

A REPLY TO NIKKI R. KEDDIE

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I thank Professor Nikki R. Keddie for her constructive critique and am using this opportunity to clarify a few points. First, let me reiterate that I do not consider statist approaches to be “wrong,” but “one-sided,” and that I am not calling for their disposal but for “trying out new sources and perspectives then fusing them with state-centered perspectives into a broader panorama of Pahlavi Iran” (pp. 38–39). I see neither “sins” nor “an ongoing struggle between ‘statists’ and ‘antistatists.’” Such language would undercut a productive debate now and disregard the fact that in the long run—as some excesses of the cultural turn in the 1980s and many historians’ subsequent search for new historiographic syntheses demonstrate—the pendulum always swings back.

Second, I agree with Keddie that many works on the Pahlavi period do examine “nonstate and antistate groups.” Her addition of anthropological texts to my original list (p. 55, n. 5, 6) is entirely justified; much more problematically, I did omit geographical works, which made statist approaches look even more dominant. At the same time, my argument is about perspective, not topics. Historians and historically oriented social scientists—who form my “focal group” (p. 38)—indeed have produced studies of women and of intellectuals, for instance. However, as a rule, they have focused on how such groups reacted to the state or were shaped by it. One example is Parvin Paidar’s masterly *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth Century Iran*¹; a recent departure I listed is the work of Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi (p. 55, n. 9). Likewise, Keddie is correct in underlining that the Pahlavi period witnessed the expansion of the state’s role in many fields; yet my contention is that historical change in the 20th century was driven by both state and societal actors and that to understand the resultant complex interactions, we should study ground-level “governing” and everyday life history.²

Third, a word about periodization. Some historians have certainly examined the years of 1941 to 1953. However, the political focus of their work—on Musaddiq’s government and the 1953 coup, on separatist ethnic movements, even on movements with a social agenda³—seems to bear out my argument. Besides, it appears to me that Reza Shah’s rule has especially attracted Pahlavi historians over the last two decades not the least because it was from 1921 to 1941 that modern state expansion started in earnest. Methodological perspectives influence which period fascinates historians (as well as the periodization they choose: 1921, 1941, 1953, 1963, and 1979 are agreed-upon historical milestones precisely because they mark political events).

Finally, some self-criticism. In my view, the gravest inadequacy of my essay is its lack of attention to transnational perspectives. This is particularly problematic in view of how works by early modern and Qajar historians, for instance, on Persianate texts, and by anthropologists, for example, on Iranian pilgrims or on Afghans in Iran, have already started to explore such paths.⁴ In fact, Keddie was a trailblazer in this field.⁵ Looking at Pahlavi Iran from angles other than that of the state necessitates not the least thinking beyond the conceptual nation–state boundaries that the modern state helped to naturalize.

NOTES

¹Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²Recent studies of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe may serve as useful inspirations; see my article (p. 53ff.) and Konrad Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999).

³A pioneer of the latter is Habib Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1985).

⁴Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Fariba Adelhah, "Économie morale du pèlerinage et société civile en Iran: les voyages religieux, commerciaux, et touristiques à Damas," *Politix* 20 (2007): 39–54; Fariba Adelhah and Zuzanna Olszewska, "The Iranian Afghans," *Iranian Studies* 40 (2007): 137–65.

⁵Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn "al-Afghānī": A Political Biography* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1972).