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BEYOND CULTURALISM AND MONISM: THE IRANIAN PATH TO DEMOCRACY[1]

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1. Introduction

A quarter century after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the name of "cultural authenticity" the establishment has been challenged over the very same issue. Children of the revolution, the voices of change and the social base of the current reform movement, are now skeptical of all Islamic clerical solutions such as Islamic state, Islamic society, Islamic economy, and, recently, Islamic democracy. The central argument in my paper therefore represents the central conflict that characterizes Iranian politics today – that is, the relation between the global and the local paradigms, between the universal and the particular or between universalism and culturalism. More specifically, the paper explores a key question concerning the nature and the future of modernity and democracy in Iran.

Can Western modernity be Iran's future goal, or should Iran seek a different path to modernity? Is democracy, as Amartya Sen (1999) suggests, a "universal value," or is it a civilizational achievement of the Occidental culture and therefore not easily transferable to other civilizations (Huntington 1996)? Are Muslim-majority states, Iran included, "exceptionally" immune to the process of democratization? If not, what would be the Iranian path to democracy? What are the main features of such a democracy? To what extent is this democracy a global, and to what degree a local, achievement?

2. The "Universal" and the "Particular": Three Theoretical Approaches

In this paper, I have identified three approaches through which to expound and examine the relationship between "particularism" and "universalism": they are "Culturalism" "Monism" and "Minimum-universalism" (Parekh 1999). By culturalism we mean an essentialist interpretation of culture in both the Oriental and the Occidental

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traditions. Moreover, the cultural relativism of people from the left and cultural essentialism of people from the right are considered to be two versions of culturalism.

Monism stands for an arrogant, totalizing, and ethnocentric interpretation of modern values defined exclusively on the basis of Occidental traditions. Finally, minimum-universalism represents plural, reflexive, and dialectical relations between the particular and the universal. Unlike culturalism, it simultaneously gives room for different cultural interpretations and avoids cultural determinism. Unlike monism, it rejects the holistic totalizing concept of universalism and yet advocates a reflexive and inclusive version of universal values.

Pure particularism is "self-defeating." This is largely due to the "conservative logic" of pure difference, which leads us to the "route of self-apartheid" (Laclau 1996: 26, 33). Hence, the world of culturalism is small, but not always small that is beautiful (Booth 1999: 5). The giant world of monism is big, but not always as in big is better. It is, indeed, ethnocentric in nature and totalitarian in outcome.

Minimum-universalism, in contrast, is a democratic approach, which encourages open and unforced cross-cultural dialogues. It suggests that there are several different moral lives, and yet they "can be judged on the basis of a universally valid body of values." There are universal values that constitute "a kind of 'floor' and 'irreducible minimum'"; once "a society meets these basic principles, it is free to organize its way of life as it considers proper" (Parekh 1999: 131). The logic of minimum universalism, as Michael Walzer puts it, is a reflection of the character of human society: it is universal because it is about humans; and it is particular, because it is about society (Walzer 1994: 9). In other words, "the *Other* is an alien," Booth argues, but "*another* is all of us" (1999: 31) As such, minimum universalism is the combination of universalism and the "politics of difference." Such a synthesis will produce "a number of different 'roads to democracy' and a variety of 'democracies' at the end of the road." The danger, however, remains if 'difference' prevails at the expense of universalism, and vice versa. In the former case, if 'difference' overcomes at the expense of the universal value of democracy, it would generate a "religious republic." In the latter case, if universalism overcomes at the expense of 'difference', we would experience political regimes such as "liberal oligarchy" (Walzer 1994: ix).

What has to be done, then, to avoid culturalism coming through the back door? How do we "make space for the inescapable cultural mediation of universal values without depriving them of their cultural and critical trust" (Parekh 1999: 151)? First, one has to realize that values differ from institutions. Societies may realize the same universal values through different institutions most suited to their culture and history. Second, universal values are general and therefore can be articulated in the language of society's *norms*. And third, one has to follow a "minimalist" as opposed to maximalist approach. This minimalism relies on the principles articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Parekh 1999: 151-52).

3. Iran: Searching for a Third Alternative

What has this to do with the Iranian path to modernity and democracy? It is to suggest that neither the culturalism of Khomeinism nor the ethnocentric version of modernity is conducive to Iran's democratic transition. Charles Taylor charts a third alternative path beyond what he calls modernity's "boosters" and "knockers" (Taylor 1992: 11, 22-23). This path is not that of a half-hearted compromise favoring a "simple trade-off between the advantages and costs of modernity. Rather, the aim is to renew serious reflections on the meaning of modernity and its possible future directions" (Dallmayer 2002: 97). This is to suggest that, "grounded in different traditions and faced with different challenges, different societies move along different paths towards modernity and represent different kinds of modernity" (Madsen et al 2002: 116).

The goal, of course, is "not to find a new title for the mantles of nationalists or religious apologists who already claim that all that has ever been of value in the world has come from Iran, or Islam" (Milani 2004: 21). Instead, the idea is, first, to admit that there are as many roads to modernity and democracy as there are societies; and, second, "to show that democracy, rationalism and the rule of law are not strange and alien ideas" to non-western cultures, but have "deep native roots in the intellectual soil" of these societies (Milani 2004: 21).

Let us be explicit about the fact that we are very much aware of some terrible historical experiences that have redefined modernity in line of culture at the cost of violation of human rights, the rule of law, the democratic process, and individual

liberties. Nonetheless, the fact is that, as Mirsepassi (2002: 93) points out, global social movements have already challenged the non-reflexive vision of modernity. "Calling for a different and more tolerant project of modernity, at a time when modern secular ideas and institutions seem to be under Islamist attack, may be perceived as politically risky, intellectually naïve, and practically unthinkable" (Mirsepassi 2002: 91). Yet history shows that totalizing universalism has proved to be equally, if not more, "politically risky, intellectually naïve, and practically unthinkable." The experience of the modern secular authoritarian polity is an undeniable fact. Our respect for the liberal and "enlightened" ideals of modern rationalism does not justify ignoring or overlooking the troubling history and colonized experience of modernity.

Accordingly, we can argue that, while alternatives *to* modernity and democracy are repressive responses, alternative modernities and democracies are practical paths. There are no unified, final answers in the permanent process of change. "All that is solid," says Karl Marx, "melts into air" (Berman 1988). We may interpret this as meaning that either local or global paradigms, tradition or modernity, can melt into air if they are solid and are not reflexive.

Jürgen Habermas argues that "modernity" is an "unfinished project." In the same vein, some social theories suggest that "'tradition' is likewise a perpetually unfinished project – that is, how people understand their traditions and apply them to practical situations is subject to dynamic change and constant negotiation" (Anderson, Seibert, and Wagner 1998 quoted in Monshipouri et al 2003: 122). A modern individual is, indeed, involved in a dialogue with the past, in which society and culture progress in a dialectic of continuity and change.

4. Iran: Religion and Democratization

Can religion and republicanism coexist? Iran's post-revolutionary politics of culturalism, which has been displayed in the form of clerical "Islamization" of society, has made many people skeptical of such a possibility. The question of religion – its nature and function – in Iran's transition to democracy becomes extremely significant.

A cardinal question is whether the current crisis of cultural politics might push Iran to an extreme and excessive secularism characterized, not by separation, but by a

total segregation of religion and politics. Is monism replacing culturalism in Iran? Who should define the relation between religion and republicanism in Iran? Does the elite or the electorate define and determine the nature of that relation? Relying on its own socio-cultural context and its historical heritage, I submit, the Iranian society as a whole must decide and determine the extent and the nature of Iranian secularism. A genuine democracy and a true republic, to use Habermas's phrases (1989; 1996), are shaped by public "communicative" actions, people's "deliberation", and "discursive" debates over the proper role of religion in the public sphere, either in politics or in civil society organizations.

For all this to happen, one has to simultaneously challenge two opposing discourses: first, the "politicization" of religion; second, the "privatization" of religion. The politicization of religion represents a state-sponsored religion and obviously violates the very foundation of democracy. Similarly, the concept of privatization of religion is a problematic one; it is not necessarily conducive to democracy. The logic behind the privatization of religion is the idea that the elimination of religion from the public sphere is a condition of democracy and that religion and democracy can live together if and only if the religious domain remains confined to private life. There is no doubt that the "relocation" of religious institutions from "state" to "civil society" is the first necessary step for having any models of democracy. This relocation, however, should not be interpreted as the "privatization" of religion (Casanova 1994: 1047).

The third alternative may be called "public religion". *What* is public religion? And *why* does it matter? The concept of public religion should not resemble political religion. Here public never means to replace the private, nor does it mean political. It also has to be distinguished from civil religion, inspired by Rousseau's and Durkheim's concept of "civil religion," which tends to be a shadow of top-down religious development. Public religion, instead, is an alternative notion, which characterizes a kind of bottom-up societal expression. It refers to a form of "civic faith" within a republic – to use a phrase coined by Benjamin Franklin in 1749 (Marty 1987).

Nonetheless, a key question still remains unanswered: *why* public religion? First, religion inevitably has and will find its own way to influence the "public" sphere; so it is "better to recognize this and make such religion a subject of citizen observation and

debate than to keep it covert and leave it unacknowledged" (Marty and Blumhofer). Unlike the Enlightenment philosophers, Tocqueville remained skeptical of the prediction that religion would decline and become politically irrelevant with the process of modernization and the advance of democracy. Interestingly, he "thought that the incorporation of ordinary people into democratic politics would only increase the relevance of religion for modern politics" (Casanova 1994: 1048). For this reason, by entering the public sphere, "religions and normative traditions are forced to confront and possibly come to terms with modern normative structures" (Casanova 1994: 1048-49). Such a public encounter may permit the reflexive rationalization of religious discourses.

Second, by questioning the absolutist principles of inhuman morality of the state's security doctrines and the market's impersonal and amoral self-regulation, public religion could play a role of counterbalance against those two major power centers, i.e., state and market. Jürgen Habermas divides the public sphere into three spheres of state, market, and civil society, and puts much emphasis on civil society in order to balance the powers of state and market. He refers to "state" "market" and "civil society" as three mechanisms of social integration and suggests that modern societies meet their needs for integration by balancing these three resources (Habermas 1996). Accordingly, it is legitimate to suggest that "public religion," being exclusively part and parcel of civil society, could play its "public" role while remaining far from any state-sponsored "political" role. An active public religion in civil society differs at once from a private isolated religion and from a political ideology of the state. Moreover, environmental and ecological concerns are not well addressed by hidden or individualized religion. It is in the public expression of religion that the environment will be faced with respect to ethics (Marty and Blumhofer).

Third, in a time of uncivil domestic politics, religion can best be overcome by religion: creative forms, not non-religion, will set out to attract the hearts of those who have used God against humanity (Marty and Blumhofer). In the context of the Muslim world, Abdullahi An-Na'im (1999: xii) reminds us, one must not to "abandon the field to the fundamentalists, who [could] succeed in carrying the vast majority of the population with them by citing religious authority for their policies and theories."

