

IRAN HUMAN RIGHTS REVIEW: YOUTH

Edited by Tahirih Danesh and Roya Kashefi
Preface by Barbara Lochbihler MEP



About the Iran Human Rights Review

The Foreign Policy Centre (FPC) is delighted to publish the first in what we hope will be a developing series of Iran Human Rights Reviews that will bring together the thinking of established and emerging analysts, activists, academics and politicians around the world to examine the many human rights challenges in Iran and put forward positive recommendations for policymakers and other interested stakeholders.

Tahirih Danesh, FPC Senior Research Associate, leads the project with support from FPC Policy Director Adam Hug who oversees work on human rights and the Middle East within the centre's staff team.

The long-term development of the Iran Human Rights Review will be reliant on the FPC attaining funding to develop this work, currently conducted on a voluntary basis. If you would like to help support the work of the Iran Human Rights Review or any other projects within the Foreign Policy Centre's Democracy, Governance and Human Rights Programme please contact Adam Hug on adam.hug@fpc.org.uk or +44 (0) 2077297566. For wider information about the FPC please visit our website www.fpc.org.uk or email events@fpc.org.uk.

Acknowledgement

All views expressed are those of their authors alone and may not represent the views of the Foreign Policy Centre or the Iran Human Rights Review's editors.

The editors would like to convey their gratitude to the authors who have thoughtfully and generously contributed to this issue. As well, they wish to thank the body of volunteers who have assisted with various important tasks such as translation and technical aspects of this publication's electronic and print formats.

Contents

Preface Barbara Lochbihler MEP	4
Introduction and policy recommendations Tahirih Danesh & Roya Kashefi	5
A Review of key causes of poor performance of the Iranian economy Mehr Emadi	8
Assumed political responsibility of the 'youth of Iran' Hossein Ladjevardi	17
A discriminatory educational discourse Saeed Paivandi	20
Substance abuse among Iranian youth Anonymous	23
A brief on Christian Iranian youth Open Doors Advocacy UK	27
Marginalisation of the Kurdish youth Anonymous	28
The plight of Balochi youth Nasser Boladai	30
Young women in Iran: the tale of the ordinary Azadeh Pourzand	34
Tragedy of young lives lost Neda	37
Judicial processes involving young offenders Mohammad Mostafaei	41
The many puzzles thrown at Iranian society, includes sexuality, in its many definitions since 1979 Saghi Ghahraman	44
Our only nightclub for performing is our website Bronwen Robertson	48
Music, young women & human rights Somi Arian	52
The politics of writing and young authors after the rise of the Green Movement Azadeh Davachi	54
Observing human rights - the lost link of sports in Iran Arash Adibzadeh	57

A look at 'modern spirituality' and the youth in Iran Ali Shirazi	59
Appendix: Recent Reports and References on Human rights in Iran	61
About the authors	62

Preface

Barbara Lochbihler MEP

During my presidency of the Iran Delegation in the European Parliament, and more recently as Chair of its Subcommittee on Human Rights, I have worked extensively on Iran – together with exiled Iranians and refugees as much as with Ambassadors and other Iranian officials. Not surprisingly, it has proved much easier to discuss environmental issues or the vital role of Iran in the Middle East, than tackling the nuclear portfolio or the country's ever-more dire human rights situation. Still, I have tried to keep the dialogue with Iran as alive and broad as possible, on all relevant topics. Indeed, open and mutually honest negotiations are the only way forward; isolation won't help anyone, least of all the numerous Iranians struggling for a better future, political reforms, the rule of law and the fulfilment of their human rights.

In all areas of concern, young women and men have played a central role. More than anyone else, the youth has a direct interest in taking the future in its own hands and, if needed, in shouldering the often-heavy burden of trying to fundamentally transform society. This is not only true for countries such as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt or Syria – where thousands of mainly adolescent citizens have brought about what came to be known as the Arab Spring – but also for Iran, where a great number of young women and men have regularly taken to the streets since the controversial 2009 elections, risking their lives in a struggle for fair elections, freedom of thought and expression, equality and political participation.

Unfortunately, and despite all these efforts, the situation for young Iranians continues to be anything but hopeful – especially for those who have decided not to silently resign to their fate, but to struggle for change. Perhaps out of fear that the wave having agitated several Arab countries might also shake Iran, the government recently announced to pursue the creation of what they called “halal” Internet: a censored and entirely controlled web structure whose negative consequences would mainly hit younger generations. Also, the economic situation has worsened considerably, and unemployment among young professionals is at its peak. Repressive measures against women, the LGBTI community, artists and members of religious minorities further deteriorate the youth's outlook, and have resulted in such a tense feeling of fear and hopelessness that the number of teenagers and young adults preferring to leave their country and join the Iranian diaspora has been growing. This is particularly alarming since, in Iran as much as in other countries, change should primarily come from within.

Of course, the outside world can – through political or economic support, or via different means of pressure if needed – play an influential role in a given reform process. Officially, the recently adopted EU oil embargo against Iran is supposed to do exactly that: increase external pressure, in order to have the country's officials accept further negotiations in the nuclear dossier. Personally, however, I have serious doubts regarding the success of this decision. Sanctions should always be targeted, in order to hit those responsible for the difficult economic and political situation, not the population at large. An embargo against the most important economic sector in Iran, by contrast, will most definitely bring further hardship to the Iranian people. It might even shut the door for negotiations, and strengthen the government, by giving Tehran the opportunity to use the sanctions as an excuse for its own shortcomings.

Safeguarding an open debate and mutual respect should be prioritised, even if external pressure – if it is well designed – might help bring about transformation. Still, the main impulse must come from inside the country. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we, Iranians or not, continue to name the existing difficulties and discuss possible alternatives, including in those areas most relevant to the youth of Iran: education, gender and trans-gender issues, sports and arts, political freedom, economics and unemployment, inadequate protection laws, as well as the marginalisation of ethnic and religious minorities. The present publication contributes to this endeavour: not to demonise Iran and its people, neither to give up hope that change is possible, but to make the latter an option within reach.

Introduction and policy recommendations

Tahirih Danesh and Roya Kashefi

One of the most common features of contemporary history is the power and role of young people who often lead movements aimed at changing society. In the case of Iran it is no different. The 1979 revolution was the direct result of revolutionary ideals and actions of Iranian youth, in particular those studying at universities and schools. The 2009 post-election uprising was also led by many Iranian youth.

According to Iran's 2006 national consensus, 27% of Iran's population fall between the ages of 15 and 29, the parameters set by the United Nations to define youth. The increase in the proportion of youth to the rest of Iran's population came after the high number of births during the 1980s. Iranian authorities, cognizant of this phenomenon and hoping to maintain their status quo, instituted a number of bodies designed to harness the potential of this segment of the population. On the one hand are the Islamic Republic Guards Corps, the Baseej and their subsidiaries as part of the militant arm of the administration. On the other are the High Council of Youth and the National Ministry of Youth and Sports as well as ideologically cleansed universities resulting from the 1981 Cultural Revolution led by the then head and founder of the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council and the current Spiritual Leader, Seyed Ali Khamenei. In the words of the father of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, the Islamic Republic is "not afraid of economic sanctions or military intervention" but they are "afraid of Western universities and the training of [Iranian] youth."¹

While the government maintains a strong position regarding its influence on Iran's youth and the apparatus and machinery of the Islamic Republic may have influenced the mindset and lifestyle of some of its youth, some reports² indicate that a large number of Iran's youth, although maintaining a strong sense of nationalism, are in fact enamoured with Western liberal ideals including freedom of expression and press, equality regardless of gender, religion, race, language, respect for rights of sexual minorities, equitable access to higher education, sports freedom for both genders, employment rights and social welfare for all regardless of ethnic or religious background.

Accordingly, one of the main challenges for foreign policy makers and Iran revolves around understanding the thoughts and aspirations of Iranian youth. However, while the West maintains a clear strategy towards nuclear negotiations with Iran, it remains entirely unclear towards Iran's greatest asset – the Iranian youth – who have steadily maintained their position over the past three decades, as potential key agents of change.

It is in this light that the current issue of Iran Human Rights Review is focused on Iranian youth. It is hoped that the views expressed in this issue of the Review will assist policy makers with their strategies and plans regarding Iran, with greater focus on the role Iranian youth play within and outside the borders of Iran. Young people are of utmost importance to the stability of both Iran and the region, for lack of access to basic human rights coupled with the Islamic Republic's emphasis on 'cultural engineering' based on the state's application of Islamist ideals provide conditions propitious to a culture of sectarianism and violence among them that can potentially be a dangerous addition to Iran's nuclear activities.

With the current state-sponsored changes in curricula and quotas in Iranian universities and colleges, the prevalent culture of espionage through the tangible presence of the intelligence and military forces – either

¹ 18 April 1980 Friday prayers sermon by Ayatollah Khomeini

² For example The political impact of Iran's youth and the future of the Iranian Democracy published on March 16, 2010, Major J. Prokopowicz, United States Army; Visiting Research Fellow, Pax Americana Institute. <http://www.paxamerica.org/2010/03/16/political-impact-of-irans-youth-and-the-future-of-the-iranian-democracy/> and Youth subcultures in post-revolution Iran by Mahmood Shahabi, published in Global Youth? Hybrid identities, plural worlds by Pam Nilan and Carles Feixa, Routledge, 2006 <http://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ZewAxSZvt98C&oi=fnd&pg=PA111&dq=Iran+youth+western+ideals&ots=5uCu5fatU-&sig=Z-Zd-J5GngKgWFKuvzNM0gb-KWo#v=onepage&q=Iran%20youth%20western%20ideals&f=false>

as students or among the academics – and discriminatory admission policies based on religion³ or gender⁴, the quality of education available to Iranian youth is far from ideal. Iranian youth face insurmountable barriers to training and education, especially at higher levels, due to policies enforced through the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, Ministry of Intelligence and Iranian paramilitary apparatuses banning or limiting academic freedom based on ideology, ethnicity, gender or religious affiliation. Consequently, more and more Iranians find it difficult to access higher education and exercise academic freedom. Under such circumstances critical thinkers who are able to employ their creativity in various fields related to sustainable development of Iran are unable to develop and progress.

Consequently, Iran is the world leader in brain drain. More than a quarter of Iran's university graduates are among those who leave the country each year. There are a number of factors contributing to this phenomenon. In addition to the quest for postgraduate studies at international universities and proportionally high rate of graduate unemployment, two other factors that stem from domestic codes are the cleansing and Islamification of educational institutions during the 1980 Cultural Revolution as well as a noticeable rate of imprisonment, torture and executions of youth since the earliest days of the Revolutionary courts.

