



Dr. Noon Loves His Wife More Than Mussadiq: A Rememory of Politics and Paternity in Iran in the 1960s

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Abstract

In this article we analyze how Shahraam Rahimian rewrites the history of Iran's 1953 coup in his novel, *Dr. Noon Loves His Wife More than Mussadiq*, as a distressing and dreadful historical event for the intellectuals of the country. Basing the argument on Katouzian's theory of history in Iran and using Lacan's theory of individuation, we want to read the novel as an attempt to introduce Iran during the 1960s coup as an individual who experiences the bitter and cruel growth from the imaginary to the symbolic.

Key words: 1953 coup; Shahram Rahimian; Lacan; Katouzian; Iranian historical novel

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There is nothing new in the world except the history
 you do not know.
 Harry Truman

Iranian history before the 1953 coup is characterized by frequent cases of patricide, filicide, fratricide and regicide. A number of historians and theorists have explained this fact in different and at times contradictory ways. Concentrating on the 1953 coup and the downfall of Mussadiq, scholars such as Mark J. Gasiorowski (2003), James A. Bill (1988), Richard W. Cottam (1979), James F. Goode (1997), C. M. Woodhouse (1982), William

Rager Louis (1984), Stephen Kinzer (2003), Fakhreddine Azimi (1989) and Homa Katouzian (2008) have tried to illuminate the dark aspects of the event. Most of these scholars, particularly Woodhouse and Kinzer, trace the coup to the policies of the US and Britain and the role of CIA. The documents recently issued by CIA on the sixtieth anniversary of the coup reveal the fact that the coup was supported by the US and British Intelligence Services (see FP issue: August 18, 2013). However, Katouzian appears to be more profound in that he has proposed a basis for his study and analysis of such pivotal historical events since he traces the roots to the very mechanism of the change and transition of power in Iran.

According to Katouzian's theory of political history in Iran, Iranian society had always been a "pre-legal society" since there had never been a rule for the transition of power from one person to the other; therefore, it had been possible for every Iranian man to become Vizier, Shah or to fill any other political position. Katouzian makes a list of Iranian political figures from Hasanak the Vizier to the Pahlavi dynasty (*Iranian Society*, p.261) to show the "arbitrary" nature of power transition. As Katouzian reminds us, it had been possible for people at different times to kill their fathers, their sons, their brothers, their kings, their Viziers, and their counselors if there was a struggle for power (*The Political Economy*, 2003, p.8). A significant indication of this fact is visible in the history of Iran in the last three centuries from Safavid dynasty to Pahlavi. The key terms here in this theory are the "pre-legal society" and "arbitrary." Any attempt to step out of this political system and to create a democratic government had been doomed. In other words, the transition from the rule of the father to that of the son had been impossible. In what follows, we trace Katouzian's theory of Iran's political history in Shahram Rahimian's political historical novel *Dr. Noon Loves His Wife more than Mussadiq* (2002).

Rahimian's novel rewrites the history of the 1953 coup and the downfall of Dr. Mussadiq, from a psychoanalytic and aesthetic viewpoint. The novel is a postmodernist novel in which history and fiction are intermingled in order to provide a profound understanding of Iran's history. Rahimian's treatment of history reminds us of Derrida's "hauntology," a term that emphasizes the haunting effect of the past on the present. The past is apparently finished and forgotten; it is, however, always haunting and affecting the present. As Jago Morrison explains "like a haunting, a past returns as a half-presence, something which is simultaneously remembered and known, and at the same time strange and unknowable" (p.24). In *Dr. Noon* the past haunts the present in a number of ways especially through the character of Mussadiq. Mussadiq claims his share of Dr. Noon's life, so much so that he seems to occupy it.

In Lacanian psychology, for his development to adulthood, an infant has to pass through the imaginary stage and enter the domain of the symbolic. Although this transition means disconnection with the grand Object of desire, the mother, it is necessary for a child's development and growth. In the mirror stage, which takes place between the 6th and 18th months of the child's growth, the child starts to recognize his own image in the mirror. He regards the image in the mirror to be himself and simultaneously somebody else. For Lacan, this is a turning point in the growth of the infant. The formation of personality is entrenched in this chasm or lack.

