

A Comparative Analysis of the Iranian Land Tenure Systems in pre 1962 Land Reform; Kurdistan Tenure System versus Boneh

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Generally speaking, this article offers a critical analysis of the land tenure systems in Iran with an emphasis on land tenure system in Kurdistan and prior to the land reform in 1962. The objective of this article is to address the contradictory narratives that have taken shape regarding the geographical boundaries of Boneh in Iran. This is an attempt to offer a new and fundamental analytical alternative compared the existing literature, about the pre-capitalist land tenure systems in Iran. The article then attempts to provide a more comprehensive insight regarding the nature of the Bonehs, their variants and their characteristics exactly as they represented collective land tenure system. This system was the dominant land tenure system prior to the land reform of 1962 more known as Muzare-eh or sharecropping system. The Kurdistan's land tenure system is also compared with Bonehs which is known as a collective tenure system in Iran sometimes known as Muzare-eh.

The authors claim here that Kurdistan's Muzare-eh system used to be different from Bonehs or its variants; nevertheless the plausibility of this claim require them to answer the question of how it could have been neglected by the existing literature

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that claim it was also a variant of Boneh. The authors think that answering such a question generates an epistemological gap between what they know about Iran and what they assume knowing about Kurdistan, while they collected ample evidence that indicate we don't know much about Kurdistan's land tenure system. The bigger issue is revealed where The authors came to learn about many literatures on rural development that have been produced based on the assumption that Kurdistan's sharecropping is also a variant of Boneh. Lambton, for example, studied land tenure system in Hasanabad village near Sanandaj (Kurdistan Prouince) in which she discussed the mode of division of crop among landlords and peasants. The authors launched an explorative study that helped them to her its findings for establishing a new argument on rural Kurdistan. This preliminary study motivated the second round of their study on other parts of Kurdistan. Parts of this study are presented in this paper.

Methodology

In order to introduce a more thorough and different knowledge on land tenure system in Kurdistan of pre-land reform, the authors assumed a socio-historical approach with a reliance on compiling historical documents as narratives. Such narrative could contribute to rereading historical specificities of land tenure system in Kurdistan. This approach was first introduced by Hayden White in his 'Content of the Form' in which he argues about how historical events cannot be, in themselves, represented but first need to be taken out of their discursive reflections and be reconstructed as narratives. These narratives can, in turn, be treated as historical evidence and when they are put together they can help the researchers to extract a more realistic understanding and knowledge about past history than the discursive versions of describing historical phenomena.

Comparative historical research has also been chosen as a research method. The qualitative data including the narratives were gathered by documentary studies and through semi-intensive and semi-structured field interviews with the traditional and experienced landlords. These data were first classified in accordance with such elements as what the landlords said about Mozare-eh system to exist in various parts of Kurdistan; how the crop was decided and how the landlord participated in cultivation of land and who contributed what to the production process And then

these materials have been analyzed based on the question of whether they addressed the existence of two different types of tenure systems; i.e. Kurdistan type and Mozare-eh (Boneh).

In the end the data were collected from 23 interviews with landlords. As the authors went further through selecting more landlords they figured out that the content of the information provided by the new interviews were becoming repetitive, and where they felt there was a kind of saturation and we decided to stop collecting further data from interviews.

Results

Describing the specificities of land tenure systems both in Iran, in general, and in Kurdistan in Particular, The authors realized that the sharecropping system used to be the prevalent and the dominant form of tenure system across Iran. However, and in contrast to Lambton's claims and other scholars who claim Boneh was the dominant form in Kurdistan, The authors discovered a different type of sharecropping existed in Kurdistan that functioned based on crop sharing but the labor process was less torturous and more beneficial to the peasants.

Conclusion

The results indicated that land tenure system based on Mozare-eh (sharecropping) has had many variations across the country but various scholars have presented them in identical forms. We However, the authors have indicated that these variations have not been addressed properly by existing literature. Probably Safinejad's account of where and how Bonehs functioned is a more plausible reliable account than that of Farhadi and Lambton. Also it is worth mentioning that absentee landlordism never occurred in Kurdistan as it did in areas where Bonehs were dominant. Accordingly extraction of surplus product did not take shape as it did in Boneh-dominated areas. This means class formation in Boneh-dominated areas followed the rules that were formed based on absentee landlordism. For example, the numbers of classes in Boneh dominated areas were higher than the number of classes that the authors came to know existing in Kurdistan. Middle men and solicitors were close to nonexistent in this province. Having considered such characteristics, this paper provides a more realistic account of socio-historic

characteristics surrounding land tenure system in Iran. It was not a feudal istic type now of production, but it was an Asian one. It simply developed out of necessities of a patrimonial system that was inherited from Achaemenid era but was reconstructed based on Islamic rules after the 642 BC.

Keywords: Grouping Tenure System, Boneh, Kurdistan, Land Reforms.

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