While some of the best-trained Iranian graduates shine and flourish with the freedom to think and express their views once outside Iran's borders others, due to the increasingly difficult and limited access to information and education when in the country, now find it difficult to function productively in the West either academically or professionally. One main reason for this struggle is the lack of freedom in access to education and information in Iran. Another reason is the promotion of some of the less constructive social values imbedded in entertainment aimed at Iranian youth. A close look at both satellite and other types of television programming, in light of the domestic challenges imposed by the Islamic Republic on Iran's young citizens, shows that even the most popular programs are void of any educational value and are instead focused on pure entertainment, much of which encourages a culture of anti-intellectualism, social complacency, sexism and violence.

The articles in this issue of the IHRR examine a wide range of challenges affecting the youth in Iran today. Combining experiences, statistics and insights, each reflect realities faced by grassroots level Iranians. We have endeavoured to include information from the heart of Iranian communities and cities. It is in this light that due to security reasons four pieces are authored anonymously or under pseudonyms. Other contributors are former prisoners, victims of domestic abuse and human rights activists who are known for their long-standing dedication to the struggle for human rights in Iran. Almost all point to the fact that the best path to policies on Iran must revolve around human rights laws, standards and education at this juncture in Iran's history.

As the new generation of Iranian youth move into adulthood, they face a new series of obstacles unknown to their predecessors who enjoyed some degree of social mobility. Consequently, the current culture of economic, social, gender, religious and ethnic inequality, coupled with moral bankruptcy manifesting itself in rampant nepotism, corruption, elitism, exclusion and violence is shaping the emergence of an oligarchy, composed of political and economic elite who are either directly or indirectly involved with the State and the promotion of its agenda, both inside and outside Iranian borders. Their legitimacy and means are purely based on their allegiance to key figures within the current government, and their power lies in their material means amassed through Iran's tyrannical system and channelled outside its borders. Today, it is essential for policymakers to empower all youth and possibly engage those young Iranians who may be caught in the emerging oligarchy in a discourse based on universal human rights, social cohesion and the rule of law. This may be the surest foundation for reassurance of this group of young Iranians to realize that there is a place

³ For a closer look at the case of the Baha'i minority, the primary target in this regard since 1979, please see: <http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/education/>

⁴ In an interview with activist Zeinab Peighambarzadeh in March 2012, the history, current trends and government quotas and bans on female university applicants is explained at: <http://www.edu-right.net/talk/39-talk/881-zeinampeighambarzade-interview>

for them in Iran's future, should they choose to become agents of positive social and political change.

In a country as diverse as Iran, the emergence of any power structure will have to be representative of Iran's diverse population and committed to the promotion and protection of their equal rights and the complementarity of rights and responsibilities. It must necessarily draw upon and further develop the learnings and achievements of Iranian youth thus far and accommodate a human rights-centred discourse in order to empower Iran as it too transitions towards sustainable development goals and remove all obstacles on the path to democracy and the rule of law.

Iranian youth and the future Iran stand in need of a system that combines the legacy and virtue of Iranian history and identity and applies it to the needs of Iran of today. Focused on maintaining Iran's diverse ethnic and religious youthful communities, foreign policy makers can include the following considerations in drafting and implementing policies regarding Iran:

- Maintain emphasis on basic human rights as enunciated in the International Bill of Rights⁵ which Iran is a signatory to in all negotiations
- Provide for safe and speedy collaboration on basic rights of youth, such as access to safe food and water, basic education, and housing and medical and professional expertise in combating addiction.
- Facilitate participation of Iranian youth in distance-learning education and training aimed at improving Iran's socioeconomic development
- Facilitate safe access to the worldwide web and the internet⁶
- Provide support and opportunities for Iranian activists among diaspora to engage in training and delivery of infotainment and edutainment of Iranian youth
- Provide for speedy translation and digital access to latest articles and books on academic research, particularly in fields such as law, human rights, nonviolence, women's studies, religion and rights and the social sciences
- Encourage a culture among Iranian youth to understand the vital and complementary role of legislation and education with regards to the universal rights of women and the right to personal belief through broadcast programming
- Continue engagement with Iranian state officials in protecting Iranian youth, emphasizing the right to life and due process of law to decrease the number of executions
- Iran's participation in global processes focused on social cohesion and protection of its minorities must be included as a prerequisite in international negotiations
- Explore efficient ways and means of implementation regarding the essential role of human rights in codes, instruments and institutions responsible for youth affairs with Iranian authorities

⁵ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with its two Optional Protocols and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

⁶ For suggestions on how this can be achieved please see [IHRR: Access to information](#)

A Review of Key Causes of Poor Performance of the Iranian Economy

Mehr Emadi

The persistent underperformance of the economy in Iran should be seen in the context of the quality of economic governance. I suggest that the spread of rent-seeking activities and corruption has been so endemic that it has distorted efficient resource allocation at every level and has permeated the machinery of government. Corruption and rent-seeking behaviour are not just private misconducts which affect only those involved in transactions and contracts. The true costs are born by the whole society – the youth in particular. Efficient firms are displaced by inefficient companies involved in illicit transactions and investment in new industries and creation of new jobs lose their attraction.

Background

The evolution of the Iranian economy since 1988, the year war with Iraq ended, shows that the economy has been underperforming relative to the neighbouring countries and the potential growth rate of the Iran. This has occurred despite the existence of a young and well-educated population that has had the highest participation rate in higher education in the region, and Iran's status as a country that is exceptionally well-endowed with natural resources. A comparison of the performance of the Iranian economy with other similar economies enables us to evaluate performance of the Iranian economy. This article will compare the Iranian economy with other economies in the region, including some of the neighbouring countries who enjoy similar endowments in oil and gas. In addition, it will compare Iran with Turkey and the Republic of Korea (South Korea), which are comparatively resource poor in terms of natural resources.

As the first step in this exploration of the changes in the Iranian economy, a quick examination of the changes in the income (Gross Domestic Product Per Capita) enables us to see the economic performance of six economies from the region plus South Korea. The choice of countries was determined by their similarity in income levels in the early 1970s and the relative share of agriculture, manufacturing and services (S. Korea and Turkey) or their energy resources which are similar to those in Iran (Kuwait and Saudi Arabia). Jordan was included as the lower-case bench mark as a resource poor regional economy.

Table One below shows the changes in income per capita of these countries for the period 1971 to 2010 when the economy of Iran entered its most fundamental shift toward formation of business and trade oligarchies linked to the Revolutionary Guard (RG). For the period 2006 to 2010, I will use more disaggregated data to show the changes in the Iranian economy associated with the expansion of RG businesses and the continuous displacement of private sector firms in government projects by the RG businesses.

Figures on the top line represent the income per capita for each country and those on the line below show the ranking of the economy in terms of their income per capita in the world economy. To demonstrate, in 1971 Turkey has the 56th highest income per capita with Iran and Korea in 58th and 78th positions.

Country	1971	1974	1979	1989	1991	1998	2006	2010
Iran GDP per Capita	426	1353	2259	1656	1652	1615	3404	4400

⁷ UNdata 2011 and Trend News 2011. For 2010 statistics- IMF 2011 World Economic Outlook Database *Per Capital GDP at Current Prices*. [online] (10 March) Available at: <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=SNAAMA&f=grID%3A101%3BcurrID%3AUSD%3BpcFlag%3A1>

World Ranking	58	48	50	71	73	96	104	91
South Korea	308	569	1795	5551	7278	7814	19926	20756
World Ranking	78	77	60	43	42	44	27	33
Turkey	620	1249	2731	2613	3557	4181	7365	10309
World Ranking	56	58	53	76	64	72	82	58
Jordan	372	495	1440	1330	1218	1699	2547	4326
World Ranking	60	68	63	86	92	95	120	94
Kuwait	4878	13731	19024	11442	5259	13199	36550	37099
World Ranking	2	3	3	9	29	39	33	21
Saudi Arabia	1134	6531	12341	6072	7834	7393	14766	14353
World Ranking	36	14	11	17	40	40	45	53

In 1971, prior to the first major oil price shock associated with the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Iran, Korea, Turkey and Jordan had similar income per capita figures in the range of \$300-500 (S. Korea \$302, Turkey \$471). At the time all six economies in the Table were categorized as agriculture-based in the pre-industrial phase of development. During the period 1974-1979, both S. Korea and Iran had adopted similar rapid industrialization programmes focused on the energy-intensive expansion of heavy industries and car and component manufacturing.

During the period 1975-77, Turkey chose to adopt a more open trade policy and provided generous incentives for foreign direct investment in selected sectors in the economy. By 1979 all the economies in the table had entered the category of middle income countries. By 1979, the S. Korean economy enjoyed the highest rate of growth in industrial output with Iran showing the second highest rate.

In 1979/80, the Iranian economy experienced two negative shocks caused by the disruptive effects of the Revolution in February 1979 and then shortly afterwards by the war caused by Iraq's invasion of Iran in 1980.

During the period 1991-94, with support of President Rafsanjani, the Revolutionary Guard entered the economy as a business force in a wide range of economic activities from civil engineering projects to commerce and foreign trade. It is during this period that the RG discovered the ease with which it could use its military and security position to expand its market share. During 1991-1998, Iran experienced one of the least satisfying economic performances. Despite new discoveries of natural gas in the Persian Gulf and new oil fields in the Caspian rim and South Western provinces, the growing role of the RG businesses led to the exit of a number of western energy firms who had started more than 12 joint investment projects.

While in 1991 Iran's income per capita gave it a ranking of 73rd, by 1998 Iran had fallen in rank to 96th. By 2006, during the presidency of Mr Ahmadinejad, Iran had fallen further to have an income per capita ranking of 104th, while S. Korea was in 27th position and Turkey was in 82nd position. Iran's decline occurred despite historically unprecedented high oil prices and additional income from new gas fields in the Persian Gulf.

For 2010 for Iran, we use the statistics provided by the Head of Iran's National Statistics Centre, Mr Adel Azar, who announced that the income per capita figure for Iran was \$4400⁸. The International Monetary Fund, using the data provided by Iran's Ministry of Economy, reports the figure for Iran for 2010 as \$5449, which places Iran in the ranking order of 84th, below Namibia (83), Gabon (64), Lebanon (60), Oman (36) and Bahrain (34).⁹ (IMF 2011)

In 2010, Iran - despite being one of the richest 15 economies in natural resources - has produced an income per capita that places it in 91st position. It is now 58 places below S. Korea and 33 places below Turkey. This change in ranking order shows the extent of an unparalleled poor performance for the economy of any oil/gas rich country in modern times. Using the statistics provided on the key macroeconomic indicators (IMF 2011 World Economic Outlook Database) show that compare with the average improvement for the five countries in the Table, Iran had become poorer by 42% relative to the other countries. Iran's income per capita for 2010, with the second richest gas fields and fourth largest oil reserves in the World is only \$74 (or 1.7 per cent) above that of Jordan which has no oil or gas income.

