

Book Review

What is Critical Social Research? Volume 1.

by Babak Fozooni. England: Upfront Publishing Ltd., 2012. \$13.50 US, paper. ISBN: 978-1780352794. Pages: 1-198.

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Babak Fozooni's book provides a genuine, provocative, and insightful opportunity to have in one book a number of previously published articles in the realms of cinema and Iranian social movements; the ideological politics behind encyclopedic discourses on fascism, and Engels; and critical social psychology.

Using such shock-and-awe titles as "Fuck Critical Psychology" and "Sand-Nigger Psychology", Fozooni intentionally disrupts the *status quo* as it relates to academic thought. This book, both amusing and very serious in its critical analysis, provides the reader with an opportunity to see the potential for social science research to contribute to the emancipation of the working classes. In the preface, Fozooni calls for the abolition of the university as a bourgeois institution so as to develop a new academic system that is pro-working class. His criticism of pre-modernist, modernist, and post-modernist theories is embedded within a broader Marxist analytical framework. He uses a variety of critical frameworks, including theorists Mikhail Bakhtin and Lev Vygotsky (p.56, 76), Karl Marx (p.132) and, to a lesser extent, Michel Foucault (p.90).

His article on "The Politics and Parables of Encyclopedias" examines the socio-political perspectives and assumptions between the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Encyclopedia of Marxism*, and *Wikipedia*. Such an analysis shows how sources of knowledge can be different in their authority and legitimacy, with a surprising conclusion that *Britannica*, due to its positivist epistemology, is the least intellectually trustworthy of the three (p.132). In further elaborating on his examination of the development of progressive social thought, Fozooni looks to the cinematic works of Magnus Hirschfeld and Abbas Kiarostami.

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In his work titled “Magnus Hirschfeld’s Contributions to Sexual Politics”, Fozooni examines the pioneering work of Hirschfeld on sexual politics and explores how the undermining of Hirschfeld during the Weimar Republic by liberals and social democrats paved the way for a full-scale attack by the Nazis after 1933. In a similar examination of cinema, “Debunking Kiarostami” provides an intimate and in-depth analysis of world-renowned Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami. This particular text provides a valuable means of contextualizing Kiarostami’s politics and philosophy, as well as demonstrating some of his limitations as a filmmaker and the liberal humanist core of his ideology (p.182).

In “Sand-Nigger Psychology: Towards a Critique of the Iranian Psy-Complex”, Fozooni engages with Nickolas Rose’s conception of the psy-complex. This complex is defined to be “a complex of discourses, practices, agents and techniques [...] which [provides] the basis for the generalization and development of *applied* and *clinical* psychology” in society at large (p.44). Fozooni interestingly points out the similarities between “fundamentalist” societies of the US and Iran. While the U.S. is more advanced in terms of wealth and geopolitical significance than Iran, the two states share similarities as they have officially sanctioned fundamentalist socio-political regimes for the governance of everyday life (p.57). Such an assemblage is said to perpetuate a bourgeoisie value system upon the proletariat especially through an authoritative regime that is regulating increasing divisions between the public-private divide, and values between religion and atheism (p.58). Fozooni takes an opportunity in “Cognitive Analytic Therapy” (CAT) to foreground the genuinely emancipatory Vygotskian and Bakhtinian aspects of CAT, especially for the working class (p.19-20). The next article shows how socio-political systems of governance dominate Iranian family and women.

In “Iranian Women and Football”, Fozooni explores how surplus value is extracted from the family as a means of development and application of the elite Mosque-Islamic regime in Iran. Women therefore come to labour under both cultural repression and economic exploitation (p.90). Fozooni’s theoretical framework for analyses in this article is interesting as it predominantly utilizes Marx, the Pankhursts’ family’s political heritage and Bakhtin, along with some secondary Foucauldian themes designed to elaborate on the link between family and the mosque as bio-power. Fozooni conceptualizes how social movements in Iran engage with and resist the dominant Islamic discourses of the ruling “bourgeois” elite, and in such a way are not much different than

other anti-oppressive social movements around the world (B. Fozooni, personal communication, April 16, 2013). Fozooni's ability for critiquing dominant, problematic academic discourses are shown in the next article.

"Fuck Critical Psychology!" shows how, as a confirmed speaker at a Critical Psychology conference, Fozooni abruptly changes his presentation in light of his experience during the conference lambasting critical psychology for having become too complacent in the politics of its analyses. Fozooni declared that critical psychology was no longer sufficiently representative of the oppressed working classes and thus insufficiently critical. He argues that so-called critical psychology actually perpetuates "bourgeois modes of organizing and communicating" (p.77). He attempts to theorize a radical 'Iranian' critical psychology so as to challenge the existing Iranian psy-complex (p.67-69). There are important methodological considerations, however, that bear further discussion.

Fozooni sparingly uses Foucauldian biopower theory. The reason for this, in his view, is because of the shortcomings and limitations of Foucauldian analyses to engage with non-Western socio-political systems of governance. Fozooni's theoretical frameworks for analysis are such that they provide a means of understanding Iranian social relations, an area that has been relatively under-researched in the critical social sciences. Fozooni utilizes Marxist and Bakhtinian theory as a means of having a more nuanced socio-political analysis of Iranian social movements that takes into account not just power relations in a normative, Foucauldian sense, but also classist challenges that are profoundly oppressive in the "fascist oriented" Islamic regime (B. Fozooni, personal communication, April 29, 2013). Fozooni predominantly utilizes Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and Marx to critically engage with socio-political systems of oppression in a way that addresses Foucauldian analysis's shortcomings.

Foucault's analysis misled him to believe that the Islamic revolution of 1979 would be the next evolutionary step in society, as a new "political spirituality" that could be beneficial not only for the Middle East but also for Europe. Foucault kept this belief until he realized, after the revolution, the significant levels of oppression and outright state-sanctioned deaths.² Foucault's inability to adequately engage with the socio-political context in the Middle East can be the result of his theories having developed out of European historical and socio-political norms.³

2 Afary, J., & Anderson, K. B. 2004. The Seductions of Islamism: Revisiting Foucault and the Iranian Revolution. *New Politics* 37(10) 1-10.

3 Beukes, J. 2009. Hamartia: Foucault and Iran 1978–1979 (1: Introduction and texts). *HTS Theological Studies*, 65(1) 1-15; See also Nichols, R. 2010. Postcolonial Studies and the Discourse of Foucault: Survey of a Field of Problematization. *Foucault Studies* 9 111-144. p.124

To transfer such a theoretical framework from its European origin into an Iranian realm, without any consideration for the differences that such a transposition brings, is an ineffective means of accurately understanding how socio-political governance occurs. Fozooni was aware of such Foucauldian limitations in his writing, and chose to utilize more of a Marxist-oriented critique in order to better understand the class struggle in Iran.

This book provides provocative opportunities to re-conceptualize the social sciences, psychology and cinema studies as a means of engagement with socio-political ideologies and Iranian relations. The ultimate goal is to foster the development of a critical theoretical framework for alternatives to existing forms of oppression. Persons interested in such themes will find this book very valuable.