5. Conclusion: "Maps of Misreading"

Let me conclude this paper with a powerful argument, made by Alfred Stepan, warning us not to misread the "lessons" of the historical relationship between Western Christianity and democracy. He cautions us against "four possible misinterpretations." According to Stepan, *empirically*, the defining feature of democracy, as it exists in fifteen European countries, is not a "wall of separation," but the political reconstruction of "twin tolerations." *Doctrinally*, one has to avoid the simple temptation of believing that a religion is univocal on democracy or human rights. The question is, who speaks for a particular religion? *Methodologically*, we should pay close attention to the "fallacy of unique founding conditions," which claims that in non-Western countries democracy will not be achieved unless they meet the same founding conditions, such as capitalist economy, independent civil society, and the like. This is to "confuse the conditions associated with the invention of something with the possibility of its replication, or more accurately, its *reformulation* under different conditions." And *normatively* one has to be cautious about taking "the truths of religion off the political agenda" (Stepan 2000: 37-57). According to the Rawlsian argument, "public argument about the place of religion is appropriate only if it employs, or at least can employ, freestanding conceptions of political justices" (Rawls 1993). What is missing in Rawls's argument is a prior question of "how actual polities have consensually and democratically arrived at agreements to 'take religion off the political agenda.'" In many democracies the core conflict for a long time "was precisely over the place of religion in the polity…This conflict was politically contained or neutralized only after long public arguments and negotiations in which religion was the dominant item on the political agenda" (Stepan 2000: 45). Stepan adds,

> [I]n polities where a significant portion of believers may be under the bend of doctrinally based non-democratic religious discourses, one of the major tasks of political and spiritual leaders who wish to revalue democratic norms in their own religious community will be to advance theologically convincing public arguments about legitimate public reasoning; they are vital to the success of democratization in a country divided over the meaning and appropriateness of democracy (2000: 45).

The implication of this argument is twofold: *theoretically*, it proposes such categories as "modernity and pre-modern" "religion and democracy" and "tradition and change" are neither mutually exclusive nor totally discontinuous.

Practically, it suggests that Muslim societies have to engage in a new hermeneutics of their own religion in order to achieve democracy. This is, of course, a "necessary" but certainly not "sufficient" condition. This is also far beyond an abstract, hypothetical debate among elites and intellectuals; it is more about society's active and deliberative engagement. "Democratization in the Muslim countries, Iran included, will not be achieved against the will of the Muslims." Indeed, "it will be accomplished with them or not at all" (Addi 1997). Institutionally, such democracy is most likely to be different from the Westminster model. Intellectually and philosophically, however, is certainly far beyond all naïve and superficial interpretations of traditional Islamic political thought, which translate and represent such expressions as *Shura* or *Ijma* as identical to the modern concept of "democracy."

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REFLECTIONS ON IRAN'S PRISON SYSTEM DURING THE MONTAZERI YEARS (1985-1988)[2]

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Introduction

Events of June 1981 were a turning point in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). It was during this period that the cleric-dominated faction within the ruling elite of the IRI moved to eliminate both its opposition outside the state apparatus and its factional opposition, commonly called the "Islamic liberals" (led by President Abol Hasan Bani-sadr in 1981). The period immediately following June 1981 was both one of consolidation for the IRI under a more homogeneous cleric-dominated leadership and one of the harshest and most violent periods in recent Iranian history. While at war with Iraq and in a continuing confrontational mode with the U.S., the IRI under the leadership of Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was, in effect, attempting to bring about uniformity in its leadership and to consolidate power by eliminating all opposition.

In this context, almost the entire political opposition (be they leftist communists, Moslem radicals, or Islamic liberals) were taken on in an often violent, sometimes civil-war-like, confrontation. The violence of 1981-1988 is best reflected in the IRI prison system, where thousands, if not tens of thousands, of men and women perished. The end of this period saw the general massacre of prisoners in the summer of 1988 as the Iran-Iraq war came to an end, a year before Khomeini's demise.

During 1981-1988, a reemergence of factionalism and the role played by Khomeini's heir apparent, Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, had a significant consequence for the lives of thousands of prisoners. This paper discusses the role of factionalism and that of Montazeri during this period and examines improvements, if any, in prison conditions during Montazeri's tenure, as well as the calamities prisoners faced after his removal.

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[2] The original draft of this paper, titled "Perspectives on Iran's Political Prisoners during the Montazeri Years (1985-88)," was presented at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) panel, "Responses to State Terror: Twentieth-Century Iran's Political Prisoners," San Francisco, November 20-23, 2004.

Factionalism in IRI

While the attempt to consolidate the IRI was, for the most part, realized, the hope of establishing a more homogeneous leadership proved to be more challenging and ultimately elusive . Shortly after 1981, and as soon as it became clear that the opposition was effectively neutralized, the cleric-dominated coalition which had closed ranks behind Khomeini began to polarize. By the time Khomeini died in 1989, three distinguishable factions had fully developed. The three differed on a range of domestic and foreign policy issues.

In brief, the first was the radical/left faction, which advocated a stronger role for the state in domestic policies and a more radical, confrontational foreign policy, especially when it came to the U.S. This faction generally had the upper hand as long as the Iran-Iraq war was going on. Second was the pragmatic/moderate faction, which advocated a lessening of the state role in domestic matters and normalizing Iran's foreign relations so as to achieve domestic growth, particularly as the war years came to an end. The reform movement of the late 1990s emerged from elements belonging to these two factions. Third was the right/conservative faction, which advocated a limited state role in regulating domestic economic matters, represented the bazaar merchant class interest, advocated a strong state role in imposing Islamic moral codes, and envisioned a more isolationist foreign policy.

The three factions also shared a clear contempt for political democracy and were in accord when it came to eliminating the opposition. Khomeini was fully aware of the factions and played them against each other to maintain balance. However, toward the end of his life he clearly sided with the left faction on most issues (1).

Montazeri

By the 1980s, Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri was already considered an old hand revolutionary, a student and confidant of Khomeini from before the revolution, and one of the architects of the IRI after 1979. Because of his age, his seminary education

and status as a *mujtahed* (learned religious scholar able to issue independent judgments on religious subjects), and his revolutionary credentials, Montazeri soon found a prominent place in the hierarchy of the IRI. He was designated to become the successor to Khomeini in November 1985, a status he held until his dismissal in March 1989.

Montazeri's selection as heir apparent posed some problems and was clearly a political step. Although a mujtahed with impeccable revolutionary credentials, he was not considered a *marja'* (source of imitation/grand ayatollah) at the time of his selection, which was a constitutional prerequisite for becoming the leader of the IRI (this constitutional prerequisite was removed in the summer of 1989 after Khomeini's death). Hence, in the months leading to his selection, a considerable effort was made to elevate his position to an acceptable level.

Montazeri was viewed as a person who would follow Khomeini's path and ensure clerical continuity in the IRI's leadership. But between 1985 and 1989 he came into open conflict with his former teacher and leader, resulting in his removal.

Like Khomeini, Montazeri attempted to stay above factional politics, but even more than Khomeini, and much earlier, he tended to lean toward the left faction, especially on foreign policy matters. On other issues, he maintained his own independent line and was quite vocal about it. As a no-nonsense straight-shooter, Montazeri often offended IRI officials, including Khomeini, with his criticism. His dismissal was due to a number of interconnected issues ranging from his opposition to the 1986 Iran-Contra affair, aspects of the IRI's foreign policy, the conduct of the war with Iraq, constitutional changes put forward by Khomeini in 1988-89, and power struggle with Khomeini's son and the head of his household, Ahmad, who led a power center by virtue of his access to his father.

Another area where Montazeri came into conflict with Khomeini was the IRI's human rights record and the issue of freedom of expression. Indeed, on the former he was accused of paying too much attention to reports of Amnesty International, and on the

latter issue, of getting too close to Islamic liberals (led by Mehdi Bazargan and considered a semi-legal opposition group in 1989).

The IRI Judiciary

Following the repression of June 1981, the IRI's judiciary was faced with an overwhelming number of detainees belonging to a variety of political oppositional groups. To put the problem simply, the judiciary was overloaded, and immediate relief or improvisation was required.

The 1981 crackdown occurred little more than two years after the victory of the revolution and at a time when the IRI was just beginning to reorganize the state system. If one takes into consideration that even today, some twenty-five years after the revolution, the IRI judicial system is still chaotic and leaves much to be desired, one can imagine how bad the conditions were at this infantile stage.

There were two core problems. First, as an Islamic republic, the IRI claimed to seek to bring about Islamic justice. Naturally, here the judiciary played a central role in administering "judicial" justice. Islamic justice meant, in part, purging the Iranian law code of its Western influence and secular past and replacing it with Shari'a-based laws. This process was at an early stage and no coherent and uniform system was yet in place. By the middle of 1981, the fact that the country was in the middle of both a civil and a foreign war, as well as the usual post-revolution disorder, only compounded the problem.

The second problem, closely associated with the above, was an acute lack of competent judges to administer justice. Ideally, in a Shari'a-based legal system, competent clerics would be in charge of courts and administration of justice. In reality, it had been a long time since Shi'a clerics had played any role in Iran's judiciary, a function they were in charge of until the early 1930s. Hence, while Shi'a seminaries in Iran had been training competent clerics during the fifty years before the revolution, they had not been producing enough judges for the task at hand. Ideally, Shi'a clerics who had become mujtaheds would be in charge of judicial and other duties such as teaching. Those among

the clerics who were not mujtaheds would attend to less intellectually oriented occupations such as preaching, notarizing, managing village mosques, etc. Since no judges were needed during fifty years of secularizing reforms by Pahlavi shahs, fewer graduates had been produced and they attended to other tasks.

In 1981, with an acute shortage of competent judges, many non-mujtaheds were recruited to run the courts, and in the absence of uniform legal codes, they began to issue rulings as they saw fit. The incompetence of most judges and their revolutionary/religious zeal resulted in catastrophe. Chaos, arbitrariness, and large numbers of executions and numerous other human rights violations followed. The situation got so bad that the ruling clerics took notice.

In his memoirs Montazeri mentions the problem and steps taken to remedy the situation (2). It seems that sometime after 1983 Khomeini was approached and asked to take action regarding arbitrary executions going on in the prisons. Khomeini in turn asked Montazeri to look into the problem. According to Montazeri, the problem was twofold. First, because of general disorganization and localism of the courts, not only were arbitrary death sentences issued, but on many occasions people who had committed similar crimes received such different sentences as short prison terms and capital punishment, depending on the judge (3). The second problem was more technical in nature and centered around who would be liable to capital punishment. The key concepts in dispute were "war against God" (*harb*) and "corrupter on earth" (*mufsed-e fi al-arz*) (4). Many judges interpreted any act of "war against God" as well as any "corrupting act" as being those of a "corrupter on earth" and issued death sentences.

It is worth noting that by the time Montazeri got involved in this process, thousands of people had already been "administered justice" under the above circumstances. Montazri's reforms in this regard were simple and swift. He issued a legal ruling stating that not all "corrupters" are to be considered "corrupters on earth," thus making them ineligible for capital punishment. He also argued, as will be explained below, that only

male, not female, prisoners found to be in a state of "war with God" were subject to capital punishment.

