



Archaeology of Sociological Discourse in Iran after Islamic Revolution

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Article Info	Extended Abstract
Article type: Research Article	Objective: This study aims to analyze the discourse of sociology in Iran after the Islamic Revolution and to reveal the archaeological rules of the order of social knowledge. The main question of the study is: How has the post-revolutionary discourse of sociology constructed society as an analytical object within its own regime of knowledge? The theoretical framework of the study is based on Foucault's archaeology of knowledge. Sociology in Iran after the Islamic Revolution, in the context of social, political, and cultural transformations, has faced a set of analytical challenges and limitations. These limitations have manifested not only at the descriptive, structural, and institutional levels but also at the discursive and conceptual levels. In the past four decades, in confronting profound social, political, and cultural transformations, Iranian sociology—rather than moving toward discursive openness—has largely been reproduced within relatively stabilized frameworks. Iranian sociology can be studied from different theoretical positions: from the history of thought and the development of sociological theories to the sociology of knowledge and science, the analysis of institutions and the social contexts of knowledge production, and historical, comparative, and critical approaches. However, the question of this study does not fall directly within any of these levels. The main question of this study is how “society” has emerged, been formulated, and stabilized as an object of knowledge in the discourse of Iranian sociology, and what rules have made this formulation possible. From this perspective, the subject of the study is not what sociologists have said about society, but the conditions that determine what can be posited as “society” as an object of knowledge, a subject of discourse, and cognition. This is precisely the level that Foucault's archaeology makes it possible to analyze, because archaeology, instead of seeking final meaning, authorial intention, or the linear development of thought, looks for something else.
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	Methodology: the study adopts an analytical and critical approach. The research field consists of works in Iranian sociology produced after the Revolution, including selected texts of formal sociology, foundational studies, and sociological analyses. From an archaeological perspective, there is no authorial subject who exercises sovereign control over the production of meaning. Discourse operates at a relatively autonomous level and possesses its own capacity to produce and organize meaning. Archaeology therefore treats discourse



as an autonomous formation, and its intelligibility can only be established through an examination of its structures, statements, classifications, and internal order.

Findings: The findings, organized into four stages of archaeological analysis, show that at the first stage, the formation of objects, “Iranian society” is constructed not simply as a reflection of social reality, but as an analytical object in its own right. This fundamental object of Iranian sociological analysis is stabilized within the academic field in close association with concepts such as the nation, territory, national security, and social development. At the second stage, the rules of enunciation determine which accounts of society can legitimately be produced and which experiences become difficult or impossible to articulate. At the third stage, the concepts of society, nation, and territory stabilize the primary object at the core of sociological analysis. These concepts are not given or neutral categories; rather, they are produced through a network of statements, assumptions, and epistemic divisions. At this stage, it becomes clear that dominant concepts in Iranian sociology including nation, order, crisis, development, and identity, do not function as neutral analytical tools. They constitute interconnected elements of a coherent regime of knowledge. Working together, these concepts shape the primary object of sociological inquiry, regulate which statements can be admitted into the field, and delimit the horizon within which society can be thought. At the fourth stage, that of discursive strategies, several dominant and recurrent strategies can be identified: discrediting, the structural exclusion of experience, the primacy of order over conflict, the alignment of society with territory and the state, linear historicity, and narratives of decline and revival. Within this coherent regime of knowledge, the fundamental object of “society” is absorbed into and defined through its relation to the nation and the territory. To invoke society is, in this sense, to invoke a unified totality, the collective spirit of the nation and the territory, in which absences, ruptures, fissures, and internal divisions are rendered invisible within an apparently seamless and timeless form of togetherness. The systematically excluded and marginalized within this discursive order including ethnic and linguistic minorities, daily and informal workers, undocumented and unnamed migrants, prisoners and the institutional sites in which they are confined, rural and peripheral women, the urban poor, small-scale peasant farmers, and emerging forms of exploitation such as emotional, care, and digital labor, are defined in advance, and always, as parts of a single, internally harmonious whole.

Conclusion: Iranian sociology has thus followed a trajectory toward the consolidation of a linear, nationalist, and unified discursive order in which ruptures, plurality, ambiguity, and uncertainty are rendered secondary, partial, or marginal. The stabilization of “society” through its fundamental association with the concepts of nation and territory results in the absorption of the sociological object into an integrated totality and, consequently, in the disappearance of society as “society.”



From this perspective, a transformation in how society appears, namely, its emergence as a totality marked by divisions, ruptures, tensions, temporal heterogeneities, and an internal dynamism, requires a transformation of the fundamental object of sociology itself. This transformation of the fundamental object is simultaneous with and inseparable from the emergence of a new form of the political, which this study calls the “New Political.” The New Political emerges when the ways in which the fundamental object of sociology, society, can be seen, articulated, and problematized undergo a fundamental transformation.

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