

Sociology in Iran: Between Politics, Religion and Western Influence

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Sociology emerged in Iran in the context of a Western-oriented modernization program instituted by a patrimonial state. The discipline developed, after it was established in the educational institutions, to train administrators for the emerging state bureaucracies. Despite this official role and lack of a distinct identity, the discipline gained popularity by the mid-twentieth century and soon acquired controversial status because of its ideological and political orientation. Since its inception, the discipline has had to confront not only the ambivalences of a modern social science, but also the ideological and political tensions of Iranian society.

In what follows, I will present briefly the history of the field in the broader context of social sciences within the modern educational system. Although the focus is on sociology, at times I refer to 'social sciences', since in many contexts the fate of the discipline was determined by the other social sciences, such as anthropology, demography, social psychology, social planning, and development. I will also briefly analyze the political and cultural climate within which social sciences have been introduced and practiced,

the paradigmatic changes within the field of sociology, the Islamization of social sciences after the revolution, public and official perceptions as well as some enduring features of the discipline, together with the strengths and weaknesses of the field as it has evolved in Iran. Discussing conflicting ideological and political challenges the discipline has had to confront, I argue that although these challenges have prevented the discipline from forming a cohesive community of theorists and researchers, sociology still remains a source of enlightenment for both public and social elite as a discipline capable of analyzing social ills, and as a field of study for students.

PRE-REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD: ORIGINS AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Iran's social sciences, including sociology, are linked to the historical development of the country as a modern nation-state. An assessment of Western ideas for understanding the

underdeveloped nature of the country led many to demand the establishment of modern educational institutions. In the 1930s Iran began the process of modernization by creating a centralized state and developing an administrative infrastructure. Designed after Western models, this modernization involved social planning and social research, i.e. the collection and analysis of demographic data as done in the West; this was the beginning of sociology.

Sociology, as a formal discipline, started in 1946 when a course on sociology of education was introduced in one of the colleges in Tehran. Gholamhossein Sadiqi, considered the father of Iranian sociology, wrote the first sociology textbook and incorporated sociological analysis into his course *Societals in Persian Literature*. Later sociological ideas were included in the curriculum of the faculty of letters and humanities in most universities. In 1958, the Institute for Social Studies and Research and afterwards the Faculty of Social Sciences were established at the University of Tehran. The latter offered sociology courses as part of an undergraduate degree. During the 1960s there was widespread expansion of sociology departments and by 1978, most universities had a sociology department (Mahdi and Lahsaeizadeh, 1992). Until the mid-1960s the curriculum was based on the French system and changed to the American one, now taught by Iranian graduates of foreign universities. Later, as students came to be trained at home, Iranian-trained sociologists filled the new departments. Additional courses on Iranian history, human geography, demography, cultural, and social anthropology were also offered.

From the early 1960s onwards, sociology became popular with the expansion of state bureaucracy and developmental projects in the country. The demand for trained employees in human services and social sciences led many to seek higher education. Additionally, the learning of sociology was endorsed because it helped to critically reflect both the nature of underdevelopment and contemporary dictatorship established through the consolidation of power by a young

US-backed monarch. The trends in Iran were in continuity with those in the rest of the world wherein there was an appeal for critical studies and Marxist ideas.

By the late 1960s this popularity was reinforced by the emergence of a critical community of secular academic and non-academic intellectuals armed with the New Left perspectives critical of the undemocratic and dependent character of the state. By the 1970s the increase in scholarships for students studying abroad, due to escalating government revenues from high oil prices, added to this popularity. Two critical sociologists with opposing ideological views contributed to this momentum. Amir Hossein Aryanpour, a leading intellectual on the left, promoted critical sociology, especially among students, despite the hegemonic positivist posture of sociology departments within the universities (Mahdi, 2001). Numerous editions of Aryanpour's textbook (1973) popularized sociology. In the early 1970s Ali Shariati, a French-trained Iranian religious sociologist, increased sociology's appeal to religious students by synthesizing sociological theories and radical religious ideas (Rahnema, 2000). Challenging Marxist interpretations, Shariati, along with Ayatollah Morteza Motahri, offered Islamic explanations for the problems of the Pahlavi state. These developments contributed to a revolutionary movement that culminated in the Iranian Revolution of 1979, overthrowing a pro-Western secular monarchy (Keddie, 1981).