Furthermore, in 1983 Montazeri suggested and led the way to establish a central court in Qum called the Sublime Court (*dadgah-e ali*) to review most capital punishment cases. This process resulted in a decrease in capital cases as the Qum court was under Montazeri's influence and did not issue execution sentences for many women prisoners, the youth, and those who did not have a direct hand in assassinations (5).

IRI Security and Prison System

The IRI's prison system faced overload problems similar to those mentioned above, only here the situation was much worse. According to Hosein Musavi-tabrizi, the Revolutionary Prosecutor-General 1981-83, not only were there not adequate facilities to house thousands of newly arriving prisoners, but many prisoners disappeared and were killed even before court hearings, some not even being registered. In addition, torture and long captivity without any judicial process, or continued captivity after serving one's sentence, had now become the norm. (6)

According to Tabrizi, in September 1981 when he took office, following the assassination of his predecessor, both the security forces and the prison system were in a dire condition. As far as the security forces were concerned, the problem proved easier to solve. Apparently, according to Tabrizi, various security forces (including the IRGC, police, revolutionary Komitehs, security forces associated with the Prosecutor General's Office, and other branches) acted independently of each other, at times competing with each other or even shooting each other mistakenly during street patrols. This problem was solved by establishing a central command for coordination, as well as taking other steps. This process eventually led to the 1984 establishment of the Intelligence Ministry of the IRI and consolidation of all police forces in one national organization under the State Ministry (sometimes interpreted as Interior Ministry) [which? Or did this change?] in the 1990s.

A solution to the problem of prisons proved to be more elusive. As with the security forces, there was no central coordinating organization in 1981. What existed was a collection of prisons left from the shah's time, each controlled by a different security organization. The person in charge until 1985 of the IRI's largest prison, Evin in Tehran, was Asadollah Lajevardi, by any measure a brutal administrator with a special security squad under his command operating out of Evin. Lajevardious["notorious" implies well-known] was himself an ex-political prisoner and a person closely associated with the right/conservative faction. His control over the most important and largest prison facility pointed to the right faction's dominance over the fate of most political prisoners.

Tabrizi notes that in the midst of near-civil war conditions, the problem of dealing with the opposition was compounded by arbitrary arrests and killings done on Lajevardi's watch. The situation got so bad that reports reached Khomeini, who appointed three parliament members to look into the problem. Their advice and that of Tabrizi was to remove Lajevardi. Apparently the right faction managed to convince Khomeini not to go ahead with the dismissal, but he did ask Tabrizi to watch over Lajevardi (7).

Montazeri and the Prison System:

This was the general situation in which Montazeri took on overall management of IRI's prison system by appointing his people to run it, a process that in part led to his confrontation with Khomeini. The office of Montazeri, the heir apparent, soon became a place which people who were not otherwise able to reach authorities and seek justice, flooded with complaints. Even many officials who were unable to approach Khomeini for a variety of reasons sought Montazeri's intervention. Montazeri intervened on many occasions by writing letters to officials, by appointing his people to oversee duties, and by directly approaching Khomeini and discussing the problem in a no-nonsense manner.

According to Montazeri, he approached Khomeini with the complaint that many excesses were going on in the prisons even years after the opposition had been effectively neutralized. These included continued summary executions, torture (in the guise of Shari'a punishment or *ta'zir*) for information, but more commonly as a form of

punishment and for repentance, long unnecessary sentences, and refusal to release prisoners after the end of their terms (8).

Another topic the two men discussed was execution of female prisoners. Montazeri believed that according to theShari'a only those women who had been directly involved in killing were liable to capital punishment. He proposed reducing sentences, and not implementing capital punishment, for those women who were deemed to be in a "state of war with God" but had not been directly involved in any killing. (9)

Interestingly, Khomeini, who would order the general killing of prisoners in the summer of 1988, apparently agreed with all of Montazeri's suggestions and asked him to take charge. Montazeri had been paying attention to prison conditions years before he became heir apparent. It appears he had been collecting information on prison conditions and trying to restrain brutalization of prisoners even in the heat of conflict with the opposition. The following episode is telling: after the fall 1981 assassination of a top cleric named Ayatollah Dastghaib in Shiraz, prison guards stormed the prison quarters of Evin. Their presence was unusual in that they all looked angry, were in large numbers, and carried their weapons with them. Prison guards apparently did not normally carry their weapons among the prison population for fear of being disarmed. The above circumstance gave the appearance that prisoners were going to be shot *en masse* at any moment. But then a live broadcast from Montazeri over radio pleaded for restraint, after which things began to calm down (10).

On another occasion, a political prisoner on a hospital bed in Evin was surprised when a member of the Revolutionary Guards approached him in late 1985 asking him about prison conditions. When asked who he was and why he was asking a prisoner such questions, he said that he worked with the office of Montazeri and that they had no access to the prisons and did not know what went on.

In 1985 Montazeri took charge by ordering a halt to execution of women prisoners who had not been directly involved in any killing, and appointed a council of amnesty to look

into cases which were eligible for release. He also initiated the creation of the IRI Organization of Prisons and began to appoint his people to oversee running of the prisons, starting with the dismissal of Lajevardi. The latter apparently left his post after executing close to twenty-five hundred prisoners who had already repented and were cooperating with him (11).

According to most accounts, the general condition of prisons began to improve from 1985 to the summer of 1988. Among measures taken were: sharp reduction in executions; release of many prisoners; general improvement of prison conditions (recreation, availability of books, family visits), and reduction in solitary confinement; lessening of torture as a form of punishment; abolition of compulsory ideological classes.

A positive change in the condition of prisons throughout Iran had begun to take shape. More than a few ex-political prisoners have suggested that their lives were saved after Montazeri took over (12). There have been over a dozen memoirs written by former political prisoners of these years. While some authors either do not mention the changes in prison conditions or dismiss them as cosmetic, others have taken notice. After acknowledging the changes, Shahrnush Parsipur, a prominent woman novelist and ex-prisoner, wrote: "Hence, it became clear that recent [prison] reforms had occurred under the supervision of Ayatollah Montazeri's office. I am not well versed in factional infighting among these gentlemen, but during the last year to year-and-a-half of prison, when these people took over, the conditions of prison changed one hundred eighty degrees" (13). Another female prisoner, Monireh Baradaran, also acknowledges the difference Montazeri made (14).

Thus, Montazeri's domination of the IRI judiciary and prison system signaled a period of visible and significant relaxation of, but not a complete end to, terror in IRI prisons. His attempt was to set the stage for creating institutions, cultural imperatives, and a legal context to serve Islamic justice and protect the revolution at the same time. Those who were guilty were to be punished and then be sent on their way. This period ended when he lost his control over these institutions, resulting in a swift return of terror.

By the summer of 1988, Montazeri was out of the picture as far as the prison system was concerned. Following the end of the Iran-Iraq war, in the summer of 1988, orders were issued to execute those prisoners who were guilty and beyond redemption and to free others. In the coming months, more than 4,500 prisoners were killed. A majority of these had already received prison sentences and/or had served their sentence and were eligible for release. Probably another 15,000 prisoners were eventually released (15).

Different people in Iran began to actively oppose the executions and voice their concern. One such group was the Liberation Movement of former Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, who had been out of favor and marginalized by Khomeini. Montazeri joined these voices by sending messages and writing letters to Khomeini. He was accused of being naïve, of collaboration with Bazargan, and of being too impressionable and under the influence of foreign human rights groups. In one of Khomeini's last speeches in March 1989, he attacked those who have been fooled by the liberals and the hypocrites (the latter a standard IRI reference to the Mojahedin), a clear reference to Montazeri and a popular line of attack on him from this point on (16). Without Montazeri's intervention and objections, the extent of the terror going on in the prisons probably would not have become internationally known. The end result of this process was the March 1989 "resignation" (or removal) of Montazeri and the beginning of his marginalization and house arrests.

Conclusion:

Why did Montazeri act the way he did? After all, he was a staunch supporter of the revolution and an architect of the IRI constitution, a defender of the repression in 1981, a father who had lost a son to assassins, and a close confidant and student of Khomeini. In his last letter to Montazeri accepting his "resignation," Khomeini referred to his former protégé as "the fruit of my life," pointing to the painful rift between the two men (17).

At the point of his dismissal Montazeri was one of the most powerful men in Iran, with impeccable political and religious credentials. As Khomeini's heir apparent he could have kept quiet until he had become the all-powerful leader of the IRI.

The answer seems to be in his personality, the place he envisioned for himself in the revolution, and his perception of what an Islamic society should look like and how an Islamic state should behave.

Montazeri was not a power-hungry political activist who would sacrifice all else for the sake of holding on to power. That is a malady that has gripped many revolutionaries, and the Iranian revolutionaries were no exception. Montazeri was and is an idealist for whom power is for the sake of justice, fairness, and morality in an Islamic context, as he envisions it. If the reality of the revolution was telling him otherwise, then it was the revolution, and not his perception of Islam -- his principles -- that had to give way.

It is true that he supported the repression of the early 1980s, but he also began to oppose what he considered the excesses of the revolution from an early stage. Perhaps only a few revolutionaries in history, or perhaps many, reach this pivotal crossroad. Hunger for power or the old craving for your principles -- which one would it be?

As a well-placed and important pillar of the revolution, Montazeri's office was soon flooded with complaints from all those who had nowhere else to turn. Montazeri in effect became a path through which these excesses were brought under a degree of control. His removal reinstituted terror and nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the prison system.

His perception of Islamic justice ran counter to those who insisted on deepening the repression. His tenure represented a relative pause in the terror. To Montazeri, terror was permissible not to seek revenge but only to save the system, administer justice, clear the innocent, and move on. Mass killing of prisoners, killing those who had been given

light sentences, use of torture and demands for repentance, and making life miserable for prisoners were not part of his vision of Islamic justice.

Perhaps there is another aspect to this problem. Institutionalization of illegality, of arbitrariness, and of terror can ultimately serve to damage revolutionary ideals. Under such circumstances, the prison wardens of today could easily become the prisoners of tomorrow. To prevent this, institutionalization of legality is an imperative. One can clearly sense an attempt by Montazeri to establish the rule of law (based on Shari'a) as he tried to prevent excesses.

Finally, it is not surprising that Iran's reform movement today is closely identified with Montazeri. It is true that none of the factions of the 1980s within the IRI even mentioned civil society, individual freedom, freedom of expression, and democracy as they are known in the West. But it is also true that faint voices from among the ruling factions, demanding and insisting on the rule of law and an end to arbitrariness and terror, began at this point.

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Notes

1) For more on factional politics in the IRI see Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (Syracuse, NY, 2002).

2) Hosein Ali Montazeri, *Khaterat* [Memoirs] (Tehran, 2000), 311.

3) Ibid., 308.

4) Ibid., 298.

5) This was the assessment of a former political prisoner, Reza Fani-yazdi (interview with author, Berkeley, CA, November 13, 2004).

