revolution, Young Turks still believed in the imperial policy of negotiation, discrimination and 'privileges', reminiscent of Reza Shah's policies, with the Balkan Wars and World War 1, the wish to negotiate 'at least in the manner that the traditional institutions of the Ottoman society were used to' (p. 70) was gone once for all.

Donald Quataert's chapter on the strikes of 1908, the first wide-reaching organised labour protests in the Ottoman empire, traces the emergence of modern unions in Istanbul and Izmir from the 1820s against the backdrop of the perseverance of the guild system and an overly suspicious state. Labour in the empire was ethnically stratified, and many trade union leaders were in fact members of the Christian millets or foreigners. By the time the republic emerged, and workers could have

¹ It is also the follow-up to the volume Touraj Atabaki / Erik-Jan Zürcher (eds.), *Men of Order. Authoritarian Modernization under Atatürk and Reza Shah*, London 2004.

built upon this tradition of trade unionism, restrictive labour laws, ethnic cleansing and war had left the unions headless, and the state in charge.

'With or Without Workers' is Kaveh Bayat's meticulous micro-history of a strike in the Abadan oil refinery in 1929, the first major industrial action in Iran, which established the patterns of discontent and conflict around oil and foreign domination that would erupt in the 1950s, and then again, in the Islamic revolution. Bayat's essay is also a reminder of the differential contexts: While Reza Shah's authoritarian regime struggled to impose its reforms on an unruly population and the modern sectors of the economy remained largely foreign dominated, Turkey in the late 1920s had literally disengaged from the world in economic terms and committed itself to refashioning its society through a ruthless project of social engineering.

The Pahlavi reforms of 1927-1929, often compared to the preceding Kemalist revolution, and the resistance they were met with are the subject of Stephanie Cronin's 'The New Order and its Opponents in Iran'. She explores the fierce resistance to the Pahlavi reforms by a coalition of religious scholars (ulema) and bazaris in cities like Tabriz and Teheran, as well as by Azeri and Kurdish tribes in the countryside. In comparison, Hülya Küçük's 'Sufi Reactions Against the Reforms' elucidates how in Turkey members of the ulema and of Sufi brotherhoods were either incorporated into state institutions, or defrocked. Most leaders of religious confraternities chose to acquiesce and keep a low profile. They accepted that they had ceased to be 'someone', and had become 'anyone' (p. 140), only to re-emerge after the relative liberalisation of the 1950s. The experience of near eradication, loss of status and ridicule, together with the choice for accommodation with state policies might partly explain why most religious orders in Turkey have chosen, to our days, to abstain from revolutionary paths to power. In this, they differ profoundly from the Iranian example.

To what extent the Kemalist nation-builders were ready to keep their stranglehold on society becomes apparent in Umut Azak's critical appraisal of the Menemen incident, which oc-

curred in the last days of 1930. Reconstructing the murder of a young officer on the basis of court records, she establishes how Republican ideologues elevated this event to a founding episode of the narrative of a Manichean struggle between progress and religious reaction, and established a key commemorative practice of the state around it.

'The State and the Subaltern' promises a comparative analysis of opposition from below to what is assumed to be similar versions of authoritarian modernisation. However, a couple of brief comparative references aside, the authors seem to be conspicuously uninterested in the 'other' case. The Iranian chapters deal with Iranian history, and the Turkish/Ottoman chapters deal with Turkish/Ottoman history. The improbable image emerges that there was hardly any transfer of ideas, policies and people between the two countries. The lack of historical and thematic categorisation and a synthetic introduction that would establish a comparative perspective between Turkey/Ottoman empire and Iran does not help the reader, as it seems to reinforce the misleading assumption that the two cases are rather similar. At a closer look, the individual essays, especially those of Zürcher, Quataert and Kechriotis, reveal to what extent the Ottoman/Turkish case of modernisation is characterised by the conditions of destruction and rupture.

Such conditions were absent in the case of Iran, where the old imperial mindset of negotiation, punishment and accommodation seems to have survived, probably even up to the Islamic revolution in 1979. Reza Shah would try wide-ranging reforms, even considering 'unveiling', but would eventually back down in the face of resistance from the ulema and bazaris, as shown in Afsaneh Najmabandi's essay. In the Ottoman empire, 1915 is the seminal turning point, after which the old imperial mindset of the state as pater familias of his subjects, meting out both punishment and privilege was replaced with a social Darwinist state that kills, if need be, to ensure compliance and conformity, and where negotiation has been dropped from the repertoire of governance.

'The State and the Subaltern' is not a 'comparative, contrasting and inclusive historical

study of modernization in modern Turkey and Iran from below'. Without a synthesis, and a meaningful conceptual focus – is the subaltern approach really the most appropriate to discuss as disparate groups as the empire's Greek Orthodox millet and the class of religious scholars? – this is a collection of essays that stay firmly within the confines of their respective epistemological communities. The 'subaltern politics' approach seems to face significant methodological limitations, when it is used for comparative purposes, at least in this volume. That the collection is, nevertheless, a major contribution to the debate in Ottoman, Turkish and Iranian studies, is owed to the high quality and originality of its individual chapters.

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