A closer examination of the natural resources of Iran, compared with those of Turkey and S. Korea, makes it easier for us to appreciate Iran's chronic inept economic governance and the failure to convert Iran's natural resources into economic wealth and higher income. We should be reminded that Iran "is one of the most important mineral producers in the world, ranked among 15 major mineral rich countries, holding some 68 types of minerals, 37 billion tonnes of proven reserves and more than 57 billion tonnes of potential reservoirs"¹⁰.

Table Two¹¹: Relative Resource Endowments and Territory (Numbers in brackets show the world ranking of the country based on the value of that variable)				
	Area(km ²)	% Agricultural	Population	Natural Resources
South Korea	99,828 (109)	30% (one half)	48.4 (37.5)	Coal, Tungsten, Graphite, Iron Ore (34) Lead
Turkey	783,563 (37)	35% (one fifth)	73.7 (43.1)	Antimony, Coal, Chromium, Mercury, Copper (26), Iron Ore (19), Boron (1), Uranium, Barite,

⁸ Trend News (2011) *Income per Capita of Iran is \$4400*. [online] (14 November) Available at: <http://fa.trend.az/regions/iran/1956519.html>

⁹ IMF (2011), Report for Selected Countries and Subjects, (September), The International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database 2011, *World Economic Outlook Database*. IMF Washington, D.C. 20431.

¹⁰ Country Mine (2011) ICD Research-Mining in Iran (Individual Reports). [online] (11 September) Available at: <http://www.infomine.com/countries/iran.asp>

¹¹ World Bank 2011a; numbers in brackets are populations in 1979. World Bank (2011a) *Google Public Data Explorer: World Bank – World Development Indicators* [online] (2 November). Available at: http://www.google.co.uk/publicdata/explore?ds=d5bncppjof8f9_&met_y=sp_pop_totl&idim=country:IRN&dl=en&hl=en&q=population+of+iran#cty_pe=l&strail=false&bcs=d&nسلم=h&met_y=sp_pop_totl&scale_v=lin&ind_v=false&rdim=country&ifdim=country&hl=en&dl=en

				Magnesite
Iran	1,648,195 (18)	30% (one third)	73.9 (37.2)	Petroleum (4), Natural Gas (2), Iron Ore (10), Uranium, Zinc (1), Sulphur, Aluminium
Percentages under Agriculture represent the fraction of land mass that can be used in agriculture with the figures in brackets showing the percentage that is irrigated. The numbers in the population column provide the 2010 data and in brackets the 1979 data for each country.				

As can be seen, in 1979 Iran and S. Korea had almost identical populations with Iran enjoying a territory that was more than sixteen times larger than that of S. Korea, and more than twice the size of Turkey. However, it is the natural resources and mining industries of Iran that place it in the league table of the richest five nations in energy in the world and the top fifteen countries in terms of minerals. Looking back at the time trajectory of income per capita changes for the period 1971-2010, we can now grasp the lost opportunity for economic growth compared with two economies of S. Korea and Turkey. Both countries have fewer resources than Iran, and yet both have outperformed Iran. The changes in S. Korea, in particular, makes Iran look like a backward economy in comparison. I suggest it has been the economic governance of Iran that has caused this poor performance.

Effects of mass entry of the Revolutionary Guard Businesses on the economy

There has been growing evidence that the decline in the productivity of the economy was associated with, if not directly caused by, the entry of Revolutionary Guard businesses and the development of Revolutionary Guard Business Oligarchies (RGO). In this section we identify the main effects and where possible, specific examples of these effects are given.

The entry of the RG into business activities as a business entity was a new territory for the rank and file of the security and military apparatus. In early 1990, there was a duality of purpose and identity for RG businesses. On the one hand, there was the profound sense of the force seeing itself a natural ally of the poor and those marginalized in the pre-Revolution era, on the other hand there were emerging elements among some of the well-connected commanders who seemed to be aware of the immense opportunities for the RG to use their political and military power to generate income and accumulate wealth. This did not necessarily - at least at the earlier stages - imply personal wealth, though some appear to have benefitted at an individual level.

A number of problems were encountered in the process of establishing new businesses by the RG. Like any new business, access to capital was a problem. While the RG had many assets, most of these had limited use in business applications. In early 1990, the RG and the Basij, the paramilitary organization that was closely linked to the RG, set up two financial entities. These were immediately given state funding to start providing for the needs of future retirees of the two forces. In addition, both of these financial branches were quickly given licence to operate as banks.

One of the above entities that started, Mehr Financial Credit (MFC)¹², became the main bidder in some of the key illicit transfer of state-owned enterprises to the RG and has acquired more than twelve billion dollars worth of government assets under the 'Privatization' programme four years ago. The RGO later acquired

¹² Please see: <http://iranbriefing.net/?p=2765>
<http://www.aei.org/outlook/foreign-and-defense-policy/regional/middle-east-and-north-africa/the-revolutionary-guards-looting-of-irans-economy/>
and <http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,4604020,00.html>

more banks and investment businesses often at knock-down prices. The net outcome of these acquisitions has been a decline in the productivity of companies and firms whose management was forced to adjust to the objectives of the RGO or leave. In November 2009, the head of Iran's Privatization Organization, Mr Heydari-Kord Zanganeh, reported that since 2005, the new government has sold more than half of the state-owned firms worth 63 billion dollars. The disinvestment has cut the government's share in the gross domestic product (GDP) from 80 per cent to between 40 and 45 per cent. It was also reported that several state banks have offered a fraction of their stake as part of the program. Iran also plans to transfer its three large insurance companies — Dana, Alborz and Asia — to the private sector¹³. It is interesting that, in all-important cases, the RGO have been the buyers of the assets. The most notable example was also the largest in terms of value on the stock market. In one of the most controversial cases of managed-privatization, fifty one per cent of shares of the Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI) were sold to an Iranian consortium for \$8 billion. All companies in the consortium were RGO-linked¹⁴.

The RGO also needed to gain a competitive edge vis-à-vis their private sector competitors who had more experience in running businesses and managing trade links with other countries. Here, the solution was to establish private routes and infrastructures for importing goods without paying their import duties. In a brief period, the RGO constructed more than 80 unloading docks and a number of private airports which were completely outside the reach of Iran's Customs and Import Duties Office¹⁵.

The effects of this state-approved smuggling were felt mostly by private sector firms, which have experienced a sharp fall in their profit margins and sales. There have also been reports that this trade network has been used by some elements inside the RG for trade in narcotics and alcohol. The most publicized case was the discovery of 29,000 kilograms of pure opium in Tehran Airport in February 2011. Jaam-e- Jam Newspaper, published inside Iran, reported that the financial arrangements for the import was organised through an Iranian bank. In a bold statement, Mr Hossein Abadi, the Head of Iran's Anti Narcotic Agency, reported that such a discovery has been without precedent in Iran¹⁶. The German media reported leaked information about the concerns of the United States and the Azerbaijani anti-narcotic agencies about the possible involvement of the RG in the smuggling and distribution of heroin in Europe and Central Caucasia¹⁷.

The foreign media's coverage of these issues has gained new momentum since the discovery of the opium haul in Tehran. Nevertheless, instead of taking a strong stance in tracing the network behind the find and trying to establish the identity of those involved, the poor follow up has only fed the worst interpretations about the identity of those involved. However, it has tarnished the image of the RG which until a few years ago still received credit for the contribution made during the war with Iraq and investment made in reconstruction during in the post-war period despite constant questions about RG involvement in the persecution of the opposition groups.

As it has been the case in other countries, illicit trade has brought with it money laundering, bribery and other rent-seeking activities. International metrics measuring corruption, financial transparency and business efficiency depict a worrying picture of the economy and the business community in Iran. In October 2011, at the IMF's meeting in Turkey, the U.S. Treasury Secretary expressed his concerns about the extent to which Iran is involved in laundering illegally-obtained money. At the same time, the German media reported

¹³ Press TV (2009) "Iran privatizes \$63bn of state assets" [online] (29 November) Available at:

<http://previous.presstv.com/detail.aspx?id=112444§ionid=351020102>

¹⁴ BBC Persian Service (2009) "Revolutionary Guards Purchased \$8 billion worth of Shares in Iran's Telecommunications" [online] Available at:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/business/2009/09/090927_ka_stockexchange_irantelecom.shtml

¹⁵ Deutsche Welle World (2011b) "80 Illegal Unloading Docks" [online] (5 July) Available at: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,6564896,00.html>

¹⁶ Deutsche Welle World (2011a) "Discovery of 29 Tons of Opium in Airport and Possible role of Security Forces in the Manufacturing of Heroine" [online] (3 March) Available at: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,6458080,00.html>

¹⁷ Tomlinson, H. (2011) "Revolutionary Guard 'running Iran drug trade'" *The Australian* [online] (18 November) Available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/revolutionary-guard-running-iran-drug-trade/story-e6frg6so-1226198241719>

that Iran was the second most attractive country for money-laundering activities¹⁸. In fact, the extent of the money-laundering activities of Iran have been so widespread and far-reaching that, in the last four years, a number of blue chip international banks have been caught accommodating Iranian money-laundering activities, almost all of which were linked to the RGOB¹⁹. Credit Suisse, Lloyds TSB and Barclays volunteered fines in excess of one billion dollars to the U.S. authorities for their involvement in the money-laundering activities of Iran in its foreign trade. Globalisation means that corruption in one country does not stay within the borders of that country and the contagion of the phenomenon spreads quickly in today's integrated world system.

A close study of the changes in the ranking of Iran in terms of transparency, corruption and banking fraud reveals the extent to which Iran's economy has been pushed toward illegal and counter-productive methods of business. These have taken the place of productive activities and wealth generation with dire consequences for employment, investment and income.

Table Three:²⁰ Ranking Based on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index

	2004	2006	2008	2010
Iran	87	105	141	146
Turkey	77	60	58	56
South Korea	47	42	40	39
China	71	70	72	78
Russia	90	121	147	154
Venezuela	114	137	158	164
India	90	70	85	87

This Table demonstrates those countries which have had a significant deterioration in their transparency positions. It is believed that corrupt economies gravitate toward each other. In order to seek bribes, a culture of bribery needs to exist on the opposite side to complete the transaction. Indeed, the data for 2008 shows that the countries in which businesses were most willing to pay bribes were Russia, China, Mexico, India and Italy. Iran's trade with all these countries has been on the rise, with China enjoying the biggest increase. It also follows that corruption needs secrecy. It is easier to avoid transparency and publicity in countries where democratic institutions, especially a free press, are non-existent or under pressure. The relative positions of Iran's main trade partners in 2010 are provided below.