6) Interview with Ayatollah Sayyed Hosein Musavi-tabrizi, *Chashmandaz* (Tehran), No. 22 (September-October 2003), 41.

7) Ibid.

8) One former political prisoner, who has to remain anonymous, told this author that when he asked his captors what were the criteria for implementation of *ta'zir* (i.e., beating prisoners), the answer was that it was implemented when a prisoner lied about a certain question; of course, as I was told, that was only one criterion among many (anonymous, telephone interview with author, Berkeley, CA, March 29, 2005).

9) Montazeri, *Khaterat* [Memoirs] (Tehran, 2000), 309, 378.

10) Anonymous former political prisoner.

11) Ibid. This is the source for both the account of the encounter with the guard in Evin hospital and the rough estimate of those executed by Lajevardi.

12) Both the anonymous former political prisoner and Reza Fani-yazdi, as well as another former prisoner, Hamid Karamyar (interview with author, Berkeley, CA, January 29, 2005), attested to this observation.

13) Shahrnush Parsipur, *Khaterat-e Zendan* [Prison Memoirs] (Sweden, 1996), 355.

14) Monireh Baradaran (M. Raha), *Haqiqat-e Sadeh* [Simple Truth] (Hannover, Germany, 1997), 163.

15) The number of executed prisoners is based on a list provided by a number of exiled political opposition organizations. See *Anan keh Goftand Na* [Those Who Said No] (Paris, 1999); the number of freed prisoners is a rough estimate based on interviews conducted.

16) The text of Khomeini's speech can be found in the following: Mohammad Mohammadi-reyshahri, *Khaterat-e Siyasi 1365-66* [Political Memoir 1986-87] (Tehran, 1990), 289.

17) Ibid., 292.

On March 8, 1979, tens of thousands of Iranian women marched in the streets of Tehran protesting the imposition of the veil and the reactionaries' rise to power in Iran.

(right) caption reads: In the spring of freedom,

there is no place for women's rights.

IRAN'S ISLAMIC CULTURAL REVOLUTION:
Cultural Authenticity, Revolutionary Ideologues, and Women as Markers of the Nation.

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"*We hope that the society of women will arise from the ignorance and false sleep imposed upon them by the plunderers…[S]houlder to shoulder, we will be able to answer the cries of those who have become toys and guide women to their high station*." – Ruhollah Khomeini, 1981.

"*In our society, women change rapidly. The tyranny of our times and the influence of institutions take woman away from what she is.*" – Ali Shariati, 1971.

In the decade preceding the Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979, revolutionary ideologues like Ali Shariati and Ruhollah Khomeini, among others, spoke extensively about women's increased presence in Iranian society. This became the framework for depicting the cultural demise of Iran through encroachment on the country by a perceived enemy from without -- the notorious West -- and a constructed enemy from within -- the immoral and undignified modern Iranian woman. In the quotations above, Shariati laments how the Iranian woman has been taken "away from what she is," while Khomeini promises to steer women back to "their high positions." This article will show

that, in effect, women's bodies became a primary battleground for revolutionary ideologues, who believed that the dress, manner, mobility, education, religion, occupation, etc. of women, were clear indicators of a pervasive social and cultural imperialism that had been corrupting society. In this conception, women ultimately became the barometers by which Western infringement was to be measured.

This article acknowledges the socio-political context in which the writings and lectures of various revolutionary ideologues were produced: the fact that an alternative discourse to modernity was being constructed as a tool for mobilization against the authoritarian rule of the Pahlavi regime. But it will not excuse the utilization and demonization of women as embodiments of this so-called socio-cultural malaise from which Iran was said to be suffering in the 1960's and 1970's. Rather, this article will explore how -- although there were divergent views on governance post-Shah and other seemingly conflicting ideologies of the various political groups involved in the revolution -- they often concurred and reinforced one another when it came to the question of women's rights. Even the Islamic Republic's first liberal prime minister, Mehdi Bazargan, who differed with the reactionary clerics on their role in governance, and who finally resigned, stated in a 1979 interview in the French newspaper *Le Monde* that "talking of absolute equality of the sexes is impossible. Nature did not want it either for the human race or for plants and animals."

As many scholars have noted (Mojab, Keddie, Azari, Moghissi, Tabari, Afkhami, Ferdows, Friedl, Shahidian, Yeganeh, Sanasarian, Betteridge), the rapid process of modernization in Iran, and the increase in women's education, were coupled with changes in the personal status laws concerning women. In 1963 Iranian women were

granted suffrage rights, and in 1967 parliament enacted the Family Protection Law (amended in 1975), which (according to Guity Nashat) was passed "to ameliorate women's civil rights in marriage, polygamy, divorce, child custody, and employment" (Nashat 1983: 197). All of the scholars mentioned above have highlighted the rejection and condemnation by revolutionary ideologues of the gender role changes that were taking place in Iran. This is how women came to occupy a prominent place within the development of an anti-Shah discourse. As Afary observes, referring to the accord that developed among the various revolutionary groups with regards to women's role in society, "ultimately the convergence of these multiple discourses on the problematic of modernity in a nationalist coalition made the 1979 revolution possible – with hostility toward feminism forming one of the main pillars of the new alliance" (Afary 1996: 29). Most of the literature also notes how women's struggle for equality was often associated with the autocratic Pahlavi regime. This meant that the legal changes implemented in favor of women's rights, because these changes took place under the Pahlavi monarchy, were dismissed by various leftist organizations as "bourgeois" and "decadent," while modern Islamists, like Shariati, lewdly referred to them as merely "a liberation of bottoms."

Considering that every source available on women and the Iranian Revolution, regardless of theoretical perspective, has overwhelmingly focused on the writings of Ali Shariati, for the purpose of this article, too, it is necessary to make an analysis of Shariati's too often cited work, *Fatima is Fatima* (*Fatemeh Fatemeh Ast*), in order to illustrate how the discourse of cultural authenticity has hindered women's autonomous movements for emancipation. Originally delivered as a lecture in 1970-1971, during

Shariati's time at the Hosseiniyeh Ershad, *Fatima is Fatima* begins with Shariati's concern for women's traditional characteristics, which, he asserts, have "been taken away from her until she is made into a creature 'they want,' 'they build.'" While pointing out the need for, and lack of, women's agency in deciding for herself who she wants to be, Shariati immediately proceeds to construct what he feels should serve as a tool for women's emancipation. Shariati's contradictions and inconsistencies are just too many to ignore.

For Shariati, women's liberation is akin to a natural disaster. He refers to it as a "crisis," a "problem," a "fire," and a "flood" (Shariati, *Muslim Women: Part One*). He operates in a binary world, where the weak and susceptible Iranian woman becomes a weapon of infiltration that the West uses to pollute the East. Not only is Shariati critical of the West's influence on the minds of women, he is also critical of traditional religious teachings on women. These, he asserts, partly explain why women are so easily attracted by the "decadence of the West.". For Shariati, "this is why the task of introducing the Prophet's family, the task of the advertisement of religion and the study of the truths of Islam fall prone to the `failures of the old schools of religion'" (*Fatima is Fatima*). Shariati argues that once women have been exposed to the true teachings of Islam, and are told about the life of Fatima, they will no longer be lost *hich va puch* (null and void) creatures. Shariati, with his constant warnings against adultery, corruption, and promiscuity, often reads like a guy whose wife just left him. In fact, it is quite difficult to see beyond Shariati's crude comments, moralistic meanderings, and constant polemics.

In her study of Shariati, "Women and the Islamic Revolution,"Adele Ferdows (1983) highlights Shariati's shortcomings by noting that he is obsessed with the image of

the Western woman as both a "participant in and an object of exploitation by dominant male standards" (287). In describing the Western woman, Shariati charges that her economic independence has led to her shirking her "family obligations and standards of behavior." While Shariati lauds women such as Angela Davis and admonishes the Iranian media for not portraying the real image of women in the West, he also abhors the modern woman who "aspires toward the fulfillment of herself instead of her family" (*Fatima is Fatima*). As Ferdows notes, Shariati "blames the failure of Western family structure on the sexual freedom of women" (1983: 288). This is exactly the point where the ideology of Ali Shariati converges with the writings of traditional clerics, such as Ayatollah Mottahari. For Hamid Dabashi, "the affinity and continuity of Shariati's and Mottahari's ideas are self-evident" (1993: 157). Mottahari, like Shariati, "urged Iranians to seek solutions culturally compatible with their history" (Dabashi 1993: 207). This insistence on a culturally authentic return to Self, or *bazgasht*, is seen as an important tool in combating the ever-present West. That is why Shariati found it imperative to shape women's emancipation within the confines of a religious discourse. Like traditional clerics, Shariati also believed in the so-called inherent psychological and biological differences between men and women. For instance, while slandering the independent modern woman "who seeks pleasure," Shariati explains how "many of her deep feelings have been taken away from her. Her hereditary feelings, which are other than the intellectual, have been removed" (*Fatima is Fatima*).

With regard to women's rights, the discourse of cultural authenticity is deeply rooted in what Aziz al-Azmeh calls a "biological metaphor" (al-Azmeh 1993: 42). Although al-Azmeh deals explicitly with Islamist revivalism in the Arab world, and not

the Iranian Revolution, the project of Iran's revolutionary ideologues (as al-Azmeh notes) is not that far from the Islamist modernist projects of the Egyptians Muhammad Abduh and Qasim Amin (al-Azmeh 1993: 43). For al-Azmeh, central to the notion of cultural authenticity is a romantic notion of history, which "is consequently an essentialist discourse, much like the reverse it finds in Orientalism" (42). A good example of the monolithic and all-encompassing definition of Islam that Shariati was promoting is a sentence such as this: "I[I]t must be taken into consideration that all matters related to women, to science, to lifestyle, to class relationships, to scholastic understanding, to one's world view – all have been designed, described, and discussed in Islam" (Shariati, *Muslim Women: Part One*). A romantic notion of history is exactly what this Islamist intellectual, Ali Shariati, provides when he offers Fatima, daughter of the prophet Muhammad, who lived more than thirteen centuries ago, as the only way, as an untapped source of emulation, for modern Iranian women: a de-historicized and de-contextualized Fatima. Thus, the notion of cultural authenticity becomes a discourse of religio-political domination and legitimation. Reza Afshari speaks to this in a study of Islamic cultural relativism, and notes that "The hegemony of the dominant Islamist polity places women at the center of Islamist discourse" (Afshari 1994: 257). As many scholars continue to debate just how Islamic the Islamic Republic of Iran is (Zubaida, Cole, Akhavi), others, like Afshari, assert that women's dress and regulated public behavior are the only marks of distinction left. Afshari concludes that "women have become the *raison d'etre* of Islamism, the reluctant bestowers of its legitimacy" (257).