The formation of the identity of the subject, therefore, is marked by what Lacan refers to as "alienating identity." It is necessary for the subject to go through this change in order to turn into a social subject or an ego. What Lacan calls the "Real" is in fact a non-existing or never-achievable state that the subject wants to achieve (see Lacan & Granoff's, 1956). As long as the subject is in the domain of the symbolic he is in a state of alienation from the Real and all his activities throughout life are attempts in vain to achieve it. The significance of the imaginary stage or the Mirror stage, according to Lacan, is "to establish a relation between the organism and its reality or between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*" (Ibid) (Italics in the original).

Dr. Noon can be read as a narrative of the movement from the paradise of prelinguistic order to the dystopia of the linguistic. In the novel, the short period of Mussadiq's prime ministership is represented as an ideal state which is comparable to Lacan's imaginary order and the unity with the body of the mother. On the other hand, existence under General Zahedi's oppressive rule is correlative with the brutal domain of the father and language. The relationship between Dr. Noon and his wife is understandable in terms of the rules of the Symbolic. He resents and tortures her for twenty three years while he claims that he loves her. A few months after Dr. Noon's release from prison, Mussadiq's phantom appears to him

and turns into a barrier between him and his wife for the rest of their lives. The presence of Mussadiq corrupts the couple's relationship: "So many times I liked to embrace Malektaj but he [Mussadiq] appeared and told me 'no, Mohsen! Not when I am present. I asked him 'you are always present and never leave me!'" (p.57)

Dr. Noon's life before the coup is a paradise in which he is in complete unity with the world around him. He is admired by the whole society. He is now married to and loved by the love of his childhood days and their love is stronger than ever. He is not aware of the presence of his father or uncle as obstacles on the way of his desire for his cousin. This period is the prelinguistic stage where there is all unity, the mother and, what Kristeva calls, the semiotic. The world after the coup is the bitter word of the language, the law, torture and, what Kristeva calls, the symbolic. When Dr. Noon is arrested he is threatened in symbolic terms.

A tall and stern officer...said: "No requests now! From now on your wife should live in anxiety." He looked at the Jeep driver and continued: Take him to the same public bathroom we took that guy - I don't remember what his name was - the minister of sanitation. Do not forget to ask them to take out all his clothes; all! Even his underwear. Hurry up! Don't forget what I told you. (p.38)

Later they threaten him with a shotgun (p.39). After the coup Dr. Mussadiq is replaced by General Zahedi, a cruel father figure who brings Dr. Noon into the realm of the symbolic, where the prelapsarian bliss is lost forever.

Dr. Noon's professed betrayal of Mussadiq is a turning point in the novel. Like Adam's original sin, it causes his separation from the imaginary order of life before the coup, and creates a chasm between him and his beloved Malektaj. The passage of the post-coup life costs Noon both his dear Mussadiq and his beloved wife. On the other hand, Dr. Fatemi, who is called a "lion" by Mussadiq, did not succumb to his torturers and died in prison. Noon very significantly remembers his childhood:

Dr. Noon was looking at the trees which were closely associated with Malektaj in his mind. He wondered if it had come to nothing. He remembered himself as a child sitting beside his father, and then he imagined himself in the garden of his father's house following Malektaj. (pp.49-50)

Years after his confession and his entrance to the rule of the symbolic, Dr. Noon's image of his father and uncle is subverted. His unity with the father now turns into a hostile relationship. In a dialogue with the photos of his father and uncle, the hostile nature of the father is clearly shown:

Uncle stepped out of the picture. He was sad. He shook his head with anger. He told my father: "You made a mistake leaving so much inheritance for him. He is not appreciative. It is very good that you are not alive to see and hear what has happened. Your son degraded us." (pp.60-61)

According to his father, his uncle and Mussadiq, Dr. Noon has ignored his moral and political commitment.

As punishment, he has been denied their love and is forced to live without physical and emotional contact with his beloved wife. The new political system, a form of despotism under the cruel rule of army officers such as Zahedi, is what creates a form of isolation for Dr. Noon.