Once established, the discipline experienced two contradictory pressures, one from its institutionalized structure and the other from its popular appropriation. Institutionally, it reflected the dominant administrative logic of a modern, Western, and secular, but undemocratic, state. Here sociology was promoted as a positivistic social science which did not tolerate critical pedagogical and curricular approaches. The state had banned Iran's Communist party and discouraged the teaching of Marxist ideas. Conversely, outside of academia, critical ideas against the Shah's authoritarian rule and American

positivism were very popular. While critical and Marxist sociological ideas were prevalent among secular intellectuals and students, radical Islamic ideas were widespread among most first generation college students.

Thus the sociology curriculum came under contradictory pressures from inside and outside academia. The state demanded an apolitical and non-critical curriculum, but the teaching of sociology remained reflexive. Critical ideas were taught cautiously, often clothed in vague language, and without a specific text, allowing teachers to deny having taught those ideas or to claim misunderstanding by students.

THEORETICAL TRENDS

Pre-revolutionary theoretical approaches can be classified as empirical-positivist, critical-ideological, and synthetic-eclectic. The first group included politically disinterested sociologists with functionalist, positivist, and empirical orientations (e.g. Behnam and Rasekh, 1969). Given the pro-Western modernizing bias of the Pahlavis, it was institutionally rewarding and politically safe for sociologists within academia to adopt empirical-positivistic approaches. While some faculty in the empirical-positivist camp served the state in administrative or advisory capacities, radical professors faced intimidation and harassment.

The second group endorsed conflict theorists, either Marxist (e.g. Ashtiani, 2007) or Weberian (e.g. Ashraf, 1980). They drew from German idealism, European Marxism, Marxist-Leninism, and the French sociologist Georges Gurvitch. They had a critical view of the prevailing political and economic policies of the country. The third group questioned the naive application of Western theories to Iranian society (Naraqi, 2007), alternated their perspectives depending on the subject matter, and/or used several theories to explain the same phenomenon. Their shifting theoretical orientations reflected

the politically charged academic environment and the four ideological trends shaping national politics and discourses: two internal to Iran, those of Islamism and radical nationalism; and two external to it, those of socialism and liberalism. Their approaches to sociology depended on the nature of issues, ideologies and political implications.

Radical students viewed apolitical sociologists as either political tools of the state and its Western imperialist allies, or naive individuals with a politically safe approach to the discipline. Conversely, sociologists not affiliated to state institutions were respected and their work considered important to the well-being of society. In such a politically charged atmosphere, teaching critical sociology was easier than writing. To publish was difficult because of the political risks and government scrutiny. Marxist views were presented formally as 'scientific theory', or through underground literature. Non-Marxist critical theorists did not face this difficulty, if their materials were presented in the Third-World, anti-colonial language.

THE REVOLUTION AND ISLAMIZATION OF SOCIAL SCIENCES: THE FIRST DECADE

The establishment of the Islamic Republic (IR) in 1979 entailed new challenges for sociology. Senior social scientists in bureaucracy were dismissed or forced into retirement. Many migrated abroad and as many as 220,000 industrialists and university teachers have since left the country.¹ However, in the early revolutionary period, the government encouraged critical teachings and research in academia. As radicalism was popular, even religious leaders found Marxist analysis relevant for exposing the Pahlavi's foreign dependence and explaining the ills of the country, and the causes of poverty, political oppression, and colonialism.

With the demise of the monarchy, academics expected the revolution to reduce

government control of the universities and encourage open and participatory administrative structure. Even though the revolution inaugurated the 'Islamic government', critical sociologists remained optimistic about the future and hoped for the emergence of a new society characterized by freedom and prosperity. Initially events seemed to be moving slowly in this direction. However, soon the new government re-imposed the top-down approach practiced by the Pahlavis and controlled the framing of the curriculum and the practices of sociology in the classroom.

Universities resisted the new changes and became the main battlefields of confrontation among ideological and political factions. The government decided to eliminate these political and ideological rivals by closing universities and launching the Cultural Revolution for cleansing the system of its un-Islamic, Westernized, and secularized elements. In June 1980, the Cultural Revolution Headquarter (CRH) consisting of appointed Muslim clerics, intellectuals, and government officials was established for creating an 'Islamic atmosphere' in the universities, 'Islamicizing' all curricula, and reflecting the revolutionary ethos of new theocracy.