Table 4: Exports to partners (2010)

	Percentage
China	16.2%,
India	12.6%,
Japan	9.9%,
Turkey	6.8%,
S. Korea	5.7%,
Italy	5.3%

¹⁸ Deutsche Welle World (2009) "Iran is the second appropriate country for money laundering" [online] (5 October) Available at: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4758749,00.html>

¹⁹ Gatti, C. and Eligon, J. (2009) "Iranian Dealings Lead to a Fine for Credit Suisse," [online] (15 December). Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/16/business/16bank.html>

²⁰ Transparency International (2004) *Corruption Perception Index 2004* [online] Available at: http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2004 - Transparency International (2006) *Corruption Perception Index 2006* [online] Available at: http://www.transparency.org/news_room/in_focus/2006/cpi_2006/cpi_table - Transparency International (2008) *Corruption Perception Index 2008* [online] Available at: http://www.transparency.org/news_room/in_focus/2008/cpi2008/cpi_2008_table - Transparency International (2010) *Corruption Perception Index 2010* [online] Available at: http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/results

Table 5: Imports from partners (2010) ²¹	Percentage
China	17.4%,
UAE	16.7%,
Germany	7.6%,
South Korea	6.3%,
Russia	5.7%,
Turkey	4.8%,
Italy	4.2%

It should be noted that half of the UAE exports to Iran are re-routed trade from Chinese sources. This raises the share of imports from China to more than 25%. This proportion of imports has been reported to be part of the RG-approved smuggled imports.

A number of observations can be made concerning the rise in corruption in Iran and the change in direction of trade with other countries which themselves have poor scores on the corruption index. First, when the share of trade of China, Russia, Venezuela and India with Iran have been added together, these countries constitute more than 50% of Iran's foreign trade. It is revealing that the countries which have seen the biggest rise in their trade with Iran, China, Venezuela, Russia and India all have a discouraging index of corruption perception.

Compared with its Arab neighbours in the region, Iran stands out as the most corrupt economy. In 2006, UAE was 31st, Qatar 32nd, Bahrain 36, Oman 39, Kuwait 46, and Egypt and Saudi Arabia 70th in the ranking based on the Corruption Perception Index. This perhaps is most discouraging since it suggests that Iran has become institutionally and culturally immersed in corruption. Businesses there function and survive on that basis. It follows further that in such an environment, the economy gravitates toward quick return / high profit activities, typically illegal, where the windfalls leave the country and seek a safe haven abroad. This dynamic has been common to almost all governments in which business oligarchs have benefited from their connections with the ruling elite.

The alarming growth of corruption in Iran provoked some members of the parliament to draft a bill that eventually passed in early 2007. Drawing on two clauses in the constitution, the bill required the Command of the RG, cabinet ministers, members of the Council of Expediency, the Guardian Council and those connected to the Supreme Leader, as well as the Supreme Leader himself and his family to provide information about their assets and sources of their wealth. Interestingly in 2007, in an abrupt move, the Guardian Council issued a ruling that declared any investigation into the assets and financial connections of all senior members of the regime and their families to be against the religious decree as well as contradicting the spirit of the constitution²².

The impact of the official rejection of the investigation into the finances of government officials has been an unprecedented rush into new foreign trade contracts, the development of energy fields, the construction of dams, tunnels and other large projects. This is being undertaken by the RGBO, at times on behalf of the government. The few cases which have leaked into the public domain show that the RGBO have had no intention of doing the work themselves, but after agreeing a pay back, have transferred the contract to third parties. Equally worrying, as well as damaging to private sector, has been the decision of the present government to award contracts to the RGBO without public competitive bidding.

²¹ Bezorgmehr, N. and Dyer, G. (2010) "China overtakes EU as Iran's top trade partner," *Financial Times* [online] (8 February). Available at: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f220dfac-14d4-11df-8f1d-00144feab49a.html#axzz1e6exMfpl> [Accessed on 18 November 2011].

²² BBC Persian Service (2007) "Guardian Council rejected the bill passed by Parliament on financial scrutiny of officials" [online] (17 July). Available at: <http://newsforums.bbc.co.uk/ws/en/thread.jspa?forumID=3539&sortBy=2>

In July 2011, the Managing Director of Iran’s National Oil Company confirmed that the value of contracts awarded directly to the RGBO had reached 25 billion dollars²³. It should not surprise us that the biggest growth in corrupt behaviour seems to have occurred in the period 2006-2010. In April 2010, the true extent of the financial corruption associated with the entry of the RGBO into banking caused shockwaves in the banking system with a number of banks facing an alarming shortage of capital. This was the result of the fact that Oligarchs had been given billions of dollars in loans and credits but were refusing to repay their debt. Mr Torabi, a member of the investigation panel examining the troubled Bank-e-Saderat, confirmed that some of the Boards of so-called private banks have government-appointed directors who have authorised billions of dollars in loans for themselves without any collateral. These funds have now been transferred abroad, leaving the banks cash-poor and seriously exposed to bankruptcy²⁴.

The resources taken out of the economy in such a fraudulent manner have deprived Iranians of credit they could have used to set up new businesses, and of investment that existing private sector firms could have used to expand their activities and catch up with their foreign competitors thus creating new jobs in the economy. The business environment has become most difficult for private firms which are not connected to the corruption network. The table below shows a host of international indices measuring the quality of governance in the economy.

	Ease of doing business	Getting credit	Protecting Investors	Paying taxes	Ease of import/export
Iran	144	98	166	128	138
Turkey	71	78	65	79	80
South Korea	8	8	79	38	4
UAE	33	78	122	7	5
Bahrain	38	126	79	18	49
Saudi Arabia	12	48	17	10	18
Qatar	36	98	97	2	57
China	91	67	97	122	60
Russia	122	98	111	105	160
India	132	40	46	147	109

A quick glance at the data in Table Four sheds light on the special features of economic governance in Iran. First, when compared with all the countries in the Table, Iran has the most difficult system for doing business. As for access to credit for businesses, in spite of a boom in oil and gas revenues, it is easier and cheaper to get credit in India, China and Turkey. As for protecting investors in terms of property rights,

²³ BBC Persian Service (2011) “National Oil Company: Contracts of Revolutionary Guards equal \$25 billion,” [online] (31 July). Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2011/07/110731_ka_oil_khatam_ghalebani.shtml

²⁴ Iranian News Agency (2011) “Billions Stolen through Banks,” [online] (29 April). Available at: <http://ajancirankhabar.com/index.php/news/khabar/iran/1822-2011-05-18-05-57-35>

²⁵ World Bank (2011b) *Report on Economy Ranking* (June) Washington: The World Bank. International Financial Corporation, World Bank Group, The World Bank, Doing Business, Measuring Business Regulation, 1818 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20433 USA.

information transparency about companies and disputes, Iranian investor receive the lowest level of support. Lastly, for ease of paying business tax and participating in foreign trade, Iran is the second worst.

Concluding Remarks

The growing rent-seeking activities in the economy have had profound implications for the economy in general and for the youths of the country in particular. In the last twenty five years, the economy has shown a disturbing underperformance associated with the displacement of competitive private sector firms and fairly competent state-owned enterprises with foundation-owned companies which in one form or another have had links with the Revolutionary Guards and other security entities. These firms have tended to be more interested and involved in distributive activities and import of foreign goods than investing in production and manufacturing where the level of expertise needed for successful growth is much higher. At macroeconomic level this has resulted in underinvestment in productive activities where growth and expansion lead to the creation of new jobs. It is in fact the expansion and growth phase of production that provides the greatest employment opportunity for the young people out of school or university education. This is because the firm's management is already in place and the technical know-how has acquired the necessary experience to run the production line. The new jobs created result from the organic growth of the firm and often if not almost in all cases are the most suited for young employees when on-job training and induction can be provided during the productive activities of the firm. This type of employment tends to be more stable than those in the distributive and import sectors where hiring and firing is easier for the firms. Also since the level of skills, acquired prior or post hiring is much lower in quality, wages paid to young people tend to be lower and their progress more restricted.

In almost all rent-seeking activities, transparency is also very poor and those who progress in the hierarchy of the firm tend to be individuals with better political connections. Again these conditions created an insider-outsider situation under which those without connections have little hope of finding jobs.

The worrying disappearance of manufacturing jobs as well as very low creation of new jobs for which the youths have to compete with the experienced unemployed draws truly a bleak picture of what the future holds for the talented and often educated youths of the country. At this point, the youth of Iran should be laying the foundation for the future of the economy by being employed in those sectors of the economy which can sustain long term growth once the oil production declines to such a level that export earning become negligible or certainly insufficient to pay for the huge import bill the economy has become dependent on for the last forty years or so.

Without creating economically viable jobs that can develop and use the productive capacity of the human capital of the country, Iranian economy is bound to fall further behind compared with both oil-rich economies of OPEC and those like Turkey and South Korea who thirty years ago had similar economic performance and income to those of Iran. This decline in the performance of the economy can further exacerbate the growing unemployment among the under 35 years old and the rapid decline in their share of the national income. This is both socially unfair and economically unsustainable.

Assumed Political Responsibility of the 'Youth of Iran'

Hossein Ladjevardi

1979 and the beginning of an Islamic Revolution was a starting point for remarkable changes in Iran, which in the truest sense of a 'revolution' changed and turned Iran's cultural, social, economic and political life upside down.

The most fundamental and significant of these changes was the population structure and population policies misguided by ill-advised religious philosophy that Iran must create an army for Islam for its successful expansion and infiltration.

An assessment of the rate of population growth and numbers indicate that in 1891 Iran's population was 7,645,000 with an increase of only around 0.6% annually until 1926 reaching over ten million.²⁶ The beginning of sharp increase in the population numbers dates back to eighty-five years ago with an almost three fold increase in the rate of growth to 1.5%. This was unprecedented and with an estimated growth rate of 3.1% by 1956 (1335) and Iran's first official national census, the population was recorded at 18,954,000.

This increase in population numbers and the consequent necessary planning requirements for primary services provision meant that the pre-revolution government accepted a United Nations population control project devised for Iran which was implemented. On behalf of the Statistical Centre of Iran I was in charge of the nationwide execution of the necessary field work for the implementation of this project in Iran and through much dedicated work by relevant authorities the growth trend was successfully reversed and reduced to 2.7%.