As Haideh Moghissi aptly points out in *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, the writings of ideologues "represent an attempt to re-assert Islamic values in a changing social atmosphere which inevitably involved the desegregation of women and their growing presence in public places" (1996: 63). In 1968, in *The Question of the Veil*, the influential revolutionary ideologue Ayatollah Mottahari asks (1968?: PAGE):

Where would a man be more productive, where he is studying in all male institutions or where he is sitting next to a girl whose skirt reveals her thighs? Which man can do more work, he who is constantly exposed to arousing and exciting faces of made-up women in the street, bazaar, office, or factory, or he who does not have to face such sights? [This should be kept single-spaced but indented on both left and right sides, with no additional indentation of the first line.]

According to Mottahari, merely by women not being present in society, men become hard-working geniuses! The crude references made to the adverse effect women's presence has on men areillustrative of the misogynistic statements made by revolutionary ideologues. Even the Islamic Republic's first president, Bani Sadr[or Bani-Sadr?], often referred to as secular, believed that a distracting and corrupting sheen emanates from women's hair, which hence should be covered. As Hammed Shahidian observes, "Mottahari was not the only Iranian Muslim ideologue who disparaged the Western notion of sexual equality" (2002: 89). As a discussion of Ali Shariati's Fatima is Fatima has shown, a lot of time, energy, and gray matter, was spent on not only peripheralizing women's voices, but also ensuring that "proper" male-defined boundaries were set for women's emancipation. In other words, any attempt to improve the status of women must coincide with their prescribed so-called natural roles as mothers and caregivers. This ideology has manifested itself in Article 21 of the current constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which states:

The government must ensure the rights of women in all respects, in conformity with Islamic criteria, and accomplish the following goals:

1. create a favorable environment for the growth of woman's personality and the restoration of her rights, both the material and intellectual;
2. the protection of mothers, particularly during pregnancy and childbearing, and the protection of children without guardians;
3. establishing competent courts to protect and preserve the family;
4. the provision of special insurance for widows, and aged women and women without support;
5. the awarding of guardianship of children to worthy mothers, in order to protect the interests of the children, in the absence of a legal guardian.

A glance at a timeline of the Islamic Republic's first year in power enables us to trace the systematic attack on women's rights, which occurred immediately after the "victory" of the revolution. Within a span of six months, all day-care centers were ordered shut down; mandatory veiling was imposed; the Family Protection Act, which had thwarted a man's unilateral right to divorce, was abolished; and all women working in the judicial profession were systematically fired. Other than the continuing enfranchisement of women, the Islamic Republic of Iran has effectively negated every single right that was struggled for under the Pahlavi regime. In fact, women's sexuality, marital and reproductive rights, employment, education, citizenship, mobility, and clothing have all come to be regulated by the Iranian state and its religio-governmental institutions.

The aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, the inception of the Islamic Republic and its immediate curtailing of women's rights and freedoms, has left a bittersweet taste in the mouth of women, whose equal participation in the revolution led to an unequal distribution of rights. As Janet Afary explains, in constructing a revolutionary discourse based predominantly on Islamic teachings, "Shariati ended with a narrow interpretation of the revolutionary movement, and thus, perhaps inadvertently paved the way for a new type of dictatorship, this time based on the notion of a revolutionary Islam" (Afary 1987: 281). Tracing how women, through their politicization, were utilized by Islamist intellectuals, the clerical class, and various leftist organizations in order to develop a

revolutionary, religio-nationalist, anti-imperial Islamic discourse, it is not difficult to understand why a revolution which was initially undertaken in a struggle for "freedom," "independence," and "equality," achieved none of these. According to the United Nations Special Commission on Human Rights, more than 113,000 people, in a twelve-month span in 1991-1992, had been arrested in Iran for "moral corruption" and "insufficient veiling" (*Iran Times*, September 4, 1992). Although more than a decade has gone by since this report, the 2000 report by the United Nations again points out the absurd number of people charged with such ludicrous "criminal" acts. After a quarter century of the Islamic Republic, Iranian women remain the reluctant biological, cultural, and symbolic reproducers of the nation, and the Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979 remains a stillborn revolution.

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SUSTAINABILITY: A 21ST. CENTURY PARADIGM SHIFT IN OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR SCIENTIFIC PURSUITS, QUALITY OF LIFE, AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN IRAN

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Iran's future, due to its historical, geopolitical and economic stature, is far more than ever intertwined with her neighbors in the region. The contributions of Iran's cultural heritage toward world civilization since antiquity can not be sufficiently stressed and acknowledged. However, it is Iran's possession of vast amounts of natural resources and its geopolitical position of bridging Asia to Europe and Africa that continues to draw hegemonic interest from the western countries and multinationals in particular. In lieu of a sound sustainable renewable energy policy, developed countries, which depend so heavily on the import of cheap oil from the Middle East for energy and, or precursors for industrial commodities, such strangulation of the oil rich regions will be more severe. Furthermore, unplanned urbanization and mass migration patterns, excessive population increases with 50% of the inhabitants less than 20 years of age, heavy dependence on the export of oil and gas as the major generator of capital, brain drain and the dependency on western technologies, information, and know-how, the role of government as the major proprietor of most economic activities, impediments in the establishment of home grown democracy and the empowerment of the rule of law, and the lack of appropriate integration of "old and new" from the perspectives of social, economic, political and architectural norms and priorities, has led the nation of Iran into a critical juncture in her long glorious history; unless proactively resolved soon, it may lead to the chaotic collapse of the systems and disintegration of the country, and possible interventions by outside entities.

Upon careful examination of the historical evolution of scientific research and discovery, and its impact and stature in the Central European and lately in the North American countries of the United States and Canada and also Japan, one can discern key qualitative and semi-quantitative indicators, that, when appropriately integrated into the unique cultural values and societal priorities of a developing country like Iran, can serve as guiding principles to further

facilitate its scientific and technological endeavors, and lead to the betterment of the quality of life for every citizen in the country. These empowered citizens reciprocally would proudly serve as the guardians, *i.e.*, vigilant watchdogs, or better said "Persian watch-cats" of the natural and human resources now and well in the future among the family of nations.

From a historical perspective, technology, which is the use of natural resources and materials for the benefit of mankind (or to its detriment at rare times), must have first manifested itself presumably in the artistic and aesthetic expressions preceding science or in the fundamental systematic method of studying and explaining the natural world. One might posit the sequence of natural observations of phenomena, followed by artistic expression, technology, and socio-political and economic exploitation based on technology to have preceded the ultimate stage of science, i.e., the understanding of how nature works. In retrospect, we might appreciate the justification behind the synergy in the "colleges of _arts_ and _sciences_" put together in today's universities as an indicator of their historical and natural interconnectedness. Upon critical probing of how certain countries were able to bring about economic development for their own constituencies while taking advantage of other nations hegemonically from the Renaissance to the contemporary era, one soon becomes cognizant of the similarity of this domination approach to that used by pre-historic man, except that the tools, breadth and depth of such socio-political and economic hegemony have dramatically advanced.

The task for developing countries such as Iran, therefore, is to pro-actively (read it "preemptively") devise a nationally driven strategic vision, a comprehensive set of plans, protocols and systems, and a set of outcome assessment key indicators to identify the country's peaceful needs and priorities, followed by the securing of indigenous human, financial and physical resources to meet the needs of the nation, thereby achieving more equitable partnerships with the more developed counties. The critical role of independent non-governmental organizations (hereafter referred to as NGOs) and professional discipline-based societies and institutions in devising, implementing and assessing the effectiveness of such a national agenda remains more meritorious than ever. Aspiring to become a truly multi-driven sustainable society must remain the top priority in Iran. Developing countries in general, but a rapidly transforming country such as Iran in particular, with its vast human potential, information, materials and (non-

) renewable resources should recognize the nation's needs in terms of quality of life for all its citizens. This will charge its vanguard scientific and manufacturing communities to concentrate on the country's prime national needs and hence, The drive toward improvements in health and preventive human care, education, food, housing and shelter that are protected from natural disasters (e.g., earthquake) yet are synergetic with traditional architecture, environment and natural resources conservation (including minerals, animals and plants, air, water and soil), renewable energy, civil safety, equitable society etc. Through population empowerment, security and communication-the hallmarks of a sustainable, stable and contended society- a high degree of self sufficiency and self-reliance will be achieved. There is an emerging consensus about global progressive thinkers that an independent democratically driven national agenda, which proactively positions its people to lead its management at all levels, would preclude the "preemptive" chance of external hegemonic intervention.

Moreover, after the collapse of the former Soviet Union's political system, due in part to its military competition and self-exhaustion, and with the increasing presence of the only worldwide superpower, it is extremely challenging, if not impossible or implausible, for any developing nation to utilize belligerence or intransigence, *that is*, military, ideological or covert means to overcome the superpower's self-driven economic or political agenda. It is not surprising that the underlying theme driving all "civilized" nations is economic competitiveness and trade. Hence, one succinctly concludes the generation, acquisition, expansion, extrapolation, integration and application of information as the main commodity pillar of sustainable economic development have now surpassed the industries of huge steam engine generators and gigantic marine ships of the nineteenth century, and the heavy industries and military and heavy industries such as mining, and milling of minerals like steel mills and the giant armored hardware and bridges of the twentieth century. The realities of economic globalization have in effect transformed the geopolitical boundaries, making them permeable to trade transactions, exchange of scientific outcomes and the infusion of inter-cultural values and personal aspirations. Internet and telecommunication have indeed revolutionized the ways and means by which we conduct business transactions, communicate, and generate, receive, truncate, analyze and disseminate information.

After a country like Iran, in consultation with its various constituencies and through a *FULL* participatory process, articulates what her priorities are, it is incumbent upon the scientific community to propose and carry out scientific research and development in support of realizing such policy-driven priorities. As recently as two decades ago, there was a distinction among what was classified as basic research, applied research, technology development and/or transfer; such artificial boundaries engraved in people's minds at one juncture have increasingly lent themselves to a multi-jurisdictional, permeable, flattened and transparent model of, at times, up to a dozen distinct disciplines which have a unified circle of commonalities to tackle. Most if not all present-day R&D endeavors are interdisciplinary, where one can hardly distinguish the line between basic research and applied research, and technology transfer. Every research grant application should not only define a research problem and a plan to tackle it with as much interdisciplinary effort as possible, but must also demonstrate its relevance to society and the outcome impacts on the individual taxpaying citizen's daily life. In other words, every single grant application not only has to demonstrate how such research will advance science and technology, but, more significantly, must exhibit its relevance to the daily welfare of each citizen in society and its ultimate economic impact. Fifteen years ago, this requirement was not necessarily institutionalized in the U.S., when more than 2/3 of the country's R&D budget was defense related. Now, if one were obliged to cite the most active areas of scientific endeavors in the developed countries, as typified by the U.S. today, health care, biotechnology and genetic engineering, novel materials and composites, environment, natural resources including renewable and non-renewable energy, sustainability, information and telecommunications, and space exploration would immediately come to mind. The U.S. government's annual budget allocation for Scientific R&D in developed counties is in the order of ~1.5%, due in part to the substantially more active role private and non-profit corporations play in terms of supporting research. In contrast, the developing countries, as typified by post-World War II Japan, have taken a much more aggressive and visionary approach with an initial phase of public funds investment above 3%, followed by a gradual decrease when the private sector, non-profit foundations and NGOs are willing to cover the discrepancy.