The war with Iraq, and the clerics' need to consolidate power resulted in political repression. The educational system had to be controlled, especially social sciences and humanities – subjects which were closely aligned to religious studies. Social science was colonial in nature and designed to undermine the native moral infrastructure of Islamic society. These sciences treat religion in temporal and spatial terms whereas Islam offers a non-temporal analytical framework capable of overcoming all historical limitations. Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi and then Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Rajai openly expressed their suspicion of sociology, and the discipline came under severe ideological pressure to 'Islamicize' and 'de-Westernize' itself at both curricular and intellectual levels.

Social scientists were accused of desecralizing religious knowledge and mythical

beliefs and were thus subjected to harassment, loss of employment, and public denunciation. The Office of Cooperation between the University and Seminary was charged with reviewing the existing textbooks and to write new ones according to Islamic principles.² New texts on Islamic sociology were now written (e.g. Sediqi Sarvestani et al., 1984). Its journal published articles on 'Islamic' sciences, including Islamic methodology for the social sciences (Abdolalavi, 2003).

In 1984, universities reopened under the control of trusted appointees. Seven hundred faculty members, mainly social scientists, were dismissed and the reappointment of the faculty was conditional upon their good behavior and attendance at religious workshops.³ Current students sympathetic to the left or openly opposed to the IR were dismissed and prospective ones were screened for their moral decency and allegiance to the IR. College deans and department chairs were appointed for their religious devotion and political loyalty, not their scholarship and administrative experience. Educational decisions were centralized in the administrative units supervised by religious leaders.

To further the revolution the regime introduced many new institutions within universities, one of which was 'Jihad-e Daneshgahi' (JD = scholarly Holy War) tasked to 'implement the goals of the "cultural revolution", . . . and move towards "Islamization of universities", by organizing cultural and research activities . . . training committed Muslim students . . . and preparing them for confronting the Western cultural invasion.'⁴ Faculty associated with the JD often received official support for their research. The JD engaged in a variety of educational activities deemed important in 'the protection of the revolutionary and Islamic' government and maintained close contact with various military and political arms of the state. Another institution was the Basij (mobilization) enclaves aimed at students. In its latest meeting it has urged faculties to create knowledge for effective governance.⁵

The 1980s was a bleak period for the social sciences, especially sociology. The Cultural

Revolution, in the words of the editor of the leading Iranian social sciences journal, resulted in loss of momentum and mobility for social sciences and 'divorced [them] from other sciences into poverty' (Askari Khaneqah, 1998). The seminary established its superiority leading to a brain drain from the universities. Islamization of the social sciences resulted in production of a few introductory books, insertion of a few Islamic examples into previously written textbooks, and sometimes the addition of a chapter devoted to Islamic societies. In addition, several new courses about the history of Islam and the nature of Islamic social thought were introduced (Azadarmaki, 2006; Tanhaei, 2004). Muslim thinkers, such as Abdur al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun and Abu Nasr Mohammad al-Farabi, were presented in a populist fashion as pioneering social thinkers having relevance to modern societies (Azadarmaki, 1998; Davari Ardekani, 2003; Tabatabai, 1995). The state and religious establishments often sponsored the publication of slim texts titled 'Islamic sociology', 'Quranic sociology', 'Alavi sociology', and 'mystical-interpretative sociology' – works which often lacked rigorous methodology and a cohesive framework (e.g., Habibi Amin, 2007; Tanhaei, 2005).

Consolidation of IR took place in the context of hopes to establish a new classless society, export the revolution around the world, win the war with Iraq, rid the social sciences of their Western influence, and invent an Islamic sociology. Despite these revolutionary wishes, sociology in its Western format remained influential and the discipline continued to attract high numbers of students. Iranian sociologists of all ideological persuasions made sure that the discipline would survive in these revolutionary experimentations. Their efforts were more focused on the preservation of the discipline, its public credibility, and its distinct identity as a scientific field than its advancement. Also, by the mid-1990s there was a slow realization among the zealots that it is impossible to create an 'Islamic methodology'

or 'Islamic sociology', although it is possible to be methodologically sensitive to the Islamic nature of Middle Eastern societies (Azadarmaki, 1999; Malakian, 1999; Taleban, 2003).

