Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

*Sociology in Iran* by Ali Akbar Mahdi; Abdolali Lahsaeizadeh
Shahin Gerami


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With respect to the 1953 CIA–engineered coup against Mosaddeq, the author does a thorough job of documenting and analyzing both the U.S. motives and the long-term impact of the intervention on the Iranian state and society. What he misses in this regard is an examination of why the coup was such a low-cost and easy operation. From a normative or legal standpoint one can criticize the CIA’s covert action, but an academic analyst should ask why Mossaddeq, despite repeated warnings, was so totally unprepared to confront his enemies; or why the coup met so significant resistance from the Tudeh or the National Front supporters.

The book reveals how the increased oil revenues in the 1970s enabled the Iranian state to expand its already significant control of the national economy and thus further limit societal influence on its policies and priorities. Equally informative is the empirical demonstration of how distortions in the state-dominated economy caused gross inequalities and neglected the agricultural sector, which in turn led to mass migration of peasants to urban areas. The author examines the political implications of this development and demonstrates the extent to which the plight of the urban poor contributed to the rise of the revolutionary situation in Iran. He also illustrates how the arrogant behavior and ostentatious life style of the Shah and his elite produced intense political alienation among the middle-class sectors of the population.

The portrayal of the domestic politics of Iran during the period under investigation is the weakest part of the book. Here the descriptions are superficial and the author’s insufficient familiarity with the intricacies of native politics causes him to give credence to some old rumors that rival opposition elements used to concoct against each other. For example, he carelessly includes Khalil Maleki, the leader of a democratic socialist formation (the Third Force), among the opponents of Mosaddeq. He does not seem to appreciate that Maleki, a gifted political thinker, at times combined his unflinching support for Mossadegh in a famous article published in *Science and Society* (no. 7, 1953), about the threat of a military coup against his government. Another lapse of the author into dubious speculation is his assertion that Reza Barahani’s *The Crowned Cannibals* may have been “written under SAVAK’s auspices in order to spread fear among the opposition” (p. 157). Professor Barahani wrote his book in the mid-1970s while residing in the United States, and his publisher was Random House. The contention that *The Crowned Cannibals* could have been a SAVAK project has to presume that Mr. Barahani, a victim of the Shah’s torturers and the best known anti-Shah activist in exile, was actually an agent of the SAVAK—a preposterous proposition.

Putting such shortcomings aside, the fact remains that Gasiorowski’s thesis concerning the determining role of American foreign policy in the collapse of the Pahlavi regime is not and cannot be supported by evidence. The complex and multifaceted causes of the Iranian Revolution defy scrutiny by any kind of reductionism. Nevertheless, as a case study in U.S. foreign policy, as well as a perspective on how the twenty-five-year Washington–Tehran connection influenced the course of Iranian politics, Gasiorowski’s book is a useful contribution to our understanding of the forces that shaped the character and destiny of an important cliency relationship during the cold war.

**Ali Akbar Mahdi Lhasaeizadeh, Sociology in Iran, Middle Eastern Series, no. 27 (Bethesda, Md.: Jahan Book Co., 1992). Pp. 141.**

**Reviewed by Shahin Gerami, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Southwest Missouri State University, Springfield**

Social institutions in postrevolutionary Iran have been reorganized in major ways, because the Islamic ideology of the revolution called for a reevaluation of social structures and their
associated functions so they could fulfill the goals of an Islamic society. To this end, education received particular attention. The new Islamic society needed members whose early training included an Islamic normative system. Schools and textbooks were therefore cleansed of unsympathetic teachers and un-Islamic ideas.

This educational cleansing swept through Iranian universities, the breeding and recruiting grounds for revolutionary ideas of various shades. Supporters of the previous system of education and of competing ideologies were removed and disfranchised, so that higher education could serve the new republic properly. This cleansing process was thorough. Even the scientific disciplines were asked “why?”, “for whom?”, and “by whom?” Their premises were questioned, their goals and targets were scrutinized, and their practitioners were investigated. Many disciplines were branded “Western” or unnecessary or both. The social sciences fell into all three categories at one time or another.

In this book, Mahdi and Lahsaeizadeh provide a descriptive history of sociology since it was introduced in Iran around 1946. They chart the history of sociology, sociology departments, and research institutes up to 1990, beginning with an overview of sociology as a discipline, with enrollment statistics and types and numbers of degrees granted; research institutes and the backgrounds of social researchers in Iran; printed materials and forums available to sociologists; the nature and problems of sociology during the Pahlavi era; the status of the discipline in postrevolutionary Iran; Islamization; and finally its future in Iran. Each chapter is rich in statistical and qualitative information. The authors should be commended for their patience and persistence in obtaining often illusive documents. Their bibliography is a testament to their untiring efforts to provide inclusive and comprehensive information.