Scientific scholarly endeavors require not only a national agenda but also more importantly, a cadre of manifestly qualified native scientists and technologists and a fiscally

responsible system-based management team to bring it to fruition. This in turn requires training, developing and wisely utilizing human minds; it also necessitates providing a comfortable, peaceful and secure socio-economic and political ambience in which the citizens in general, but more significantly, scientific personnel can grow professionally and personally, prosper and be tangibly recognized as a middle [socio-economic] class; if not, the pace of brain drain and monetary capital transfer from the developing countries such as Iran to the North American and European developed countries will unfortunately accelerate in the coming decades as long as the opportunity exists. In fact, if one asks the authorities in Iran to identify the greatest national asset, they should proudly and responsibly single out the country's skilled and intellectual human resources as the primary national treasure and devise legitimate ways and means to retain these resources in the country.

Most professional scientific societies in the U.S., NGOs, academies, each devoted to the promotion of a specific scientific discipline, trace their origins back to the late nineteenth century. The national American Chemical Society (hereafter referred to as ACS) with a current membership of 160,000 and annual gross revenues of nearly 400 million dollars, was originally conceived 125 years ago. Having served as the Chair of the ACS in New York and as a candidate for its national directorship, this author is appreciably cognizant of how the ACS impacts on the advancement of chemical science and education, chemical professionals and chemical manufacturing enterprises, not only in the U.S., but worldwide. There are several hundred professional organizations similar to the ACS in the U.S., each devoted to the promotion of a specific scientific discipline with common goals, publishing nearly 20,000 periodicals; and the number of NGOs and non-profit foundations exceed tens of thousands. However, in fact, there are interdisciplinary coalitions established among such scientific organizations/academies and/or NGOs for certain common goals, spanning from influencing government priorities and policies on research and development, to securing grants from government and the private sector for their respective disciplines and, or constituencies. Under government mandates, there are national academies, namely the National Academy of Sciences, The National Academy of Engineering and the National Institute of Medicine, which set the government scientific agenda after continuous consultation with the professional scientific societies. Finally, one should mention the existence of science committees and subcommittees

set up at each of the three Federal branches of government that provide advice, counsel, and expertise, and draft, implement, interpret, and assess laws and policies. Nonetheless at first glance, one might hastily conclude that this is a rather redundant and convoluted infra-structure of various institutions which might indeed be partly true; yet having closely monitored and worked in the system, I dare say the system does work rather efficiently, since there are clear checks and balances and benchmarks as to the realm of the responsibilities of one organ in relation to the others. One point cannot be sufficiently stressed, namely, the vital importance of [inter-]independence in approach by these scientific organizations to avoid becoming too closely aligned with government policy and especially falling under the sway of political pressure. Otherwise, these organizations would tarnish their credibility and objectivity.

Although the developing countries can benefit immensely from emulating the infrastructure for the advancement of sciences or drawing upon a public domain internet information base, they should be cautious not to make the same technological errors committed by the developed countries in the past, *i.e.,* in terms of non-renewable resource exhaustion, pollution and adverse health effects and socio-economic inequities. Adapting an imported technological approach to their own unique cultural norms and societal needs is a pre-requisite toward achieving the necessary quality of life for all citizens. The exhaustion and deterioration of natural resources especially, water and air, should be avoided by initiating green and environmentally benign sciences and technologies in the country. In fact, the shortage of fresh water supplies in the 21st. Century will be one of the most intense sources of conflict among nations especially in the Middle East. Figuratively speaking, one does not have to "*reinvent the wheel"* from scratch *per se*, but rather learn from tested shortcomings in "developed" nations. This is where the notion of sustainable development will impact every single discipline in the sciences and society at-large for that matter. In a recent piece in the Chronicle of Higher Education, I wrote:

> **"***Recognizing the Earth's finite natural resources and its limited carrying capacity, we should appreciate that we are merely the guardians of such resources having borrowed them from our future generations, and not the sole proprietors having inherited them from our past ancestors. Therefore, we should*

perpetually refine and optimize practices, lifestyles, science and technologies and Yes, novel green chemistries that are environmentally benign by design-- that meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the abilities of the future generations to meet theirs. We humans are not the apex of the pyramid of life, but rather an integrated and interactive player of a horizontal web of life. This requires a multijurisdictional paradigm shift with a cross disciplinary approach that almost touches all the "E" curricula: Earth, Environment, Ecology, Education, Energy, Economics, E-Commerce, E-Communication, Ethics, Equity, aEsthetics, and Empowerment....This is the epitome of sustainable development and inter generational equity as a guiding principle in my life. (D.N. Rahni, excerpt from The Chronicle of Higher Ed. , Jan. 19, 2001)"

Iran: Background

Iran is the world's 17th largest country with a land area of 1,648,200 sq. km. and is located in South-West Asia. The current territorial integrity of Iran has not changed since the mid-19th century when after a series of treaties, the country lost several major provinces on both sides of the Caspian Sea to the Russian Tsars. Iran, or as it has been referred previously to as Persia for several millennia before its name was changed in 1935, extended from North India to West Africa 2500 years ago was superpower of the era. Cyrus the Great who wrote and implemented the First Declaration of Human Rights, and then Darius II of the Achaemenid Dynasty united immense number of diverse nations. Today Iran borders Turkmenistan, the Caspian Sea, Armenia and Azerbaijan in the north; in the east Iran meets Pakistan and Afghanistan and in the south the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman; in the west Turkey, Iraq and Kuwait share borders with Iran. One of the distinct characteristics of Iran is that because of its geography four climatic seasons may prevail simultaneously in different parts of the country. About one-eighth of the country is forested, mostly near the Caspian Sea, with oak, beech, poplar, linden, elm, sycamore, wild fruit trees (grapes, figs, meddler, pomegranate, dates, persimmons) , and a few broad-leafed evergreens. The abundant wildlife of the country includes wolves, foxes, leopards, lynx, gazelles, jackals, wild hogs, gazelles, deer, as well as mountain goats and sheep. There are two mountain ranges in Iran: the Alborz extending east-west along

the Caspian Sea with Mount Damavand at 18,735 ft. (5678 m.), and the Zagros spanning along the western side of the country.

lran's vast reserves of oil, gas and coal, located mostly in the southwestern part of the country near the Persian Gulf, were discovered a hundred years ago. The country's non-renewable oil and gas exports account for about 15 percent of the total world reserves and have been ranked fifth in the world. Iran also has one-seventh of the world's reserves of natural gas, and there are substantial reserves of coal and copper and other metal and mineral ores.

More than 65 percent of the country's population of 70 million live in the urban areas primarily developed in the past fifty years, with Tehran the capital- a mega metropolis of nearly 12 million inhabitants spanning a foothills area of roughly 7500 square Km. After the 1979 Revolution, the official Islamic government message called for large "Shiite" families, leading to the population doubling at a rate of 3.5 in less than 20 years. This trend has, however, slowed down to less than 1.5 by the reversal of government policy and sudden delay in marriage age by the youth due to unemployment and personal financial insecurity. The urban population mostly works in government, business and service sectors and industrial sites at the outskirts of Tehran. In fact, one could cite the government and government contractors as the biggest employer nationwide, encompassing over six million employees and if their primary families were included, a population of ~25 million is dependent on government or para-government employers. Although many Iranian cities, *e.g.*, Esphahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, Ahwaz, Hamedan, Kerman, Mash-had and Tehran had their origins hundreds of years ago, it is only in the past one hundred years, especially since the so-called, "White Revolution" four decades ago as implemented by the Shah and the sudden economic development of increasing oil revenues in the past fifty years, which has led to a dramatic influx of rural inhabitants to urban centers. With the "white revolution", the feudal system was somewhat eradicated or institutionalized to conform to modernity, complemented with land reform. The peasants bestowed with land, nevertheless, saw more incentives in the emerging cities. With education and health care centralized in urban areas especially Tehran, the farming families uprooted from cultivatable lands behind for urban life. This enhanced desertification and led to arid lands. It is well known that less than 10% of the 12 million inhabitants of Tehran can trace their ancestry in Tehran for more than three generations; 90% are descendents immigrants in the last hundred years.

Historically I would be remiss if I did not cite the evidence for historical cities in Iran that date back to 4th millennium B.C. in Burnt City (*share sookhteh*), and Jiroft City mounds in the southeastern Iran.

The agricultural sector accounts at best for about 20% of the gross domestic product (GDP), and employs ~25% of the work force in Iran (ICAST, 2004). If the industrialization trend continues without proper substitute planning for the agricultural sector, the country may face a critical era of agricultural shortages that would force the country into dependency on foreign help. Nearly half of Iran's topography is covered with high altitude mountains that were formed in the third geological era. Permanent and seasonal streams flowing away from these high elevations have deposited an abundance of minerals and fine particles in the lower valleys that are essential for plant growth. Most Iranian cities are located on the foothills of these high mountains and occupy a large portion of the rich arable land. Expansion of suburban districts and subsequent turning of the agricultural lands and fruit orchards into industrial and urban developments will cause irreversible consequences to the country's future sustenance. One major task, as observed in a traditional urban metropolis like Esphahan, is to wisely integrate the old historical part of the city with the modern expansion of utilities and infrastructure. Although Iranian city planners, comprised mostly of government educated bureaucrats and technocrats are cognizant of such integrations in European cities *e.g.,* Florence and Madrid, by and large they have not been capable of implementing a long term master plan to sustain synergism in the ever expanding cities. Nepotism, cronyism, lack of transparency and accountability, and extortion are accepted norms for sustenance in daily life. For several decades now, there has remained an on-going discussion of offering decentralizing services and employment opportunities to small towns and rural areas so as to slow down the migration patterns; this has, however, remained rhetorical and in the discussion stage. With the influx of nearly three million refugees from Afghanistan into the Iranian cities, especially Mash-had and Tehran, the unplanned urbanization and the deterioration of essential services has only been exacerbated. One should add though that well over one million of such refugees have voluntarily repatriated back to Afghanistan since the collapse of the Taliban in 2002. There are still over one million Afghani refugees in Iran who mostly provide unskilled labor in urban and industrial centers, or have been naturalized in Iran.

Additionally, Iran hosted hundreds of thousand of Kurds and Shiites from Iraq with open arms and with no assistance from international aid agencies and western countries.

Iran has the largest gross national product (GNP) of over $450 billion in the Middle East, but its estimated GNP per capita is below average for the region due to lower productivity of the manufacturing factors. Exports for instance, from Iran were estimated at 24 billion $US, and imports were valued at 18.5 billion $US in 2001-2002; with a sudden oil price rise in 2004, it is estimated that Iran will have an unexpected revenue of 35 billion $US.   The government can not, however, diffuse such vast revenues into the economy as massive inflation, which officially stands at nearly 20%, will be the expected outcome. The country's major export items are Petroleum, natural gas and petrochemical products (85% of total export), mineral products, food products, carpets, pistachio nuts, caviar, skin and leather, handicrafts, fresh and dried and fresh fruits, iron and steel, chemicals, textiles, and refined copper. Mining and manufacturing account for almost one-sixth of the GNP and employ about one-eighth of the labor force. Major import items are road vehicles and machinery, base metals, chemical products, iron, steel and metal finish manufactures, animal and vegetable fats, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, food and live animals, plastics, tobacco, and technical services. There is an untapped economic and trade exchange potential with the Caspian Sea countries, with many in the region recognizing the historical and cultural commonality with their southern neighbor, Iran.