Sociologists continued to remain hostage to the pressures of the Cultural Revolution. On the one hand they accepted criticism of Western social sciences but on the other abhorred the impact of the Cultural Revolution on universities and people's lives. The Cultural Revolution made them victims of revolutionary excesses and ideological dogmas, and many abandoned their previous view of revolutionary clerics as a catalyst for progressive historical transformation.

In these circumstances, sociological theorization had to remain opaque. Non-religious scholars who survived the purges were forced to accept 'true Islam as a progressive and liberating force'. Empirical-positivist social science survived by avoiding research on politically sensitive issues. Marxist social scientists who retained their jobs studied non-religious subjects. Eclectic approaches gained popularity. The new younger faculty focused on marrying Western modernity and science with religion and ethics with methodology.

REVIVAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN THE SECOND DECADE OF THE REVOLUTION

The end of the Iran-Iraq war, the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the spread of democratic movements in the developing world, and the election of Ali Akbar Rafsanjani to presidency in 1989, set the stage for a new direction in political, economic, cultural, and educational policies in the country. Recognizing the extremity of revolutionary measures, the Rafsanjani administration began a rapprochement with the West, encouraged foreign investment, initiated privatization of the economy and structural adjustment, imported Western technology, removed some of the social and

cultural limitations imposed on public spaces, lured back the educated and wealthy Iranians from abroad, liberalized the educational environment, and re-instituted some of the previously abandoned programs. The transition from war economy to reconstruction and economic development required foreign capital from international agencies. These agencies demanded liberalization of the state and removal of some of the radical ministers and influential deputies in the parliament as a precondition for loans to the IR. These developments had positive implications for the educational system and led to the revival of social sciences departments and an increase in the significance of sociology in the public domain through many interventions.

First, the establishment of a Presidential Center for Strategic Studies attracted a number of young reformist revolutionaries who reflected critically on the war, revolutionary policies, the feasibility of an utopian Islamic classless society, the widespread alienation of the new middle class from government policies, and the yearning for political change. To find solutions to these problems, they studied Western theories of social change, democracy, civil society, and modernity.

Second, a group of young revolutionaries following Shariati's ideas founded the monthly *Kian*. Labeled the journal of 'theoretical left', *Kian* became the citadel of reformist Islamic thinkers associated with Abdolkarim Soroush – an anti-Marxist Muslim intellectual member of CRH, now converted to modernist thinker. *Kian* was successful in reviving the modernist tradition of Islamic thinking and in developing new interpretations of religious texts and ideas – some of which are in contradiction to the views of the traditional religious elite in power. Members of the group, such as Emadeddin Baghi, Hamid Reza Jalaipour, Mohsen Goudarzi, and Hossein Ghazian obtained degrees in sociology and intervened in the public sphere. They taught and did research on social issues, such as the nature of public attitudes in Iran and on politically sensitive ones such as the rights of prisoners.

Third, the biweekly *Asre Ma* of the Organization of Devotees of the Islamic Revolution contributed to the relevance of sociological ideas to current political change and became an influential source of political analysis in the nineties. Drawing on Shariati's ideas, on Marx's class analysis, and on Western sociopolitical theories, the paper offered fresh perspectives on current events and conducted a series of independent surveys assessing youth's inclination to religious, social, and political issues in the country (Shamsi, 2003).

Fourth, the return back of young loyal Muslim graduates who were earlier given foreign scholarships helped to convince the clerical establishment that not all Western secular theories and methodologies were irrelevant to Iran. Some returnees joined the Muslim reformist camp and became advocates for the expansion of 'civil society', thereby supporting the new President, Mohammad Khatami. The Office of Consolidation of Unity, the largest Muslim student association in universities, organized conferences on secularization, democratization, and social reform.

Fifth, Khatami's election in 1977 ushered in a new era of unprecedented openness in the IR. Newspapers and magazines, such as *Jame'eh* and *Iran-e Farda*, publicized social sciences ideas and regularly published tracks covering sociological ideas and development theories.

Sixth, the establishment of the Iranian Sociological Association in 1991 and an associated journal, restarting the publication of the *Name'h Olum-e Ejtemai* (Journal of Social Sciences), and the initiation of a number of sociological weblogs and netzines boosted scholarly morale and strengthened the infrastructure of social research.

