

Jan-Erik Lane and Hamadi Redissi, Religion and Politics, Islam and Muslim Civilisation. Ashgate, Aldershot, UK & Burlington, USA, 2004. (Pp. 213). ISBN 10 7546 4167 8.

The starting point of this volume is purportedly Max Weber's axiom that religious values and beliefs have had immense social consequences and the stated intentions of the authors is "to launch a new analysis of Islam, different from that of Weber" and to fill in the gaps Weber left behind. The authors accept the desirability and inevitability of modernity and posit this as reference frame for their analysis: the advance of Muslim societies, particularly Arab societies, towards modernity is hindered more by traditionalism, than by Islam itself; that is to say the authoritarian nature of politics in Muslim societies, patrimonial attitudes and feudalism (p. 191). They argue that the "Koran (sic) is reconcilable with both modernity and post-modernity". Traditionalism has stood in the way of modernisation of Muslim societies, including the absorption in its milieu of both the market economy and democracy.

If Edward Said were alive today he would recognise this volume as representing the kind of orientalism that he was so scathing about. Said exposed the "unholy alliance between the enlightenment and colonialism" and Max Weber, understandably steeped in the intellectual tradition of the West reflect the methodology of that environment. It does not however appear that Lane and Redissi have been informed by Said's critique, as their analysis of Muslim societies is based on an orientalist mindset. Writing within the frame of the Weberian analysis they plunge headlong into the rationalist discourse. They "claim that Islam as a religion had the universal features of occidental rationalism", laud modernism and post-modernism and even the capitalist economic system.

There is an a priori assumption by the authors in this volume that modernity and its underpinning economic system are desirable objectives. There is however a biting counter critique of these phenomena which any apprentice researcher could access. David Hume in the eighteenth century and Nietzsche in the nineteenth century were part of the counter enlightenment movement and were contemptuous of the rationalist discourse. Although the authors discuss the reconciliation of the Qur'an with "progress" there is no reference to revelation and its juxtaposition with reason – not the same thing as rationalism. Society is in the throes of social and environmental collapse and it is now seen that anarchic capitalism supported by the nation state and democracy is at the root of it.

Muslims are already avid participants in the rat race that is modernity and this volume attempts to provide the intellectual justification for further truncating the vision of Islam in the conduct of human affairs. How can the paradigm of submission, Islam, be subsumed into the paradigm of Cartesian domination? It has occurred to some that expanding scientific knowledge and technological development coupled with an unbridled global economic system is well on the way to destroying life on this planet as we know it.

There is a disconcerting reference to Turkish rule, meaning The Ottoman Caliphate, being seen by Arabs as colonial (p. 9). If so then the Umayyad, the Abbasid and the Cordoban periods were also colonial. But this was patently not the case as the Caliphate was not colonial rule. In one of the more redeeming sections of the book (p.

183) the authors describe the Ottoman Millet system. What ultimately poisoned it was the European sponsored ideology of the nation state coupled by a usurious banking system and the hypnosis induced by democracy, the alleged roots of what is now defined as progress. What is in question here is the particular form of democracy, which is now being propagated by adherents to a modernist fundamentalism with proselytising zeal. Like the zealots of old they will even go to war for it. In their analysis of the current Iraqi war (p. 189) the authors stunningly leave out the creation of Iraq itself on the rubble of the Ottoman Caliphate, which the British and the French helped destroy. History is merely repeating itself as it would appear that past lessons have not been learned. The Iraqi nation state (as indeed the whole of the Middle East) was created by war and an attempt is now being made to democratise it by war.

If this volume has a redeeming feature it is an indication to future researchers of the direction not to take and to heed the potholes that Edward Said took great risk in exposing in his orientalist discourse.

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