With the onset of the Revolution and the rule of Islamic ideology, as introduced by Ayatollah Khomeini, population control/contraception was deemed immoral or gravely contrary to the Sharia law. The onslaught of war and Islamic expansionism goals meant that the 2.7% achieved with much hard work was increased to 3.9% in a space of ten years.²⁷ This was one of the many erroneous policies introduced and applied by the revolutionary government. The growth of the population rate was a source of pride for the revolutionary government and then Prime Minister, Mir Hossein Mousavi, boasted on national television that Iran had achieved one of the fastest growing population rates in the world.

As a result, lack of planning and foresight confronted the regime with its own inadequacies and the population with social and economic hardship. They were forced to rethink their population policy and not govern under the misapprehension that 'God will provide'. Nevertheless, the dramatic change in the population structure had taken place. Iran now has a young population that can be one of its strongest assets in shaping and bringing about change yet repeatedly the question of 'Iran's youths' is used and abused.

This generation of 'youth' has developed its own identity. It is alert and aware of world progress and keeps informed through advances of communication technology. Attempts to indoctrinate and shape them into an army of Muslim soldiers have failed. Their needs and aspirations are far removed from that of the Islamic regime.

The positive or negative role of the 'youth' is crucial in Iran's tomorrow. Without adequate planning the present underlying pathology and dissonance will only worsen. On the other hand this 'youth' is struggling and fighting for a solution and a way out of its present predicament.

²⁶ National Statistics Annual published February 2010 – page 92

²⁷ Ibid.

The Islamic regime has behaved irresponsibly towards this generation. It incites and excites them into political participation at election times to claim popular legitimacy in the eyes of the world but when this mobilised 'youth' actually thinks for itself and demands a better life it is beaten violently into silence and submission. In 1997 the voting age was reduced to fifteen, in 2001 as part of promises of 'civil society' and 'rule of law' and in 2009 abusing their desire for change, pre-election activities were organised, encouraged and tolerated.

This created clear expectation of accountability that led to the protests after the 2009 election and gave birth to the 'Green Movement'²⁸ which has been used since to refer to the popular movement in Iran. It is worthy of note that in true recognition of the merits of a pluralist society even when they were being beaten by the regime's forces the 'youths of Iran' would stop anyone bringing harm on the soldiers and men and women alike physically shielded them from understandable crowd anger.

As in all other societies in transition, unwittingly a group of these 'youths' have become 'heroes', 'role models', and 'pride of Iran' and referred to with many others such adjectives. They look to a better future beyond the factional fighting of the Islamic regime. While shaping and writing a defining point in the pages of Iran's history, they are paying heavily for their vision and courage with their safety and liberty. They are a group of young men and women who are equally aware of the gender disparity, of ethnic and religious discrimination and persecution, and the deceit and duplicity of the ruling elite. They understand the needs of the society at large regardless of political loyalties and the fact that economic hardship affects all Iranians. If they want change and a better future they want it for all equally. Unarmed, they have become the most effective threat to the Islamic regime. They are standing up and advocating change through non-violent means, which must be respected and supported. They are claiming ownership of equality and freedom. Nonetheless, the brutality of the regime means that they are distrustful and work in small numbers and groups. They do not benefit from a cohesive unified movement. The culture of mistrust and fragmented disjointed actions hinder the speed with which change can occur.

They could be divided into several groups:

- Some remain in Iran and in the face of brutal suppression fight for a better future. They risk continuous intimidation, imprisonment, torture and even death 'accidental' or by execution.
- Some were forced to flee following the disputed 2009 presidential elections in Iran:
 - Understandably, some are absorbed into a 'normal life' and pursuit of further education – something they were deprived of in Iran - and have consciously removed themselves from activism;
 - Others without paying attention to the possibilities and opportunities that life outside Iran offers them remain committed and engaged with the day-to-day struggle in Iran. They have dedicated their time to raising awareness of the plight of those left in Iran;
 - The last group - the better known or with identifiable potential - taking refuge in western countries or countries that have a vested interest in Iran are snapped up by international media and organisations. They believe they can influence and inform policy and decision makers and thus remain active in this manner.

While this piece is looking at the political responsibility the 'youths of Iran' have assumed, it must be noted that they cannot effect change in isolation from the rest of the population. Real lasting change will happen when the experience of the older generation is passed on. Without a doubt, shaping the future of Iran requires each generation to assume its own responsibility and duty.

²⁸ Immediately after the elections The 'Green Movement' was only concerned with 'Where is my vote?' The 'Green Movement' today is complex and no longer concerned with the actual election results. It refers collectively to popular democratic movements in Iran that may or may not agree with each other's political aims and strategies. The common denominator of the various groups and movements today, is the clear need for change from the existing system. In my book, 'The Parliament of Minds' I have detailed the Green Movement extensively.

In view of the thirty year period of the Islamic Republic and the present population structure these could be divided into those who are (a) fifty to sixty years old and over, (b) the forty to fifty year olds and (c) those below the age of forty who make up the largest part Iran's population today. The fifty to sixty years old generation in Iran has clear memory and experience of the revolutionary ideals and excitable impulsive actions; while the remainder were either not born or too young to know anything different. It should also be kept in mind that 37.5% of those below forty years of age in Iran today are actually below nineteen years of age²⁹ creating further unanswered demands for higher education, jobs, housing, health and social welfare.

While the public debate is dominated by worries about declining moral standards, growing divisions between rich and poor and institutional and systematic discrimination experienced by the majority of the population the force for change needs political planning with a clear sense of direction and purpose. As Iranians, young and old, we must have faith in our own abilities and learn to trust each other again. The events of the last three years have shown the global community – and Iranians alike – that the Islamic Republic cannot maintain the present status quo. Political and/or economic expedience for a few who without a doubt exist may buy the regime some time but change is inevitable.

The 'youth of Iran' have chosen their future. They are working towards a fair, just society founded upon equality and rule of law. They are fully cognisant of Iran's national interest and engage the global community respecting theirs. They ask for the same awareness and respect from the global community. National interest of all nations is best served with peace and stability. A democratic stable Iran best serves the interests of the country, the region and the global community. Fully aware of the risks involved this is the chosen political path and responsibility of many among the 'youth of Iran' and with clear strategic political planning this vision is an achievable reality.

²⁹ National Census 2006

A Discriminatory Educational Discourse

Saeed Paivandi

The Islamist forces' takeover of power and the advent of the Islamic Republic of Iran following the 1979 Revolution represent an important turning point for its formerly secular education system. The new Islamic Republic has attempted to implement the process of Islamisation (*Islami kardan*) of the Iranian School. What is currently referred to as the Islamisation of the education system was progressively imposed through diverse reforms over the last thirty years. In the discourse of political leaders, the Islamisation meant adapting the education system to religious and ideological framework of the Islamic State. The Cultural Revolution (1980-1982) played a determining role in the acceleration of Islamic reforms, which have radically transformed the Iranian education from elementary school to university.

What the meaning of an "Islamized" education in the service of a Shiite state? How does the curriculum of the "Islamized" system oppose the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or various International conventions (UNESCO, UNICEF, and UN) concerning education and children's rights?

A law for ideological education

The main law of the education system adopted in 1987 by the Iranian Parliament is an important source for understanding the critical features of the general philosophy of this "Islamized" school.

The most important point made by the 1987 law is the priority given to the moral and religious development in educational and school activities. According to Article 4, in Islamic education "purification takes precedence over education." In the chapter related to the aims of the education system, the first article emphasizes "the promotion and reinforcement of religious and spiritual foundations through teaching the principles and laws of *Shi'ite* Islam." The second article of the 1987 law states fourteen main objectives for the education system, of which nine focus directly on religious, ideological, moral, and political issues. Shia Islam is presented as the religion of the state and the representative of the sacred order. The most "sacred" mission of the school is to form the new Muslim man, a virtuous believer, conscientious, and engaged in the service of the Islamic (*Shi'ite*) society. The same article specifies the important role played by Islamic education in shaping students politically and ensuring their adherence to the Islamic Revolution. The law stresses the need to build a teaching corps that would be faithful to the values of the Islamic Revolution and permeated with moral Islamic virtues.

Successive reforms put in place since 1979 have built an atypical educational model at the international level and a curriculum centred on religious instructions and values. A significant number of international researches highlight the strong religious and ideological orientation of the education system in Iran. The Iranian school is founded on *Shi'ite* beliefs with its eternal truths, values and dogmas and on the philosophy of a religion identity.

This ideological orientation and the imposition of a Shi'ite vision as the only truth of our world in a clear opposition to articles 18 and 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to article 18 "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." Article 26 emphasizes that "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups..."

There is a significant gap between this open and universalist approach of education and the Iranian educational vision focused on the political Shi'ism. Among these critical points of divergence, I can mention three kinds of discrimination observed in the Iranian curriculum.

Gender Discrimination

The first and most important discrimination identified in the Iranian curriculum refers to the place and status of women and men. Recent research on the content of Iranian textbooks published in 2008 highlights the large inequalities between women and men in the educational discourse.³⁰ Textbooks are trying to prove that men and women are not equal. Not only is this inequality clearly reflected in the lessons' content, but it also seeks to justify it within religious vision. Men and women have assigned gender roles in their social and private lives. They are presented as two different social individuals who complement one another and have specific gender roles. Men are clearly the "superior and dominant sex" in both professional and social space, women are the "second" or "inferior" sex who take care of home, household chores and raising children. The woman in textbooks is often not an autonomous individual; she is first of all the mother or the grandmother, sister, the wife of a man. These gender roles are carefully present in the texts and images.

The statistical analysis of 3,115 images in textbooks (elementary and high school) reveals that women are present only in 37% of the images (21% in images of work). Women are depicted in photos with lower age groups and the number of images of women decreases considerably in photos with higher age groups. Censoring the women's body and the physical separation of men and women continues even inside the family environment, to the extent that no photos exist of men and women together within the privacy of their home. These "symbolic walls" exist even in the relationships between husband and wife, father and daughter, and mother and son. The scarcity of images of women in the work environment is a good indication of the male-dominated nature of the textbooks and their view of women's role in the economy, especially since they compensate for this absence by depicting them in family matters, maternal responsibilities and housekeeping. Women mainly appear in images showing family (77%).

The same trend is observed in the content of texts as well. In the 412 Persian language lessons comprising all grades, 386 cultural, scientific, political, social, and religious personalities are mentioned, and only 7% of those are women. Female authors comprise only 5% of these lessons. This significant gap proves that discriminatory attitudes towards women are a general pattern and one can even talk about a "gender ideology" of the Iranian curriculum.