Finally, there were secular intellectuals, writers, and academicians who, despite control exercised by the state, presented their views in influential monthly and weekly magazines such as *Adineh*, *Farhang-e Touse'eh*, and *Donya-ye Sokhan*. Although politically powerless, and often intimidated by the

authorities, their publications on democracy, civil society, and modernity, became resources for use by religious intellectuals who had opportunities and political space for publicizing these ideas.

Once Iran broke its isolation from the rest of the world, an atmosphere conducive to the growth of social research and education developed. The reformist movement utilized ideas from social science both to legitimize and further its own cause in society. Sociological methods of survey, field observation, and polling became regular tools for measuring public sentiments about the government, campaigns advice, and organizing public opinions. Local, regional, and international conferences were organized by departments and students, foreign scholars were invited, and funds were allocated for faculty development. Iranian faculty participated in international conferences, and restrictions on the import and export of educational materials were eased.

Diverse ideas in social sciences have found legitimation today. Intellectuals have theorized on globalization in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the decline of communism, and also have reflected on the changes experienced by the Iranian revolution. Many Islamic radicals, earlier staunch supporters of the regime, have now become liberal democrats advocating the need for civil society, democracy, and human rights. Utilizing Western, secular, and liberal ideas, the reformists debated with their conservative colleagues over the future direction of the IR (Jahanbakhsh, 2001). Conservative Islamicists used postmodernist, post-structuralist, and post-colonialist theories without reservation, even though these are Western approaches.⁶

These variations are related to contemporary politics indicating the organic linkages between it and social sciences. In the 1970s, those opposing the Pahlavi regime used Marxist and Western critical social science perspectives and Islamic radicalism to explain political repression in Iran, to question the nature of the modernization policies

of the state, and to debunk the dominant Orientalist views of Iranian society. A decade later, the Islamic reformists had reversed themselves by embracing Western social science theories as a tool for delegitimizing the conservative Islamic views of the ruling clerics.⁷ Western social sciences are utilized to reject the earlier radical theories used in support of revolution and the establishment of an Islamic state. Also, concepts such as bourgeois democracy, civil society, and individual rights, rejected earlier, are now used as an instrument of change. While the officially sanctioned perspective continues to be religious-ideological, sociologists are using pre-revolutionary sociological traditions. Secular thinking is an undercurrent and both positivist and postmodernist ideas overshadow Marxist and Islamic views.

Khosrow-Khavar (2005) argues that Iranian scientists are divided on the existence of a 'scientific community' in Iran, and Azadarmaki (1999) finds Iranian sociology in crisis. Yet, despite the ebb and flow in the history and state of sociological practice, sociology is institutionalized in the Iranian higher education system and often influences national debates. Neither the unfavorable environment of the early revolutionary period nor the suspicious view of clerical establishment has been able to prevent the public acceptance of the discipline and its influence on public discourse. The expansion of the discipline has been comprehensive. Most universities offer undergraduate and graduate degrees in social sciences and enrollment in sociology has increased. Some areas within the discipline, such as demography, urban and rural sociology, have received official sanction because of their supposed non-political nature and have expanded.

The last decade has seen an unprecedented appreciation for the production of empirical research on public attitudes and socioeconomic problems – e.g., Asadi et al. (1979). Although much of the state research remains out of the public's reach, today there is increasing demand for the teaching of social research, in the form of public surveys, participant

observation, and ethnography. Masters and doctoral theses have started using survey-based field research.

Gender has become an important component of theoretical analysis. Due to the influence of women's movements, and the increase in female students and faculty in higher education, attention is given to gender as an important variable in sociological studies. A number of studies on violence against women, gender bias in family laws, and gender stratification in occupations have been undertaken. The establishment of several institutes for women's studies by government and private bodies has encouraged its popularity.

These developments received a setback with the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as President in 2005. Education is once again being controlled and Islamic principles being endorsed, to the detriment of the slow growth of the plural trends mentioned above. Elected university presidents and provosts have been replaced by appointed conservatives. The government has appointed a cleric without an academic degree as President of the University of Tehran. Professors with critical views have been forced into retirement.