Dr. Noon finally submits to the hostile rule of General Zahedi. This leads to a period of isolation in the life of Dr. Noon who was previously highly active in politics. The coup brought along the same fortune for the political parties the most significant of which was the Tudeh party. This inability to follow political goals led to cultural activities. This is comparable to what happened to the 1968 revolution in France. Eagleton believes that the inability to bring along political change finally led to the poststructuralist and deconstructionist approach to the text.

Post-structuralism was a product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe, which was 1968. Unable to break the structures of state power, post-structuralism found it possible instead to subvert the structures of language. Nobody, at least, was likely to beat you over the head for doing so. (Eagleton, 1983, p.123)

In the novel Malektaj suggests a number of things to Noon in order to forget what has happened. She suggests he write stories: "Now like the past start writing stories" (p.73) or practice gardening. Whatever social activity Malektaj suggests is harshly rejected by Mussadiq. Such activities are, in Lacanian terminology, the little objects of desire. After he has started gardening, Mussadiq's phantom appears to him and protests:

What an interesting means of escape you have made for yourself! Congratulations! You have forgotten everything. Wow, you have planted very beautiful flowers. I would forget everything if I were you. Completely forgotten! Particularly that red rose which is very big! Bravo! Well done! You have forgotten me and have grown such a beautiful flower. You love Delkash's music too! What else do you need for a hedonistic life? (p.77)

What is significant here is the suggestion to write stories. Near the end of the novel Dr. Noon tells us that Malektaj suggested they fill their empty and idle days after the coup with talking. They cannot even talk and she regrets their failure: "Why didn't we talk? Why didn't we fill our life with talking? (p.100). Malektaj blames herself since she had not been able to sooth their pain by talking or storytelling, a device practiced by Scheherazade to avoid death and to sooth Shahryar's rage. Dr. Noon has trespassed the boundary of the normal; that is why he cannot write stories or practice any other activities. He is just involved in activities that bring along his death. One can see that after the coup the death drive in Dr. Noon comes to prominence and the balance between the life and the death drives is disrupted. Drinking, is a means through which Dr. Noon brings along his death and downfall.

It is after Mussadiq's comment about his gardening and his relationship with his wife that Dr. Noon starts a life of self-torture and isolation. From then on, he terminates physical contact with his wife. He uproots the flowers and destroys everything that might provide a means of escape. He asserts "I couldn't help it; I stood against Malektaj" (p.78). One night he uproots all the flowers in their garden, and then he tells Malektaj that it was Mussadiq who uprooted and trampled them. As time passes, Dr. Noon's situation becomes more critical. Every time Mussadiq appears to him he resigns from an activity, so that his life becomes a gradual self-committed death. Dr. Noon even denies himself the remembrance of his happy life in the past. Before the coup they hardly had a night without love which is one indication of his unity with the world around him. Later we see that he even denies having had any relationship with his wife.

Death is the term that best describes life after the coup not only for the intellectuals but for the whole society. The art and literature of the 1950s and 1960s are indicative of this pervasive spiritual death. Poetry and music of the period reflect this national loss. Akhavane Sales's "Winter", with its dark, cold and gloomy atmosphere is a good expression of the social and political situation after the coup. The music after the coup bears a sense of frustration, loss and depression.

The change in Dr. Noon's fortune in Rahimian's novel and his isolation after the coup is indicative of the life and the fortune of the whole notion. This novel concentrates on the change brought about by the 1953 coup which was itself an episode in the chain of events from the constitutional revolution and the formation of Reza Khan's despotism.

Dr. Noon is a vivid image of despotism in Iran from the early stages of its history to the 1953 coup. The novel recalls a doomed attempt in the history of Iran to break through despotism and create a democracy. This transitory period of democracy does not last long. It is suffocated by the cruel father. In the history of Iran till the 1953 coup there had never been a clear criterion for the transition of power; hence, the numerous cases of patricide and fratricide among the ruling dynasties. The only principle and measure for everything, including power transition had been the dominant despot.

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