The debate about sociological practice in pre- and postrevolutionary Iran reflects the political exigencies of each system. In the Western-oriented Pahlavi regime, the main sociological paradigm was structural functionalism and similar models founded on the premises of Western positivism. Critical theories in Iran—not unlike those in the United States—remained at the margin of sociological discourse. In America, critical sociologists were excluded from mainstream forums and publications. In Iran, political persecution and imprisonment awaited many of the critical thinkers.

In postrevolutionary Iran, the marginal became the central, imposing the same authoritarian exclusiveness of the previous sociological paradigms. Chapter 5 describes the “indigenization” of sociology in the Islamic Republic. The anti-Western, anti-imperialist nature of the revolution set the stage for the deconstruction of all the existing paradigms in almost all the sciences. The social sciences were of course more apt to retain the Eurocentrism of the positivistic tradition. Therefore, they were deconstructed and then reconstructed based on Islamic ideals.

The authors discuss the “indigenization” debate that has sprung up in the Third World countries. They suggest that “the idea of indigenization in the social sciences represents the interest of the Third World social scientists in developing paradigms and methodologies based on the specificity of their local conditions rather than some universal ingredients imported from the West” (pp. 73–74). In prerevolutionary Iran, indigenization began with Ali Ahmad’s “Westoxication” and Sharīʿati’s deconstruction of the Western social sciences. These early efforts did not, however, lead to a systematic theory construction and sound methodological innovations for investigating Iranian social issues.

The postrevolutionary milieu was ripe for the further deconstruction of sociology. Indigenization became Islamization. In chapter 6 the authors describe the elements of the “Islamization movement.” The Islamic sociology is universalistic, nonhistorical, collectivist, subjective/spiritual, idealistic, theological/teleological, and moralistic as compared to Western sociologies which are relativistic, historical, individualist, objective/materialistic, real- istic, teleological, and secularistic (p. 87). Islamization is based on two principles: rejection
Reviews

of Western ideas and models, and the validation of past scientific contributions. With respect to the latter, most writings about the Islamic works are framed in response to the Western paradigms, since the Iranian intelligentsia is even more obsessed with the West today than it was before, though now it is preoccupied with rejecting rather than imitating it. It is this obsession, rather than genuine scientific inquiry, that leaves Islamic sociology without scientific foundation.

In chapter 4, the authors briefly refer to the “lack of [a] strong tradition” for scientific inquiry in Iran (p. 49). This premise, however, is not considered in the following chapters where the deconstruction of the Western sociology by Ali Ahmad and Shari'ati and reconstruction of Islamic sociology are discussed. Attending to the fact that Iran, like most Third World countries, lacks a “scientific ethos” would have fundamentally changed the descriptive nature of these chapters. A critical analysis of the authoritarian nature of Shari'ati Ali Ahmad traditionalism or that of the Islamic sociology would have enriched these chapters. The fact is that Islamic sociology, like its predecessor, is exclusionary to the detriment of the scientific inquiry.

Another shortcoming, though minor in nature, are the stylistic and grammatical errors and misspellings throughout the book. “Since modern sociology, as was modern science, was developed” on page 28, or “sensitive researches” on page 44 are two among many examples.

Despite its minor shortcomings, Sociology in Iran poses a timely challenge to the Western, particularly American, sociology. At a time when multiculturalism and globalization of education are the catch words, American sociologists, mostly concerned with local community issues, need to broaden their point of reference and take note of new perspectives coming out of Third World countries. This book is a must for those concerned with the indigenization of sciences, and those interested in Islamic fundamentalism and Iranian education will benefit from the data and the original sources utilized by the authors.


REVIEWED BY WAEL B. HALLAQ, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal

For students and professors of Islamic law, Weiss's book is a dream come true. It represents the most comprehensive statement yet made on the subject, even though, as is clear from the title, it is limited to the works of Amidi. Weiss writes with a felicitous and lucid style, paying careful attention to detail. Having the purpose of exposing Amidi's legal theory, the work is unparalleled in its phenomenal success in running the gamut of theoretical issues dealt with not only by Amidi, but also by the majority of Sunni legal theologians.

In an informative introduction, Weiss treats several issues that pave the way for an effective presentation of Amidi's theory. A noteworthy part of the introduction is an insightful analysis of the five legal norms (obligatory, recommended, neutral, disapproved, and prohibited) in light of the modern distinction between law and morality. It is a tribute to Weiss's historical sensitivity that, having explained to the reader the moral consistency of some of these norms, he unqualifiedly insists that in his treatment of Amidi he will, after the example of medieval jurists, ignore the modern distinctions and instead address them as legal norms.

Since legal theory is grounded in theological, juridical, and linguistic postulates, Weiss dedicates a lengthy chapter to the exposition of each of these. This is followed by twelve chapters treating what Weiss terms “the indicators of the law.” These include, as anyone familiar with the literature would expect, the Qur'an, the Sunna, consensus, transmission of the texts, legal language, abrogation, qiya, istidîl, and other controversial sources. The