Discrimination against minorities

The second type of discrimination in textbooks refers to religious and ethnic minorities. Iran is a nation with multiple ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious minorities. Under the rule of a government that officially defines itself within the Shi'ite perspective; the division of people based on religious beliefs becomes inescapable. The members of the "official" minorities (Sunnis, Zoroastrians, Christians, Jews are recognized by law) receive an especially designed religious education. But the problem is that religious themes are not confined to religious studies classes, a variable part of non-religious books such as the Persian language, history or social sciences require a Shi'ite vision of the world, and matters directly related to values, identities and traditions of this religion. Worse yet, there is a category of minorities not formally recognized (Baha'is, atheist, etc.) by the government and with whom even hostile encounters have taken place, namely, the followers of the Baha'i religion. During their education, it is not possible for Baha'i students to express their views as they may be expelled from school or lose their chance to go to university. Those who do not fit into these official religious classifications are thought to be suffering from a form of deviance. The term "kafar" (heathen), applied to these minorities, means a person who is the enemy of religion.

Clash of civilizations

The third category of discrimination is based on how the world is perceived and presented. In the discourse of textbooks the world is divided mainly into the two camps of "Islamic countries" and "non-Islamic countries." From the political standpoint and the perspective of Middle Eastern and Iranian history, the discourse of the textbooks can be considered "anti-Western." The "foreigners" referred to in the textbooks

³⁰ Paivandi s. (2008). *Discrimination and Intolerance in Iran's Textbooks*. Washington: Freedom House.

are limited to none other than the Western countries which are continuously conspiring against the interests, national resources, wealth, and cultural values of the Muslim countries and which are considered potential and actual enemies. In a way, the worldview is a clash of civilizations between the West and the Islamic world.

The data gathered for this analysis demonstrates that Iranian textbooks view the world with a religious and ideological approach. Perceiving the world, history, and human beings from the perspective of a religious doctrine will lead to reductionism, bias, and exclusion. This discourse accepts certain people as insiders, “tolerates” other groups, and rejects others. Thus, in its essence, this reductionist outlook produces behavioural and interpretive mechanism based on discrimination. In the discourse of the Iranian curriculum’s religious ideology, the “self” and the “other” have a structural presence: they overshadow all subjects.

Another characteristic of the curriculum is that its discriminating viewpoint is recognized religiously and politically. The textbooks legitimize and justify this discriminatory viewpoint of gender, identity, and religion, and thus can signify a form of institutionalized discrimination. In the textbooks, an ideal individual is a devout and pious *Shi’ite* who believes in Islamic government and obeys Islamic laws.

A discourse of discrimination also brings about a discriminatory culture. This culture has its own signs, codes, language, and values, and, by repeating them, the textbooks make discrimination and differentiation among people appear “natural” and legitimate. Thus, terms such as *nadjes* (impure), *kafar* (heathen), *Baha’i*, Western, *monafeq* (hypocrite), deviant, deceived, or enemy draw the boundaries of identity, and victims of such a discriminatory system who are on the other side of the barbed wires of the prison of ideology become second-class citizens.

The textbooks’ discourse is a rhetoric based on violence. The content analysis of the textbooks reveals the existence of other forms of violence in the religious and ideological discourse. For the most part, these forms of violence are due to a discriminatory viewpoint and culture: Institutionalized violence occurs when someone is deprived of having rights equal to those of others because she is a woman, a *Baha’i*, a *kafar* (heathen), or *Sunni*, and as such, is criticized, judged, and reprovved directly. Symbolic violence takes place when certain individuals are denigrated or ignored and are victimized by what is left unsaid in the textbooks.

It is in this way that a discourse that considers itself as moral, spiritual, and at the service of all humanity, is turned, paradoxically, into a discriminatory rhetoric that separates and divides human beings from one another. The “original sin” of the textbooks—in production and reproduction of a discriminatory viewpoint and the explicit negation of equality of human beings—is related to the ideological-political discourse. This identity-based attitude towards the subject of religion leads to classifications and reduces the possibility of peaceful and humane coexistence.

Substance abuse among Iranian youth

Anonymous

The Iranian Deputy Secretary General for Drugs, Mr Taheri, has said that the US, Canada and the UK are responsible for drug abuse among Iranian youth.³¹

Drug use/abuse is a significant mental health crisis in Iran. Opium is culturally supported in Iran, as there is cultural tolerance for tobacco smoking, particularly water pipe smoking. Alcohol, opium and cannabis are the most regularly used illegal drugs, but there are new emerging problems with anabolic steroids, ecstasy and stimulant substances, for instance crystal methamphetamine.

There is a critical drug abuse crisis among Iranian high school students, street children and generally Iranian youth and adolescents. This may be due to role modelling by parents – mostly fathers – and also cultural tolerance of some substances. Under age smoking of tobacco, at a rate between 4.4% and 12.8% among high school students per day, is a significant risk factor for other drug abuse. Use of all types of drugs is more common among boys. Alcohol is the most frequently abused substance, with a lifetime rate of at least 9.9% drinking to levels that cause significant health damage. Lifetime rates of opiate use – mostly opium – are between 1.2 and 8.6% in different parts of Iran. As opiate use is a common problem among Iranian youth, particularly high school students and street children, it is essential to plan and apply drug prevention programs to protect them.³²

A study of 200 addicts attending the Rehabilitation Centre in Shiraz was carried out after the 1979 Iranian Revolution had disturbed both drug supply and addict treatment programs. The survey demonstrated that clinics were, after the revolution, seeing a broader social range of addicts than before; and that action by the authorities was bringing many recently addicted individuals to clinics. Heroin use predominated among those who were urban residents, whilst villagers were more likely to be opium use.³³

In 2008, a member of the parliament announced that there is a serious risk of addiction among young girls and women, and asked the parliamentarians to shoulder more responsibility. He expressed worries about the next generation that will be brought up by such mothers.

According to official statistics, there are 1,200,000 permanent addicts, and 80,000 temporary addicts in Iran, and it is increasing at a rate of 5% to 8% per year. Iran is home to the highest instances of drug abuse in the world. The increase in the number of addicts is three times more than the increase in the population. About 3% of Iranian adolescences are addicted while the price of crystal methamphetamine decreased dramatically from 1,800,000,000 Rials in 2002 to just 10,000,000Rials in 2011.³⁴

The root cause of 70% of social problems in Mashhad is addiction. It should be noted that in Mashhad access to the drugs takes an average of 22 minutes while access to sports locations takes an average of 45 minutes.³⁵

More than 70% of addicts, started to abuse drugs due to social conditions.³⁶ It seems that today, there are much more social and cultural factors for addiction than individual ones; hence, as a sociologist, I

³¹ ILNA. (10. January 2010). *Social News*. Aftab News: <http://www.aftabnews.ir/vdcevp8o.jh8xoi9bbj.html>

³² Momtazi, S., & Rawson, R. (May 2010). *Substance abuse among Iranian high school students*. Current opinion on psychiatry: http://journals.lww.com/co-psychiatry/Abstract/2010/05000/Substance_abuse_among_Iranian_high_school_students.7.aspx

³³ Dalvand, S., Agahi, C., & Spencer, C. (9. March 2004). *Drug addicts seeking treatment after the Iranian revolution: A clinic-based study*. ScienceDirect: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0376871684900231>

³⁴ Meaning 0.005 of its original price. See: Shojaee, K. <http://www.hodablog.net/files/ebook2/mavademokhadder/21.htm>

³⁵ Shojaee, K. <http://www.hodablog.net/files/ebook2/mavademokhadder/21.htm>

³⁶ Ismaeilij, H. (2 2008). *Addiction disease*. <http://etiyaad.blogfa.com/>

suggest social and cultural remedies along with individual treatments. It takes more time, but preventive measures are more effective than treatment alone. This article asserts that the time has come to tackle addiction instead of addicts.

As it will be made clear below, today in Iran addiction is mostly a social disease, and not purely a crime, and therefore addicts have to be treated as patients and not offenders. Unfortunately, the politicians and the community typically consider addicts as convicts not victims, and instead of altering the social and cultural conditions in which the disease of addiction develops and grows, they try to eliminate addicts from society.

Theoretical framework

There are three theoretical frameworks that seem to be compatible in explaining the problem and helping to find the solutions.

First, *Talcott Parsons* (13 December 1902-8 May 1979) considers youth violence and nonconformity with social norms and describes structural factors in family and the job market in modern urban communities.³⁷ According to Parsons, the sense of security is limited to the childhood period, when children receive their parents' unconditional love. Upon entering adulthood, personal capabilities are a factor in attaining success.³⁸ Entrance into community requires the acceptance of new responsibility, for which the youth are not prepared. Inadequacy in achieving social ambitions is a source of feeling incapable following by feeling insecure and unjust treatment.

On the other hand, the youth do not believe that they are responsible for their own incapability, and their annoyance targets adults who were not honest with them; therefore, they lose their trust in others and withdraw from the community. As family is considered a holy institution, they direct their anger towards the society and stand against social morality and norms, and the most frequent form of rebellion is drug abuse.

The second theory is the viewpoint of Edwin H. Sutherland (August 13, 1883 - October 11, 1950) who states that crime is an abnormal behaviour, which is explained in the same way that normal behaviour, is explained. The process through which a criminal learns crime from the "significant others" is the same as learning normal behaviour. The difference is in the content and not the process of learning; Sutherland rejects the concept of "social disorganization" and suggests "differential organization."³⁹ In his opinion, in heterogeneous and plural communities, some groups are based on social and cultural norms and some others are centred on the offenses. He suggests that criminal behaviour is learnable and is learned through the process of cross-communication interaction. He also says that the "differential organizations" can be changed in terms of abundance, priority, intensity, and duration.⁴⁰ While criminal behaviour is the representative of common norms, values and requirements; it cannot be clarified through them. He undeniably states that crime is learned through sociological organizations.

The third theoretical view is that of Albert K. Cohen's (June 15, 1918). He is famous for his sub-cultural theory of delinquent urban gangs, as well as his significant book *Delinquent Boys: Culture of the Gang* (1958).

According to Cohen, the main condition for forming a sub-culture is "the interaction among actors who are compatible with similar challenges." Lower class children are asked to adapt to their teachers' middle class criteria. The lower class children, who cannot follow these criteria, will be disappointed,

³⁷ Assosiation, I. S. (2010). *Iran Social Damage*. Tehran: Agah.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Sheikhavandi, D. (2005). *Sociology of Deviance and societal Problems of Iran*. Tehran: Qatreh

⁴⁰ Ibid.

because their family background has not prepared them for such a competition. Despite the fact that Cohen's theory is aimed at explaining the causes for lower class children delinquency, nevertheless, the main idea is helpful. It states that delinquency behaviours are rooted in failing to follow the middle class or sociological criteria of success.