It is ironic that the newly elected "conservative" legislative branch member of the parliament and the Guardian and Expediency Councils that have endeavored to rescind Article 43 and 44 of the Constitution, thereby paving the way for privatization and possible joint partnership with foreign corporations and nationals. Although this, if properly implemented, will generate capital and economic development, the nation must be careful to avoid a dramatic deterioration of the social safety net (education, health care, environment, etc.) as long as such economic opportunities are not equitably shared with every citizen; also, increasing partnership with foreign capital investment and know-how should be balanced with national interest.

Iran in the past decade has adopted a development strategy of decentralization with the three main objectives of controlling the expansion of Tehran, redistributing various government and private activity functions to major regional cities, and promoting the growth of smaller cities

in rural areas which would include an acceptable level of services. How these tasks can appropriately be implemented, however, remains to be seen since there exists a per capita disparity in resource distributions between Tehran on the one hand, and the other greater metropolises of Esfahan, Shiraz, Mash-had, Tabriz, Kerman, Ahvaz, Hamedon, and Rasht, each comprised of at least one million inhabitants. Such disparity is even more disproportionate and inequitable for the rest of the nation.

Rapid Urbanization in Iran in the 20th century

Urbanization in Iran, as in many developing countries has occurred at a rapid pace, particularly since 1956, when the first national census was conducted. In a forty–year period from 1956 to 1996, the population has more than tripled. In about fifteen years since revolution of 1979 to 1996, the population has almost doubled to the current 70 million with an annual growth rate of less than 2%. According to table I the number of urban clusters changed from 496 in the 1986-1987 Census to 614 in the 1996-1997 Census; the number presumably will stand at nearly 700 by 2005. Consequently, the urban population, currently at 70%, is projected to increase in the same proportion. To sum it up, Iran, especially its main mega-cities such as Tehran, will be facing an immense number of urban related impediments so long as there is no comprehensive set of accountable plans, implementation and assessment to prevent it; these include air and water pollution, municipal services, health care and education, and transportation to name a few.

Table I: POPULATION IN CITIES, BY SIZE CLASS OF CITY

Size class	1986-87 Census		1996-97 Census	
	Number of cities	Total population (1000)	Number of cities	Total population (1000)
Total	496	26845	614	36818
250000 persons and more	16	14222	23	20147
100000- 249999 persons	25	3757	36	5133
50000-99999 persons	46	3155	60	4260
25000-49999 persons	67	2320	94	3310
10000-24999 persons	145	2300	166	2578
5000-9999 persons	113	833	150	1105
Less than 5000 persons	84	258	83	286

Source: PBO (1996).

The future of urban growth in Iran, if it is to stabilize to about 80% of the country's entire population, will lead to 120 cities with a population of 100,000 or more, while seven mega-cities, each with a population exceeding one million, with Tehran on top at ~20 millions by the year 2020. Unless the government, through a sustained and transparent policy of long and medium term planning and implementation, endeavors to decentralize resources while providing education, training and employment opportunities across the country, the future will be bleak. Ironically, the government advocacy of large families in the 80's has now generated a very young and demanding population (more than 50% of the population is less than 20 years of age), thereby requiring the government to create an almost impossible amount of 30 million jobs in the next decade. Again, with the current

unemployment and under-employment standing at 50%, this is an insurmountable task for any government. It is worth reiterating that if the country as whole is socio-politically stable wherein every citizen is empowered with democratic rights and the rule of law, the country could devise sustainable and futuristic technologies and services that will make the country less dependent on the short-sided export of non-renewable resources. In summary, Iran, especially its main mega-cities such as Tehran, will be facing immense number of urban related impediments so long as there is no comprehensive set of responsible plans, implementations and assessments to prevent it; these include air and water pollution, municipal services, health care, employment, education and transportation to name a few.

Recommendations

The author would like to avail himself of the opportunity to make a series of recommendations, in relation to the mission, vision and function of a model scientific society, an NGO, the scientists, technologists and technocrats in IRAN in the context of (urban) development. A progressive scientific society or an NGO in Iran should:

1. Remain focused on its vision and mission in the context of the national agenda, its individual and corporate member interests, the broader public's quality of life objectives and the safeguarding of national resources and heritage.

2. Remain independent of the government's official line or partisan manifesto, that is, to serve as a non-governmental organization, recognizing that as an independent intellectual society, it does and should, in fact, interact efficiently and cordially with the government's scientific and technical organs, attempt to influence them and provide counsel and education to the government staff in shaping, carrying out and assessing the national scientific agenda.

3. Initiate and sustain transparent bilateral, multilateral, trans-lateral and inter-lateral exchanges of scientific information, education and expertise with sister societies not only inside the country, but, more importantly, with sister societies in other developing and developed countries.

4. Makes its annual budget a combination of non-binding government grants, private sector sponsorship, donations from endowments, and proceeds from their own reserves, product sale revenues (including a consultancy database of its members), membership fees, journal subscriptions and meeting registrations.

5. Pro-actively project and ensure the balance of human power and the needs of society for a specific discipline or line of scholarly pursuit.

6. Help build and sustain transparent communications, and coalitions and inter-network with other sister scientific societies to coordinate the realization of a collective agenda while avoiding redundant efforts.

7. Strive to perpetually assess its practices, priorities and policies so as to avoid its mission becoming obsolete in its mission and satisfying the anticipation of its constituencies at any juncture.

8. Devise in concert with other internal sister institutions fluid and smooth processes by which national priority shifts will be accommodated without detriment to the entire scientific infrastructure.

9. Instill a positive sense of proprietorship and/or guardianship of the scientific discipline among its members and a climate of camaraderie, thereby facilitating the fulfillment of financial, material and spiritual expectations of its members.

10. Articulate and promote the measurable role its discipline plays in regard to the advancement of quality of life of the public at-large.

11. Aspire to articulate the balance among basic and applied research, and development and technology transfer in terms of securing fiscal and human resource needs and in the context of the national agenda.

12. Facilitate the mutually beneficial and remunerated legitimate exchange of scientific information between such vast intellectual resources outside the country on one hand, and their peers inside the country.

13. Accept their utmost responsibilities in relation to the society at-large and its citizens to safeguard comprehensive welfare and aspirations of the human resources in the nation, as well as the conservation of its natural and intellectual resources.

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POLITICS IN WEBLOGS: A SAFE SPACE FOR PROTEST

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Nowadays, there is a widely accepted belief that the Iranian community is in a process of great change. But it is not clear in which direction this transformation is taking the country. The purpose of this article is to consider the culture of the Iranian Youth from the beginnings of this decade. We intend to examine political Persian Weblogs using the method of content analysis and, through this examination, to analyze the opinions related to the political at the three levels of population, systems, and politics.

Introduction

In contemporary Iran, an understanding of the future direction of the community is highly important. Today, the Iranian community is on the way of another volano-like eruption. But there are large differences of opinion concerning the nature of this change, its strengthr, and its goals. In this article, we will consider the most important part of the Iranian community, the youth, and do our best to examine their views of politics on the three levels of elite, the political structure, and the regime. This research explores the political culture through analyzing the content of Persian Weblogs. We try to show that the political culture of the Iranian youth is highly emotional and that subjects related to public politics are highly controversial.

Content analysis can help us recognize the characteristics of writers as well as analyze the general position of a culture during a given time or the collective opinions of people on the public sphere. The data sample studied in this research is the Persianblog community (http://www.persianblog.com) which includes more than 1020 political Weblogs (as of September 2004). To reduce this population to a manageable number, we used 40 sample intervals.

Political Culture

"Political culture" refers to people's beliefs about special aspects of public culture that relateto their behaviors vis à vis the government. Political cultures have three different aspects: citizen attitudes toward the political system itself; citizen attitudes toward becoming involved in the system (level/kind of participation); and policy expectations of citizens. These are labeled the system culture, process culture, and policy culture of the country (Ghavam 1998: 70).

The system level concerns citizen and leader views of the values and organizations that hold the system together. The process level is concerned with individuals' propensity to become involved in the process. Finally, the policy level has to do with what policies citizens and leaders expect from the government.

From the standpoint of the government and political legitimacy, Almond and Powell divide political cultures into categories of agreement and dispute (Almond, Powell, and Mont 1998: 76):

- Consensual Political Culture (agreement): in political agreement culture, the people usually have the same ideas about the appropriate methods for political decisions and the main issues of the community and their resolution.
- Conflictual Political Culture (dispute): in political contestation culture, the people do not have the same ideas about government legitimacy and the resolution of the major problems. Almond et al. believe that when there are major disputes on acceptable political methods and values, political subcultures will emerge.

What is a Weblog?

The development of the Internet has had a considerable effect on life and human knowledge. One of the newer communications phenomena that has emerged within the internet in recent years is the Weblog. A weblog, web log, or simply a blog, is a web application which contains periodic posts on a common web page. These posts are often,

but not necessarily, in reverse chronological order. Such a website would typically be accessible to any Internet user (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog).

In another description, a Weblog, or blog, is a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged so that the most recent post appears first. Typically, weblogs are published by individuals and their style is personal and informal. Since anybody with an Internet connection can publish their own weblog, there is great variety in the quality, content, and ambition of weblogs, and a Weblog may have anywhere from a handful to tens of thousands of daily readers (Jensen and Are 2004).

David Weiner has summarized the main character of a Weblog as follows: 1) It is personal: one person writes it; it is not prepared by an organization so that it has a special character. 2) It is on the Internet: It is not printed anywhere and we can update it at very low cost. For reading it, having one browser is enough. 3) It is published; the special writings are prepared automatically and will be available for all persons. 4) It is part of an association: It relates to some persons who have a common interest in the Internet and gather to use it (Weiner, summarized in Derakhshan DATE?).Due to the above-mentioned characteristics, a Weblog is a web site which contains the reports of the Weblogger about his ideas and knowledge or others' interesting web sites. In general, Weblogs are divided into two groups: 1) Explanation Weblogs, and 2) Information Weblogs. The first group includes persons who write about their personal ideas, feelings, daily events, and knowledge. The second group includes more news, sites, and links.

In comparing Weblogs with web sites, we can say that Weblogs are a kind of personal web sites which are updated daily or weekly and contain continuous material about an issue or other sites. Weblogs have been seen as personal journalism. The Internet has made it possible that all communities can, like journalists, produce news and information and easily publish them. In this new form, all distribution and dissemination of contents is carried out without monitoring. For this reason, most of the perspectives expressed in weblogs are unofficial and often radical. In this sense, Weblogs are a figurative or metaphorical space in which a person can publish his or her ideas in the form of personal

notes on the Internet network, without showing his or her real identity, without anxiety or worry, and people all over the world can immediately see these ideas.