ENDURING CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS OF SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE IN IRAN

The above developments are indicative of several historical, structural-institutional, and cultural challenges weighing on the development of social sciences, particularly sociology, in Iran (Abdi, 1994; Tavassoli, 1976; Tayefi, 2004). First, from its beginning, the Iranian university system was influenced by diverse local and global directions having complementary and contradictory implications. The introduction of the Western educational system and ideas created cultural ambivalence, social displacement, alienation, and an uneasy alliance of social forces. Numerous swings in national

politics throughout the past century have placed obstacles in the production, reproduction, and transmission of social sciences. Nationalist, Islamic, and Western influences have put pressures on social sciences to identify themselves as 'indigenous', 'Islamic', or 'modern'. Despite repeated efforts to reconcile these contradictory demands, social sciences has not been able to achieve a comfortable balance that combines these diverse expectations.

Although institutionalized in the context of Western modernization, sociology in Iran today is pressurized by the forces of politics and religion. Its development has been closely connected with government policies and competing ideological trends in society. During the Pahlavi era, the creation of modern social sciences departments was a necessary aspect of the emergence and expansion of modern state institutions. After the Revolution, the declining fortune of sociology in the 1980s was due to ideological constraints imposed by the new theocracy. Even sociologists supportive of the state complained that they could not study religion objectively and their research is subject to suspicion, interference, and unsubstantiated accusations (Mohadesi, n.d.). The official support of Islam has undermined an assessment of the religion's utopian aspects.

The recent revitalized efforts were due to the ascendancy of state reformists initially under Rafsahjani and later during Khatami's presidency. Sociology's public acceptance and popularity are related to intellectuals who have used it to highlight political causes and ideological concerns rather than to those specialized academics confined to university corridors. Adibi and Ansari (1978) have distinguished between two sociologies: 'official' in universities and 'unofficial' outside them. The bulk of sociological research in pre-revolutionary Iran, they argue, was produced by non-academic intellectuals such as Jalal Al Ahmad and Gholamhossein Sa'edi. Whether formally trained or not, they utilized social science skills and ideas as a means to enhance political and social causes.

Amir Hossein Aryanpour, trained in education and philosophy, developed a sociological language for teaching. In 1970s, Shariati reframed sociology for Muslim youth searching for an Islamic alternative to both Marxism and Western liberalism.

Second, academic sociology has found it difficult to analyze social issues. Government suspicion has restricted its identity to technical descriptions. Some sociologists attribute this to official censorship, while others perceive it as laziness or political cautiousness.⁸ It is difficult to expect heroism from academics in a society that denies freedom of inquiry, intimidates those who do not support the ruling ideology, and makes it risky to contact colleagues outside the country.

Despite the opening up of academia mentioned above, studies having political and religious implications often remain unpublished. In 2002, Ghazian and Abdi, the director and managing member of Ayandeh Research Institute, were arrested and jailed for the alleged 'crime' of 'cooperating with a belligerent state [the US] through conducting opinion polls for Gallup Organization and Zogby Polling Institute', and 'waging propaganda against the IR of Iran'; and Baghi, who had previously served a three-year term in prison for his writings, was detained again on 15 October 2007.⁹

Third, an unfortunate aspect of the sociological experiences in Iran is the scattered and unconnected nature of its community. Teamwork is not welcome and researchers rarely build on previously produced works, thus hampering the sustained accumulation of sociological knowledge. Repetition and redundancy are rampant. There is an absence of clear theoretical conceptualization on major national issues. Also, in addition to the above, an inadequate peer review structure, self-reflection, disciplinary and institutional integration, and individual cooperation shape the practices of the discipline (Abdi, 1994; Abdollahi, 2006).

Gains in the development of sociology have been in the area of teaching and transfer of knowledge, and not in substantive research

(Mohadesi, n.d.). Translation makes up much of sociological production. Although the quality of translations has improved, fashionable Western intellectual works receive disproportionate attention.¹⁰ There have been valuable theoretical works on Iranian society and history, however, not being translated these have little outreach. Only four social scientists within Iran have global recognition: Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2002); Darius Shaygan (1997); Seyyed Javad Tabatabai (1995, 2002); and Abdolkarim Soroush (1995, 2000). The weakest aspect of Iranian sociology is theory construction, as the country remains a consumer of Western sociological knowledge.¹¹ In-depth and original analysis of theoretical sociology is not available. The success of sociology departments remains in the production of necessary personnel for the state bureaucracies and service industries.

Lastly, there is lack of institutional support for research within universities. When and where state funding is available, its disbursement is often determined by practical and security considerations, and substantive research is discouraged. Non-scientific criteria for funding override scientific ones. Further, research institutions rarely communicate their research findings to each other, deterring the growth of a research culture.