All these theories explain delinquency and crime, but the main idea that this article points to is that drug abuse is a sociological problem, and the specific conditions in Iran make it even more sociological.

Below, several factors are described that make drug abuse more probable as well as sociological. They were collected during personal research and also through Iranian formal and informal reports and conferences.

These factors are reported as separate points. Of course, it is impossible to describe all causes and conditions or simply reduce the reasons to social and cultural ones. However, since the approach of this article is sociological, it considers only this type of analysis.

The conditions and situations that facilitate drug abuse

1. Lack of access to employment
2. Too much leisure time
3. Cheap and abundant drugs
4. Positive attitude towards opiate substances effects
5. Psychological, social and cultural frustration
6. Anomie⁴¹
7. Quick social transformations
8. Educational weaknesses in training individuals to practice self control
9. Lack of education in schools and curriculum about the effects of long-term drug abuse
10. The weakness of the foundations of religion, which guarantees the social norms and values as well as the purpose of life
11. Lack of opportunity for dialogue and consultation and referral to psychologists or pathologists
12. Weak family ties
13. Heterogeneity in the government's policies toward drug abuse
14. General depression
15. Poor social monitoring
16. Multiplicity and variety of values
17. Constantly adapting to a rapidly changing society
18. Instability of identity
19. Fragmented community; we do not have an organic society in Iran
20. Devastating impact of mass media on integrity of identity

Solutions and suggestions

In light of the focus of this article the main basis of drug abuse in Iran is structural; hence, the solutions are also structural, social and cultural.

Drug abuse is not just a single problem; it is a part of social problems and diseases stemming from deeper problems in a community. I call the deeper disease, "lack of social consensus." The gap between the state and nation has led to the gap between the nation and the values and norms that are promoted by mass media and state agents, such as religious and traditional institutions which are

⁴¹ A state or condition of individuals or society characterized by a breakdown or absence of social norms and values, as in the case of uprooted people.

supposed to be state-based. This gap has led to politicization as well. Politicization has deepened the gap; and this loop continues on.

To end this loop, it is necessary to improve and authorize civil institutions, such as NGOs, through which social interactions and cross-communications can regularly take place. These NGOs can perform regular training programs to compensate for the lack of formal education in schools on dangers of drug abuse and addiction. NGOs can attract volunteers from among the youth in order to conduct participatory action research and activities to train, inform, empower, recover and warn the youth about the effects of drug abuse.

Interaction through cultural and ritual activities conducted by NGOs in accordance with the youth's preferences and requirements can reinforce a sense of belonging to an integrated and cohesive community which in turn leads to social consensus. Through these activities they can compensate for the lack of common and shared values and norms.

The youth also have to experience adequacy in attaining success. The major factor through which they may lose this feeling is disparity between their own norms and values and general norms and values. This coordination is essential in obtaining the social position necessary for employment and identity.

The NGOs are also able to train families about the requirements of interaction with adolescents and youth.

Conclusion

It appears that the Iranian government is not serious in its efforts to support the youth against drug abuse and does not have a significant program for prevention of addiction among adolescents and youth. Consequently, NGOs have to face structural and social shortcomings and failures.

In effect, the way to treatment and prevention of addiction in Iran is through education and advancement of the Iranian perspective on drugs.

A Brief on Christian Iranian Youth

Open Doors Advocacy UK

Iran is home to a Christian community, which is reportedly growing despite facing persecution. Indeed, Open Doors estimates that at least 450,000 Christians live in Iran. Of this estimate, about 370,000 are “new” Christians from a Muslim background. Among this community are many young people who have grown up knowing that their faith labels them a vulnerable minority in their home country. Here are some reflections from Iranian Christians on the situation facing Iranian youth today.

In many ways they have the same interests as youth in the West. The big difference is the future. Due to the economic situation and the lack of employment prospect, many young Iranians dream of leaving the country. They have nothing to look forward to and just want to leave.

Ihsan, an Iranian Christian leader, says: “Emigration is like a disease: if they do not do well in school they think it is better to leave. Family life is not very stable and they think leaving is the answer”.

An Iranian teenager, Salman, saw how the group of youth in his fellowship became much smaller, because of people moving abroad. “Almost 75% of the youth in our church have left,” his pastor illustrates the statement. At school Salman is the only Christian in class. “The others are Muslims, but generally only in name. It seems that they wish they were Christian too. At school I have some freedom. I don’t have to follow the lessons on Islam. During that time, I can have separate teaching on Christianity.” Unlike some, he hardly has any problems at school. “I know well those I trust, and can even give some New Testaments and Bibles to students who are interested.”

Ramin works with the youth and says: “I don’t feel that the challenges they face are vastly different to those elsewhere in the world. Iranian youth have the same questions about faith, relationships and life. The main difference is that many dream of leaving the country. And the best form of communication with this age group is via electronic media, CD’s and DVD’s. Sometimes it is a challenge for youth to access the websites they want. Some of them are filtered.” Students and young adults have difficulties in finding employment, and many consider leaving Iran.

Ramin makes the following observation regarding Iranian students: “For those who become believers, their main challenges come from their family, not the authorities, as they are fearful of what the repercussions could be for the wider family. They need to be careful, and sometimes they do suffer at the hands of relatives or are arrested if they become too outspoken.”

Open Doors offers the following policy recommendations for consideration and implementation by the UK and international community actors able to encourage Iran to:

- Release those detained for the peaceful exercise of their religious beliefs
- Cease other forms of harassment of members of religious minorities – including discrimination in employment, house searches and intimidating surveillance of individuals and religious buildings
- Legally and practically protecting the right to have or adopt a religion or belief of one’s choice
- Take all necessary steps to ensure that national legislation provides for all the rights related to religious freedom, as enshrined in article 18 of the ICCPR, to which Iran is a State Party. This includes, but is not limited to, Iran’s Penal Code and Personal Status Legislation

Marginalisation of the Kurdish Youth

Anonymous

In essence when assessing the situation of the youth in any country, their development and progress can be measured by the level of access to and the quality of the education system. This is no different in Iran and its Kurdish region.

In the first instance, the cultural and linguistic discriminatory practices hinder the progress of the Kurdish child. Many children attending the first year of school would be hearing Farsi for the first time and prohibition of speaking their mother tongues provides a big obstacle to their learning and developmental abilities from the outset. Second, access to education - even primary education - for those in small or remote villages is very limited. Little children have to travel long distances to attend over populated classes with poor provisions.

Without a doubt, the enforcement or imposition of a language other than the mother tongue or in other words studying in a language other than the mother tongue coupled with the economic, political and other social discriminations that child experiences while growing up have reduced the participation of the Kurds in the national political discourse as has been evident over the last 33 years.

Human Rights Watch summarised the situation eloquently in 2003 when in its report it stated, 'Iran's religious and ethnic minorities remained subject to discrimination and persecution. Representatives of the predominantly Sunni Muslim Kurdish minority protested the appointment of a new governor of Kurdistan province from the Shi'a majority. The authorities overlooked Sunni candidates for the post put forward by Kurdish parliamentarians. The lack of public school education in Kurdish language remained a perennial source of Kurdish frustration.'⁴²

Furthermore, the approach to the region is one of security. The instability and security concerns colour economic development or investment both by the state and the private investor creating high unemployment rates – second to that of Baluchistan – and lack of opportunities for the young Kurd. The main problem in the region is one of politics. In other words, segregating Iran and Iranians in erroneous policies has created national divisions. The Kurds have always been active in their efforts to secure equal rights and this has been met with bloodshed and violence by the Islamic regime. The fatwa against the Kurds issued by Ayatollah Khomeini on 19 August 1979⁴³ and the murder of many at the hands of Sepah Pasdaran and Khalkhali, the Revolutionary Judge. In elections, the Kurds have either supported candidates who were not favoured by the regime or showed low turnout. They see little or no point in engaging with a system that only discriminates against them.

In a statement, Komala, a Kurdish dissident group, says, 'we have witnessed in recent years, a new growth and formation of political and cultural consciousness among the Kurdish people all over Kurdistan. A broad section of the youth, who are fed up with the repression of their national rights, the growing problems of mass poverty and unemployment, have started a new political dynamics in Iranian Kurdistan. Young people, who do not see any future for themselves under the tyranny and military occupation in Iranian Kurdistan, are considering more and more the necessity of organizing resistance against the Islamic Republic. Thus, we are witnessing a changing balance in the relationship of the forces in Iranian Kurdistan. These changes have manifested themselves in dozens of popular uprisings in Kurdish cities and towns in the last few years.'⁴⁴

⁴² Human Rights Watch World Report 2003, p. 446

⁴³ On 27 Mordad 1358/19 August 1979 Khomeini issued a fatwa ordering the military to dispatch its forces to Paveh, a central Kurdish city, and use whatever military means to end the clashes. The fatwa was announced through national radio and television as well as published in various newspapers, including page 2 of Kayhan Nr. 10784 on Saturday 27 Mordad 1358.

⁴⁴ The 30 July 2010 statement is available on-line at: <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/48533954/THE-KURDS-IN-IRAN>

In 2003, with the so-called 'liberation' of Iraq by the Coalition forces the Kurds are seen as a major threat for the Islamic Republic. In Iran both in April and June 2005 the celebrating crowds were met with violence, arrests and detentions. They had gathered to celebrate the success of Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, as the first elected president of free Iraq and Massoud Barazani of Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq heading the autonomous government in the Iraqi Kurdistan. This has given further reason for increasing the already heavy military presence and the presence of numerous parallel security forces each with their own agenda and acting extra-judicially.

The threat of the Kurds forcing the disintegration of Iran is an unfair and unjust excuse for withholding investment and development opportunities from the region. None of the Kurdish political groups advocate separating from Iran and in fact have repeatedly stated that they look for a solution in a democratic, representative and decentralised Iran where all Iranians can benefit from the country's vast resources equally and equitably. The reason for the disenfranchisement and marginalisation of the Kurdish youth must be sought in the systematic discrimination and unjust policies of the regime.

Coupled with high unemployment, economic hardship and failure to provide real solutions, this is another reason why voter participation remains low in Kurdish regions. Following the June 2009 presidential elections it is no surprise that the 'Green Movement' failed to capture the popular imagination in Kurdish regions, since Green or not, so long as the present system is in power the youth of the region see no hope of change for the future. The developments in the Green Movement during the last three years, and the fact that the movement is no longer in the monopoly of those who support the present regime and argue over the presidency is interesting. It is noteworthy that the self-appointed self-exiled representatives of Moussavi and Karoubi (defeated presidential candidates presently under house arrest in Iran) have not been able to centralise the Green Movement under their leadership, despite benefiting from the support of certain groups outside Iran. This demonstrates that the Green Movement neither provides a cohesive and united voice for change in Iran nor does it speak for the marginalised youth of Iran's diverse make up. The Green Movement that some young Iranian Kurdish activists support has very different aims and objectives.