Persian Weblog:

The term "weblog" was coined by Jorn Barger in December 1997, spread, and became popularized with the arrival of the first hosted weblog tools during 1999 (The first Persian weblog, a Weblog published in Farsi and used Farsi font ,was published by Salaman Jariri on 7 September 2001; but only after Hossein Derakhshan published instructions on ” “How to Make a Blog in Persian” on 5 October 2001, did it become popular among the youth in Iran (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_blogs). Nowadays, there are at least 65,000 active weblogs out of an estimated total of 200,000 (*http://www.blogcensus.net*), making Persians the fourth-largest language community of Weblogs in the world after English, Portuguese, and Polish Weblogs. (Compare this with 7,000 Persian websites.) On the other hand, when we look for materials using the addresses of websites, we find that 50% of Persian-language content on the internet is provided by the Weblogs. The important issue to note is that it is mostly the youth who write these Weblogs. Illustrating the predominance of youth in using the Internet, the following table shows the distribution of Weblogs (Lavasani 4/2/82).

Age	No. of Weblogs	Percent
10-12	555	1,3
13-19	2120	51,5
20-29	1630	39,6
30-39	241	5,8
40-49	417	1,0
50-59	185	0,4
60-69	139	0,3
Total	4120	

The table above shows that the youth between 13 and 30 years old own more than 91% of Weblogs. The statistics are the same for Persian Weblogs. This is plausible for two

reasons. First, the Iranian youth constitute more than 70% of the population. . Also, the younger generation are more familiar with the Internet and computers and have more desire to express themselves. In addition to age, the gender distribution of Weblog writers is also important. 76% percent of Weblog autohors are written men and 24 percent are women. The considerable development of Internet use in Iran and the youth interest in Weblogs has led to the establishment of several different internet sites for Weblog creation in less than two years. For example, we can point to Persianblog, blognama, blogsky, blogger, and Persian log. In this research, we use the Persianblog (www.persianblog.com) server as the community for our statistical study. The distribution of the Weblog topics that are listed in this server shows that "Political" is among the top weblog categories, in terms of number.

Research training	1051	News	178
Literature	1268	Afghanistan	25
Internet	372	Medical	154
Business	363	Sport	27
Art	1014	Writing	801
Political	1027	Cinema	467
Nature	93	Music	320
Personal	795	Religious	532
Computer/Technology	1477	Public	3830
Philosophy	581	Entertainment	670
Journalism	269	Life	1645

 One has to note that establishing Weblogs does not guarantee their continued activity: some Weblogs are not updated regularly, while others are abandoned after a few posts. It seems that inactive political Weblogs are more common than the average for all Weblogs. An examination of statistics for 2002 found that only 65 percent of Weblogs are "active" (meaning that they have been updated at least once in the most recent 8 weeks). The date of 16 percent of Weblogs has passed (i.e., they were not updated in the most recent 8 weeks). Eight percent of Weblogs are experimental: the writer was experimenting with

these Weblogs. Four percent of Weblogs have ended by default: this means that the writer has no reason to continue to write the Weblog. Three percent of Weblogs have not been recognized. Another study indicates that %66 of Weblogs have not been updated during the last two months. Meanwhile, %26.4 of these Weblogs are active for one day only: we can only see texts and materials that refer to that day. Thus, in doing research about personal Weblogs, we are faced with different kinds of Weblogs (http://sargardou.net).

Politics in Weblogs

Books such as *Three Years in Iran* from Gobino, *A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West* from Graham Fold, and the works of Iranian researchers like Hedayat, Bazargan, Jamalzadeh, and Moradi show that hypocrisy is an obvious characteristic of the Iranian community. Yet an individual person, when detached from that collective shows himself as he is or thinks. In doing content analysis of a Weblog, the researcher can get to know the person. For that reason, the resulting information and data exhibit a high degree of credibility.

In the last two sections, we introduced two main concepts: political culture and Weblog. One of the most important functions of the Weblog phenomenon is as a secure space for expressing ideas. Traditional methods such as interviews for studying the political culture are not usable, especially in a country like Iran; Weblogs, however, provide us with an appropriate situation for study aimed at understanding their writers' opinions regarding the three levels of political figures, everyday politics, and the political system. As one Iranian scholar writes:

"One of the best ways to study the socio-cultural ramifications of the Internet in Iran is through Weblogs, which became very popular after the Unicode system made typing in Persian possible. Weblogs, especially among middle-class youth, have become a key site for Iranians to participate in the new virtual world and, at the same time, rediscover their own selves and desires while constructing new relations and communities often not possible in real spaces" (Amir-Ebrahimi 2004). From the 1027 Weblogs that have been

listed as political Weblogs, we selected a random sample with intervals of 40 weblogs within the political weblog list.

Persian political Weblogs are divided into two main groups: news Weblogs and analysis Weblogs. In news Weblogs, there is a dissemination of everyday political news, and reports on political figures, political parties, and events. In analysis Weblogs, the current politics, news, and events are analyzed and the writer expresses his or her opinions and views.

The establishment of some Weblogs is associated with events in a community. For that reason, when that event is past and forgotten, the Weblogs will be inactive in less than a month. This issue will be considered in the conclusion.

Iranian Politicians in As Reflected in Persian Political Weblogs

92% of Weblogs being considered are against the government system, . In the remaining 8% of Weblogs, Iranian political figures, especially the government leaders, are vehemently supported by the authors. In the list of Weblogs critical of the government system, the names of Mr. Khamenei, Mr. Rafsanjani, Mr. Janati, Mr. Hashemi-Shahroudi, Mr. Yazdi, Mr. Asgaroladi, Mr. Bahonar, Mr. Larijani, Mr. Saeed Imami, Mr. Falahiyan, and Mr. Naghdi have the highest frequency of occurrence in the order cited.

These government figures have been all equally described as non-Iranian, robbers, evil, and so on; however, in pro-government Weblogs which can be considered pro-leader (or Vellayat Faqih) , only the leader is the subject of support. . Among the pro-government webslogs, . In these Weblogs there was little support for other political figures. .Most weblogs are emotional and lack substantive analysis. Therefore, the political culture, with regards to the political elite is essentially contentious and emotional.

Political Culture At The Level Of Public Policies

Some Weblogs are written and published in special situations. For example, concerning the event of 18 Tir (the student uprising in July 1999) and its anniversaries, many Weblogs were published within the public sphere of the Web community, but became

inactive as quickly as they were written. On 18 of Tir 1382 (Persian Calendar, July 10, 2003), the Weblog of *democra30* (read democracy) stated "The anniversary 18 of Tir is near and the Iranian people are waiting for the students." But there were no postings on this Weblog on 20 Tir 1382 (July 12, 2003) or thereafter.

A close examination of the selected Weblogs shows that government's policies are usually met with negative reactiona and sometimes apathy. For example, the joint protocol with the European Union[what?] and its signature by the Iranian government[s?] are almost completely neglected, being discussed in only one of the Weblogs. The author of that weblog claims that the joint protocol policy of the Iranian government is flawed. In some cases, the policies adopted by the government are met with stronger negative reactions -- in particular, when the issue of collective identity of Iranians is at stake. Many weblogs repeat the claim that the current system is an expression of the Arab culture, not the Iranian culture. Most revert back to the pre-Islamic Persian culture as the real Iranian culture. . One weblog states: "We live in a period of time when if we do not have money, we will not be given medical assistance in our own country. The Arabs (Palestinians) can come to treat their injuries at our hospitals for free."(See http://sermisk.persianblog.com/).

Another issue that is discussed is the inability of the Iranian government to preserve the national interests of Iran. "Iranian policies against the division of the Caspian Sea by neighboring countries caused a reduction of 50 percent in the share of Iran in Caspian resources. Now, the Iran's share is at 12 percent of total resources, which demonstrates the incompetence of the authorities and shows that they are only thinking about their own benefits". Even in pro-government Weblogs the government's policies are recognized as causing poverty and corruption.

"I want to complain! What's going on in the country? What is the situation? The government is going downhill; the authorities only think about their political advantage. There is corruption and unemployment all over the country. Why, contrary to Imam Khomeini's teaching, has our government given up the employment creationsystem? At

the beginning of the Iranian new year, the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran requested that the authorities work for the people, There is no other action that can give people hope in their lives."

The Government System/Regime From The Viewpoint Of Persian Political Weblogs

From the standpoint of anti-government weblogs, the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran is presented as savage, on the verge of ruin and "Arab". From the standpoint of pro-government weblogs it is portrayed as ideal, purposeful and Islamic…The following offer illustrations of these viewpoints:

 "The system of the Islamic Republic of Iran is savage -- killers in the hands of Mafia power (Bahman Azad). "The system of the Islamic Republic of Iran is against the national governments of the historical Aryan land of Iran" (Faryad Khak). "The system of the Islamic Republic of Iran has defeated 70 million Iranian people. AAA means freedom. This system is reactionary and based on autocratic leadership" (Forghan). "We are all doing our best to overthrow the rough, decaying, and tottering Islamic Republic of Iran" (Enghelabi). "The corruption of the regime of Iran is immense. It keeps people hungry and illiterate. This regime is treasonous and inefficient" (sermisk). On the other hand, some Weblogs assess the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran positively. "The Islamic Republic of Iran is Islamic and just. This regime is based on the Koran, Islam, and religious leaders" (Ya saral Hussein).

Our examination has shown that 90 percent of Weblogs believe that the regime is unacceptable, and only 10 percent of these Weblogs support the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Conclusion

Methods such as interviews and questionnaires to assess the political culture of the Iranian people are inadequate. People do not express their real opinions through such channels Hence, it is important and even vital to use new methods to gain insight into the political consciousness of Iranian youth. Weblogs are useful tools, since they provide anonymity and yet offer good exposure for authors opinions. For this reason, we see Weblogs as the most appropriate sphere in which to study the political views of the Iranian youth.

In this research, we found that more than 70% of Persian political Weblogs are inactive, about 20% are active, and about 10% have technical problems that make them unusable. The average statistics of all Weblogs shows that about 66% of Weblogs are active, indicating that the political sphere is considered a very sensitive area of expression, and one that is associated more with particular events and situations rather than everyday events portrayed iin other weblogs. . For example, on the anniversary of 18 of Tir, many Weblogs were published and immediately forgotten one month later.

In summary, we can say that the political culture of the Iranian youth between 2001 and 2004 is characterized by rebellion and contention. More than 90 percent of Weblogs are against the government system and criticize it. About 10 percent of them support the regime (more particularly, the leader of the system). Falling into these two groups, the views of youth regarding population, politics, and the government system are highly charged and polarized, with substantive analysis giving way to emotional expression.

The polarized structure of the Iranian political culture reflects the Ahoora-Ahriman duality of good and evil. Yet because the political culture is highly polarized it is also more prone to change.

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