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The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic by Asghar Schirazi;
John O'Kane

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account, the authors believe, in the last analysis, that the economic policy since the 1979 revolution is responsible for the lamentable economic situation in Iran.

Regime legitimacy, health policy, national and ethnic questions, and women's status are studied in the last section. Sussan Siavoshi, Asghar Rastegar, Shahrzad Mojab, and Amir Hassanpour cover different aspects of postrevolutionary Iran and come to the same conclusion: from education to the ethnic question, the Ayatollahs practice the Shah's previous policy of repressing democracy by centralization and control over all institutions. Regarding the challenges that the Islamic government faces on women's issues, Haideh Moghissi warns that "the politics of gender is the 'Achilles heel' of the clerical state" (p. 264).

Deeply pessimistic, *Iran after the Revolution* details failures of the Islamic Republic, but unfortunately omits any practical solution to "break the cycle" (p. 147) of economic failure. The authors refer briefly to nonconformist clerics and could have made an interesting contribution by exploring further the dynamism in the Ruhanioun circles that provided against all odds the reformer president Mohammad Khatami less than two years after the publication of *Iran after the Revolution*. Clearly, the Iranian clergy is not a homogeneous entity; within its ranks are possible forces of further change.

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The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic, by ASGHAR SCHIRAZI. Translated by JOHN O'KANE. London: I.B. Tauris, 1997. 334 pages, bibliography, index. (Cloth) ISBN 1-86064-046X

In 1803 Napoleon Bonaparte declared that "a constitution should be short and obscure." While the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran may not meet Napoleon's first criteria, it certainly meets the latter. In this meticulously researched book, Asghar Schirazi—a political scientist at the Free University of Berlin—walks the reader through the labyrinth of jurisprudence, law, and politics in post-revolutionary Iran.

The Constitution of Iran provides a treasure trove of historical facts, legal reasoning, and political insights about the constitution and the process of state building in revolutionary Iran. Schirazi assiduously deconstructs the ideological character of the constitution by demonstrating its latent and manifest contradictions. In particular, he highlights the discrepancies between the religious and secular principles, the democratic and anti-democratic spirit, and the populist versus elitist predilections of a text conceived to be the foundation of Iran's social order. Concerning the first set of contradictions, Schirazi maintains that the antiquity and private character of *Shari'a* law made it ill equipped to deal with the legal and public needs of a modern, stratified polity. He maintains that in order to handle the anachronisms, complications, and inconsistencies resulting from the gap between text and practice, Iranian statesmen increasingly resorted to the "exigency of the state" argument to circumvent both the letter and the spirit of *Shari'a*. This new style of statecraft, however, required that the constitution

be stripped of much of its democratic and legalistic elements. Schirazi writes that "legislation in the Islamic Republic has increasingly freed itself of any link with the Shari'a and thereby freed the constitution from its legalistic components" (p. 251). He concludes that, within the confines of Iran's authoritarian hierocracy, "the state has conquered the clergy and along with them religion" (p. 303). In other words, the invasion of politics by religion, which culminated in the 1979 Islamic revolution, was soon reversed.

The Constitution of Iran reminded this reviewer of the sagacity of Abdallah Laroui's comment in the *Bulletin* (31:1, July 1997, p. 10) that "ideology is, in the long term, less powerful than sociology." Schirazi's erudite study demonstrates that the mechanisms of social production and political discord in postrevolutionary Iran are too complicated to be reduced to religious ideology *per se*. I would have only wished that he had done a more adequate job in demonstrating how and why the interventionist impulse of the Iranian state and its proclivity to devour civic constituencies/institutions predate the 1979 revolution. This criticism notwithstanding, Schirazi's monograph should be on the reading list of every serious specialist wanting to better comprehend the non-transparent and partisan nature of post-revolutionary Iran's political ambience.

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Iran and the Muslim Brothers: A Study of the Factors of Agreement and Difference, by ABBAS KHAMAH YAR. 286 pages. Beirut: The Center for Strategic Studies and Documentation, 1997. (Arabic)

The Iranian writer Abbas Khamah Yar raises a wide variety of questions in his analysis of the duality that comprise *Iran and the Muslim Brothers*. The Islamic movement in Iran must be discussed in terms of its relationship to the larger Muslim world and to self-identified Islamic movements, notably the Muslim Brothers. A historical and political tracing of this relationship reveals their attachment and detachment, and hence reveals the theoretical and ideological disagreements between them.

Khamah Yar's point of departure reflects the recent interest in the relationship between Shi'i Iran and the Sunni world and the interest in the future relationship between Iran and Egypt as the two axes for polarization or recruitment to political Islam. He builds his argument on the fact that both countries are large geographically and demographically, have longstanding civilizational heritages that provide important locations for Shi'i and Sunni doctrines, respectively, and have lived under dictatorial regimes for thousands of years. They both have strategic importance and host the leading religious centers—scholarly religious centers in Qum and Mashhad in Iran and al-Azhar University in Egypt. He agrees with Egyptian experts who view Egypt as the gateway not only to controlling the Arab world but also to dominating all the Mediterranean, and refers to history—from Alexander and Caesar, through the Ottoman Empire, to Napoleon and the British—to support this view.