CONCLUSION

Social sciences in Iran are intimately connected with the process of modernization and the Iranian encounter with Western modernity. Decades of institutionalized social sciences have been shaped by the major forces in recent Iranian history: state formation; centralization of political power; the emergence of a state bureaucracy and civil organizations; a Western-originated legal system; modern economics; education; and political parties. The limitations, weaknesses, and problems encountered by social sciences reflect conflicting pressures from the above developments as well as the institutional

problems each field has had to face within its own disciplinary environment.

The close association of social sciences and Western modernity has promoted discourse of a clash between tradition and modernity. The overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty by the religious forces resulted in the rejection of Western modernity and its associated products, such as social sciences within the Iranian educational system. In the first decade of its establishment, the IR attempted to cleanse these sciences of undesirable Western elements. These efforts resulted in the loss of human capital, cultural resources, and national talents, as many Iranian social scientists left their jobs for retirement or departed from the country. In the second decade, this trend has reversed itself and social sciences have emerged as a tool for societal development and national integration.

The growth of social sciences during the Pahlavi era was based on a model of modernization from above. Though the Pahlavis found social sciences instrumental in the promotion of national development, they did not expect social science departments to teach students an untainted view of Iranian society and produce students critical of the government – even though that was an unintended consequence. The IR also had similar expectations from social science education, with the difference that this education should conform to the ethical concerns of a theocratic state. Compared to the Pahlavi monarchy, the IR has had more difficulty in achieving its goals. The Pahlavis viewed social sciences as a natural extension of their own modernization efforts and thus had no epistemological difficulty in incorporating them into their intellectual cosmos. The limitations they imposed on the discipline had to do with its political content and implications. As long as social scientists avoided Marxist theories and did not criticize the monarchy, they were free to practice the discipline as they pleased. However, the IR often opposed Western modernity and its associated instruments. It expected social sciences to produce

sociologists who appreciated Islamic values and practices. This was impractical and beyond the competence of social sciences. Modern social sciences have proved to be a weak tool for the creation of an ideal society, especially a theocratic one. The Islamization of social sciences has been an historical experiment with few successes and a great toll on the national and human resources of the country.

NOTES

1. *Islamic Republic News Agency*, 1 May 2001.
2. Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi established the Research Center for Seminary and University in 1982. Since then, the Center has produced numerous publications on the Islamization of the social sciences, attempting to prove the importance and relevance of Islam to modern society.
3. Report by Sadeq Zibakalam, *Hammihan Newspaper*, No. 33, 3 Tir 1386.
4. Statement by the Director of the JD, *Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA)*, 5 August 2007.
5. *ISNA*, 28 July 2007. <http://www.isna.ir/Main/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-968506&Lang=P>
6. See Jamileh Elmolhoda, 'Roykard-e postmodernisti be hejab' (Postmodernist View of the Veil), <http://old.tebyan.net/Teb.aspx?nid=8076>; Faramarz Qaramolki, 'Melak-e akhlaq-e elahi hoqq-e bashar ast' (Human Rights is the Criterion for Divine Ethics), *Mehr News*, 8 Khordad 1385; and Mohammad Ali Mohammadi, 'Pasa-Islamism modeli bara-ye touse'eh' (Post-Islamism: A Model for Development), *Resalat*, 16 Farvardin 2000.
7. The relationship between political currents and theoretical positions is discussed by the Cultural Deputy of Ministry of Sciences, Mohammad Baqer Khoramshad, *Sharifnews*, 17 Aban 1385, <http://sharifnews.com/?21026>.
8. See Abbas Abdi's reaction to Parviz Pedram's commentary on Khatami's program, www.ayande.ir/1385/11/post_142.html.
9. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/2398329.stm and <http://www.worldpress.org/Mideast/2963.cfm>.
10. Ali Paya considers intellectual fashions and lack of theorizing as two major problems in Iranian sociology. See Report of the 2nd Academy of Human Sciences, Tehran University, *ISNA*, 19 December 2005.
11. In an unscientific poll by a sociology student on his webpage, 88 respondents identified the

following as problems with sociology in Iran: theoretical weakness (22%); over-reliance on translation (16%); institutional inactivity (15%); weak personnel and universities (13%); conflict with religion (12%); focus on quantification (9%); and others (10%). See <http://khodayeman.blogfa.com/post-135.aspx>.

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