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Days of Revolution: Political Unrest in an Iranian Village

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~~may corrupt the mind, so to speak, by casting the problem of corruption as one of noncompliance with rules rather than as a failure to exercise ethical judgment—a drastic narrowing of our understanding of human agency.~~

~~The chapter by Wim Dubbink explores dimensions of human maliciousness that extend so far as to include corruption of thought and speech, and thus touches on the problem of corruption of the mind. Referring to the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel, Dubbink draws on Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (sadly a work almost never referenced by political scientists) to emphasize that it is not just the fratricide but the evasion of "am I my brothers' keeper" that is the problem: The former is merely a crime, the latter is a denial of ethical responsibility. This denial is an act of "redescription" of an action, and this redescription, according to Dubbink's reading of Kant, corrodes our way of understanding social reality. Therefore, corruption may be a much deeper problem than either behavioral or institutional approaches realize—our very way of thinking and speaking about social reality may be corrupted by the way we try to evade the consequences of our actions and lie to others and ourselves about our motivations and reasons. Do we not routinely "redescribe" certain problems so as to absolve ourselves of doing anything about them?~~

~~The papers in the Hardi, Heywood, and Torsello volume emerged from two workshops organized by the Center for Integrity in Business and Government at the Central European University Business School, financed by the CEU and the Siemens Integrity Initiative. The book does not mention this, but the Siemens Integrity Initiative funding is part of a 2009 settlement between Siemens and the World Bank over corruption allegations. One might view the settlement optimistically as a case of public institutions (in this case the Word Bank) turning some tiny fraction of the proceeds of corporate corruption into an opportunity to fund anti-corruption activities (in this case a workshop for academics), or one might see it as a case of corporate "greenwashing." Perhaps these two interpretations are not mutually exclusive. Mungiu-Pippidi's work has been funded by a variety of sources, but the most substantial one is the European Union Seventh Framework Project grant of 10 million Euros. I take note of the funding issue because the question of whether and under what conditions money corrupts any activity is central to corruption scholarship, and should remain so. Researchers are themselves not immune from such questions~~.

Days of Revolution: Political Unrest in an Iranian Village. By Mary Elaine Hegland. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014. 352p. $95.00 cloth. $27.95 paper.
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— Kevan Harris, *University of California–Los Angeles*

The "hard core" of anthropology, Edmund Leach believed, was the study of kinship politics. As the field developed over the twentieth century, anthropologists shifted from the abstract charting of genealogical lineages toward the analysis of kinship, clan, and tribal politics as social history. Formalized models of descent, with their rigorous terminology of kinship lines, were replaced by the study of flexible alliances, adaptable strategies, and localized idioms that shaped competition and conflict. For Pierre Bourdieu, who began his career observing the Kabyle berber and the Bearn peasant, genealogical models of politics tended to obscure the "real relations between kin," especially during times of rapid social change.

One of the key sites for theorizing kinship politics beyond such genealogical determinism was Iran under the Pahlavi monarchy. During the 1960s and 1970s, anthropologists such as Frederi~~c~~k Barth and Richard Tapper showed how seemingly archaic confederations of nomadic pastoralists—tribes and clans in the early twentieth century—were actually products of external relations with nearby groups and central authorities. Rather than a universal typology of tribal structure, their ethnographies stressed the making and unmaking of kinship alliances and rivalries as historical processes. Barth's substitution of mutable boundaries for fixed categories influenced sociological theories on ethnicity and nationalism, partly through the work of Richard Jenkins (*Rethinking Ethnicity*, 1997), Rogers Brubaker (*Ethnicity without Groups*, 2004), and Andreas Wimmer (*Ethnic Boundary Making*, 2013).

Unable to return to the field after the 1979 Iranian revolution, this anthropological cohort published the remainder of their monographs in the 1980s—with one notable exception. Mary Hegland's *Days of Revolution* is the last of these works, but with a twist. Hegland followed up her 1978–1979 fieldwork in a 3,000-person village with numerous visits in the 2000s. The resulting study accomplishes what earlier ethnographies could not, through detailing changes in kinship politics, state authority, and social structures over a revolutionary interregnum.

Through oral accounts, field censuses, and artful observation, Hegland presents a social history of the pseudonymous village of Aliabad, a relatively prosperous community near the southwestern Iranian city of Shiraz. Village struggles over land, water, protection, and prestige occurred through the process of *taifeh-keshi*, a Persian term which could be imprecisely rendered as primordial "inter-clan conflict." Hegland's close retelling of major events and everyday rituals suggests that the term's meaning can be better translated as protean "factional boundary making." Reference to *taifeh* by villagers "never meant simply a kinship category, a group of people connected merely by kinship ties, but always included the implication of interaction and association" (p. 9).

