

Reviews

Drugs Politics: Managing Disorder in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Maziyar Ghiabi, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, ISBN 978-1108475457 (hbk), 360 pp.

Maziyar Ghiabi's *Drugs Politics* is an important piece of literature that gives a historical, yet deeply personal account of the evolving politics surrounding drugs in contemporary Iran. His work is illustrated through eight chapters, each with a distinct focus, yet woven together seamlessly, which makes his trail easy to follow. There are a total of 288 pages of text including two parts, eight chapters, a prologue and one epilogue, followed by thirty-three pages of selected bibliography. Part One of the book includes Chapters 2–4 and offers a meticulous look at Iranian drug culture (specifically with regard to opiates) and the responding policy during distinctive timeframes ranging from the Constitutional Revolution, to the Pahlavi era, to the Islamic Revolution, and finally the Reformist era. The Interregnum, which includes Chapter 5, bases its focus on the Expediency Council of Iran, which is an often talked about, but rarely explored institution within the Iranian government. Chapters 6–8 are contained within Part Two of *Drugs Politics* and shift the focus to discuss the often-overlooked methamphetamine crisis in Iran and how drug policy was handled in the post-reformist Ahmadinejad era. Part Two also looks into the roles that NGOs and other grass-roots organizations have played in curbing the drug crisis in modern Iran.

Ghiabi is able to tell an effective story based on extensive historical research coupled with years of fieldwork, which is able to give his work a first-hand take on the current state of drugs politics within Iran. His interviews with public officials, activists, and drug consumers give his work an intimate narrative that has not, to my knowledge, been replicated in any recently published literature. His scholarship is of high quality and his primary sources include the aforementioned interviews along with conferences and workshops he attended between 2013 and 2016. Ghiabi also incorporates sources from Iranian newspapers and magazines into his work, which is impressive given the difficulty and the amount of time it must have taken to accumulate these references. His secondary sources include books and journal articles from both English and Persian studies that appear up-to-date and of high quality.

One of Ghiabi's main arguments in *Drugs Politics* has to do with the global misconception about the current state of drug policy in Iran. The oxymoronic association of progressive policy within an Islamic Republic is something that needs to continue to be discussed. Ghiabi's contribution to this debate is found through his detailed accounts of drug reform and harm reduction practices currently ongoing within the country. Through first-hand experience and credible resources, Ghiabi is able to concisely convey an accurate depiction as to the current state of drug policy within Iran that is both original and telling of the lack of contemporary literature on the subject matter. While *Drugs Politics* does indeed reference appropriate literature on the subject of drug policy in Iran, one of the works it does not reference (likely due to both texts being published close to each other) is that of Amir A. Afkhami's *A Modern Contagion: Imperialism and Public Health in Iran's Age of Cholera* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019). While Ghiabi does briefly mention the parallels between the Iranian cholera epidemic with that of the drug epidemic, he stops short of expanding on how the crises had similar effects on influencing the social, economical, and political development of modern Iran.

As a resident psychiatrist currently in training with an interest in addiction psychiatry, I found Ghiabi's writing style to be of high quality and easily accessible. For those who do not have much background in Iran or Persian material, *Drugs Politics* may prove to be a more challenging read, but Ghiabi does a wonderful service to his reader by incorporating a Persian glossary into his book which helps translate important key words and phrases that are pertinent to the overall aesthetic of his work. I would highly recommend this book to any other scholars that are interested in Iranian studies, specifically those interested in addiction medicine and psychiatry. As a clinician with an interest in both Iranian politics and addiction psychiatry, I felt that reading *Drugs Politics* gave me a better appreciation for what worked well and did not work well in Iran's pursuit of managing the drug crisis. While the Iranian approach was not perfect, I agree with Ghiabi that a lot can be learned from their successes and failures. *Drugs Politics* helps advance our understanding of

the ongoing sociopolitical challenges in Iran, and to a greater extent, the rest of the Muslim world.

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A Modern Contagion: Imperialism and Public Health in Iran's Age of Cholera, Amir A. Afkhami, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019, ISBN 978-1-4214-2721-7 (hbk), 296 pp.

Questions around health and disease exceed the realm of medicine. They pertain to science, conceived as knowledge and mental structure through which humans interpret the experience of living and the embodiment of the natural world. In being essential frames of knowledge, health and disease—as much as life and death—they belong to a cultural and political sphere, maintaining an inescapable symbolic place in human affairs. Hence, to explore the history of health and disease means coming to terms with issues of life and politics, of governance and culture, of agency and structure. Consider the opioid epidemic causing hundreds of thousands of deaths in the United States: can a history of people's relation to opioids do without considerations of politico-economics and cultural ideology? Does America's form of government, embodied in the profiteering interest of the private pharmaceutical industry in tandem with the culture of never-ending consumerism, affect the unwrapping of the opioid epidemic? And does this health phenomenon bear upon institutional developments and historical trajectories in American society? Without being teleological, the response seems to lean towards the affirmative and future historians will have much food for thought on today's health/political emergencies.

This nexus is not peculiar to the contemporary globalized world order. During Iran's period of Constitutional Revolution (1906–11), many intellectuals had clearly identified how national emancipation, social justice and global politics intermingled with the imperatives of public health. In the journal *Kāveh* (1921), Sayyed Hasan Taqizadeh wrote that

a thousand times more important than political and governmental reforms are national public education for the young and old, men and women, abolishing opium, preventing illness, encouraging physical exercise, acquiring the protocols of civilization from Europe and hindering groundless anxieties, superstitions, ignorance, and fanaticism.¹

¹In Schayegh, *Who Is Knowledgeable Is Strong*, 18.