Drawing from social anthropology, Hegland suggests a set of mechanisms that maintain or undermine these networks. As economic sociologists like to point out, there is little that is truly traditional about such

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mechanisms, since they can be found under the formal veneer of most bureaucratic organizations. For one, villagers busily engaged in the "politics of hospitality," a term nicely coined by the anthropologist Richard Antoun. This involved socializing with allies and contenders in order to increase and strengthen associational ties, compete for relative prestige, and augment a family's moral reputation. Well-attended weddings, funerals, and holiday ceremonies implied higher status and more political power. For village elites, extending reciprocity to allies of similar status was expected, as was giving appropriate patronage to potential subordinates. For everyone else, accepting hospitality in exchange for support from the dominant faction increased the chance to gain access to larger plots of irrigated land or be hired as a sharecropper. Ritualized displays of community solidarity, such as loud ululations or soulful wailings at public events, operated as "passive confrontation" between factions.

All of this coming and going required a lot of strategic work, Hegland stresses. Men rallied under factions in times of actual conflict, but women cultivated and maintained these associational networks through everyday efforts. Iran's bilateral kinship structure, in which children are considered equally related to their mother and father, meant "both male and female lines offered a variety of potential ties of a person who wanted to shift affiliation to another faction" (p. 27). As a result, Iranian women could amass social power through strategic exploitation of customary law, most notably through the feared and respected position of mother-in-law. Over time, factional boundaries did not remain constant, since families shifted allegiances at opportune periods.

From the early 1900s up to 1962, absentee landowners largely left politics up to these village dynamics. Indirect rule by the Pahlavi central state meant local power depended on recognition from below as well as from above. Landlords appointed the most powerful *taifeh* leaders as village representatives and delegated control over distribution of resources. Half of Aliabad's male residents worked in agriculture and the other half specialized in local trades, with little outward migration. In 1962, however, the Pahlavi monarchy implemented land reform as part of a state modernization package, altering social relations throughout much of the Iranian countryside. The distributional effects differed across the country based on regional and local characteristics, but in Aliabad's case the outcome was largely regressive. As Hegland documents, the dominant faction of the period and their supporters seized the majority of land rights.

All this took place in the context of rapid modernization by the Iranian state. The Pahlavi monarchy's efforts at political centralization subsequently meant that village elites could call upon state representatives in nearby Shiraz rather than rely on informal support from below. The economic transformation of the region over the 1960s–1970s meant that far fewer villagers depended on land for their family's livelihood. Many migrated to Shiraz or embarked into trades linked to newly-formed markets.

The result in Aliabad looked strikingly similar to transformations in Western European state formation as described by Charles Tilly and Michael Mann. Individuals began to identify national institutions, not local ones, as powerholders. Circulation of ideas and news from the city entered into villagers' assessments of the status quo. As Hegland witnessed, revolutionary demonstrations in Shiraz during 1978 gradually attracted Aliabad residents, mostly male university students or commuting workers. Finally, in early 1979, marches took place in the village itself, with women among the throng, chanting "Down with the Shah." Villagers spoke of a peasant *taifeh* in opposition to the state and its local village cronies. After the Pahlavi monarchy collapsed, villagers used the revolutionary idioms of religion and populism to wrest back land from the village elites. Local struggles were portrayed in nationalist frameworks, but actual politics still occurred through the associational network building of previous eras.

In the 2000s, Hegland returned to assess three decades of post-revolutionary change in Aliabad. Due to urbanization, most villagers had sold their lands for high prices, turning the formerly self-sufficient agricultural community into a commercial and consumer suburb of Shiraz. People lived in single homes instead of communal courtyards. Women went to local schools and regional universities. Marriages resulted in small nuclear families with more equal gender relations. Standards of living were much higher. Gripes and dissatisfaction revolved around keeping up with the Joneses rather than feigning fealty to local elites. As Hegland observed, "instead of relying on relationships with blood relatives, in-laws and *taifeh* members, people formed connections with others who shared common interests" (p. 247).

Comparing *Days of Revolution* with recent works such as Carter Malkasian's *War Comes to Garmser: Thirty Years of Conflict on the Afghan Frontier* (2013), one should emphasize the anthropological truism that dissolution of kinship politics is not automatic with modernization. Economic growth in India, for instance, has occurred in tandem with vigorous renewal of caste distinctions. Nevertheless, the most remarkable and least examined finding by Hegland is the degree to which daily Iranian life, three decades after the 1979 revolution, would appear normal to a Western audience. Just as with kinship networks, these recent forms of everyday association are not autonomous but rather structured by changes in economic and social policies. In the end, Hegland's political anthropology of an Iranian village is as much about five decades of socioeconomic modernization as it is a witness to rural life under a revolution.

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