If cultural, social and economic rights of the Kurds are observed, without a doubt civil and political participation in the national discourse would follow. Sadly, under the present policies the few who have participated nationally are paying the price behind bars.

The Plight of Balochi Youth

Nasser Boladai

Introduction

'The Sistan-Balochistan province, despite its richness and geographical advantages, is the least developed area of the country'⁴⁵ this is how the Governor General of the Provincial Social Department in Balochistan described the region in June 2005. 'We always assumed that the Baloch would attempt to create their own independent state some day, with Soviet support, so it was desirable to keep them as politically weak, disunited, and backward as possible', this is how another official explained the State's relationship with the Balochis⁴⁶ under the Pahlavis.

Successive Iranian governments have been engaged in demographic manipulations to systematically reduce the Baloch people to a minority in their own homeland. Among the many repressive policies is the destruction of the homes of poor Baloch people in Balochistan and their displacement. This is done in order to provide non-Baloch workers, especially the security forces, brought into the province with the best land; Government policy has been based on facilitating access for Shi'a and non-Baloch people to purchase land cheaply and set up businesses.

In its 1997 report on the plight of the Baloch Human Rights Watch stated, 'the administrative and political districts were arranged so as to avoid the creation of any Balochi majority provinces, thus preventing locally elected officials'; and 'a systematic plan has been set in motion by the authorities to specify the region by changing the ethnic balance of major Balochi cities such as Zahdan, Iranshahr, Chahbhar and Khash'.⁴⁷

Perhaps the shared border with Afghanistan and Pakistan to the east and warm waters of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman to the south is an excuse for many of Iran's army garrisons to be permanently stationed in Baloch area, which depicts Balochistan as an army zone. Nevertheless, the militarisation of Baloch areas has been combined with increased human right violations and collective punishment of Baloch civilians. The regime's forces have bombed civilian areas using helicopter gunship, resulting in the deaths of innocent Baloch people in both villages and the mountains.

In addition to many security forces and intelligent agencies, a paramilitary group, 'Mersad' meaning *ambush*, which operates under direct order of Iran's supreme leader Khamanei, is also active in Baloch areas. What differentiates this group from others is its licence to kill. They choose their victims randomly, creating a sense of insecurity in Balochistan, especially among young men. For this group the whole of Balochistan has become a hunting ground. It has been responsible for many shootings and beatings in Balochistan.⁴⁸

But, what is the reality of life for the Balochis? Sistan and Balochistan is the largest province in Iran. Most of the Sistanis are Shi'a and Balochistan predominately Sunni. The population growth in the province is higher than the national average of 1.61% for the 1996-2006 period indicated at 3.4% making it one of the highest birth rates in Iran (4.15% Urban, 2.66% rural).⁴⁹ These figures indicate success in reducing and controlling population growth in the majority of the country's regions but can the failure in this region be attributed to poverty and lack of adequate education?

Furthermore, according to the national census of 2006, unlike the general urbanisation trend in the country the population remains rural with over 50% living in villages and 51.61% households comprising of five or

⁴⁵ http://www.irna.ir/index2.php?option=com_news&task=print&code=84042301999102

⁴⁶ Mahmud Khalatbary, Director General of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in conversation with Selig S. Harrison 1981, pp 159.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch: Religious and Ethnic Minorities Discrimination in Law and Practice, September 1997 Vol. 9, No 7(E)

⁴⁸ From paper presented at Bad Bull, Stuttgart, Germany By Nasser Boladai in a three days conference on 25 November 2006, organised jointly by Evangelic Academy and Kurdish Human Right Organisation-Germany. the conference was held between 24 to 26 November 2006.

⁴⁹ The figures are taken from a study by Ehsan Houshmand for issue 57 of Goftogu quarterly journal published March/April 2011 p29-43 – Iran. <http://www.goftogu.net/?id=100&num=57#599>

more people in the province again almost double of the national average.⁵⁰

Of particular importance is the population structure of the region.

Table 1 ⁵¹	0-14 years of age %	15-64 years of age %	65 and over %
Overall figure	25.08	69.73	5.19
Sistan and Balochistan	38.85	58.20	2.95

Table 1 demonstrates much higher than average age group of 0-14 year olds and lower than average 65 and over indicating a young population structure and low life expectancy within the region. Of concern is the high 0-14 year old age group pointing towards serious future problems with existing policies.

Education

According to Hamid Reza Haji Babai, the Education Secretary, 70% of students starting school in Iran do not have Farsi as their mother language and do not successfully learn the language after first year in school.⁵² He expresses concern that this creates inequality and provides for fewer opportunities in competition with Farsi speaking children.⁵³

Literacy rate within the region is also lower than the national average, actually last in the national list (84.61% national average, 68.01% Sistan and Balochistan). According to the figures 32% of the people in the region are illiterate; this increase to 40% in the rural regions.

Early years

Despite Article 15 of the Iranian constitution and Article 27 of the ICCPR, the Ahwaz, Baloch, Kurds, Azerbaijani Turks, and Turkmen face difficulties in exercising their rights to use their own languages, in private and in public. For example, all state schooling in these regions is conducted exclusively in Farsi. As a result, dropout rates are high.

There are several problems facing Baloch children when they start school. First of all, the medium of education is not in their mother language - majority of the children do not speak medium of instruction or do not have a good command of Farsi when they start school. Unable to understand teacher's instruction makes them less enthusiastic learners from beginning. Studying in the mother language makes children more willing to learn as well as making it easier, but for Baloch children language barrier is not the only hurdle in a curriculum which is very ethnocentric and religious centric.

Another problem in Balochistan province and Baloch areas compared to other provinces and regions is lack of school or their poor conditions. Village children have to travel or walk for miles to get to schools with poor or inadequate facilities and families do not have the means to provide for safe transportation. This especially makes it difficult for girls to continue their studies with over 60% dropping out after primary school.⁵⁴ Financial and traditional concerns mean that families' limited resources are not spent on education of girls.

Higher Education

The region as one of the most deprived in Iran suffers from inadequate facilities for higher education despite the existence of several universities in the province. These universities are under resourced with lower than standard facilities. The national selection criteria means locals stand a very low chance of acceptance at

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Hamid Reza Haj Babai speaking at a Seminar in November 2009. <http://farhang.barnegar.com/view-467.html>

⁵³ <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,15044682,00.html>

⁵⁴ Councillor Rahim Bakhsh Derazehi also a member of High Council of Provinces in an interview with Ati News, 17 September 2011.

<http://www.atynews.com/fa/print/54717>

other universities which yet again reduces the national interaction and access to better education consequently leading to unfair competition in the job market and employment opportunities.

Employment

The country as a whole suffers with inaccurate or untrustworthy employment statistics. A perfect example can be seen in the unemployment figures published for the region in 2001. In these figures 61.6% of the 15-24 year olds were unemployed (national average 33.6%). However, in 2006 the local and national average was published as 23.3%. As far as the region is concerned there are no indicators to explain this massive drop in the space of five years. Industrial units remain well below the national average and no other extraordinary developments have been recorded as far as agriculture, mining or service industries are concerned.⁵⁵ Yet, there is general consensus is that unemployment is particularly high in the region and of great concern. Discrimination on the grounds of religion is high with many Sunni Muslims of the region experiencing jobs going to non-local but Shi'a competitors.

The only opportunity is cross border trade and that too is inadequately managed with poor Customs services and fraught with terrorist or drug trafficking concerns.

Women

The discrimination against Baloch women is three fold: ethnic, religious and gender based. Coupled with traditional and cultural prejudices Baloch women have a particularly hard time. Lack of job opportunities for the men means many travel to neighbouring countries for work. This together with the practice of polygamy has resulted in a high number of cases of AIDS being reported among the Baloch women, twice the national average and in children three times the national average.⁵⁶ Young Baloch women suffer from lower than average education, little job opportunities –where men are unemployed opportunities for women are even more limited and cultural and traditional biases further hinders their progress in the region.

Health

With a population of 2,405,742 the province only has thirteen health and medical centres including hospitals, with only 2117 beds, which yet again point to the level of discrimination and lack of attention to the needs of the people of the region.

Leisure, Culture and Sports

Little or no attention is paid to the leisure needs of the region. As an example, Abdolaziz Jamshidzahi, a Member of Parliament from the town of Saravan warned the Assembly that while parks in Tehran are paved so as not to dirty the shoes of the children, in his area barefoot children do not even have parks or play spaces.⁵⁷

According to the national statistics the province had three operational cinemas, which by 2006 was reduced to one with seating for 470 people. From the nine swimming pools reported in 2003 by 2006 only four remained open.

Conclusion

The Islamic Republic treats its religious and ethnic minorities as second or third class citizens, a form of apartheid. Systematic discriminatory policies, inequitable access to the country's resources and opportunities, and worse than average economic concerns mean that the Baloch youth is disillusioned and disenfranchised with little or no hope for a better future. Attempts to control their anger and frustration through fear and intimidation such as mass public hangings do not encourage participation in the national

⁵⁵ Ehsan Houshmand for issue 57 of Goftogu quarterly journal – as detailed above

⁵⁶ 27 November 2011 - <http://www.zanefarda.ir/1390/09/%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%DB%B2-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%85%DB%8C/>

⁵⁷ 2 March 2011 - <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8912110817>

dialogue.

This situation demonstrates the urgent need of a new social contract that recognises Iran's different ethnic groups such as the Ahwazi Arabs, Azerbaijani Turks, Baloch, Fars, Kurds, Lur and Turkmen as equal in their collective rights and duties. In this millennium, a new scenario of national governance should prevail. The elements of this new system of governance should be harmonious partnership in a republican, liberal, democratic, and secular system with a federal structure and autonomous, provincial governance mechanisms. Such a state system would appropriately address the problems and offer the prospect of a positive new partnership of trust and coexistence. A mechanism based on the acceptance of genuine and justified demands of the constituent groups should generate participation, shared responsibilities, and at the same time offer opportunities to all nations.

Young Women in Iran: The Tale of the Ordinary

Azadeh Pourzand

It seems with every political turmoil young Iranian women find their way into international tribunes. Regrettably, the last time it was the tragic death of Neda, a young beautiful Iranian woman, who was shot by the governmental forces in front of eyewitnesses at one of the street protests of the Green Movement that caught the attention of the world in summer 2009. She became the symbol for young Iranian women throughout the world. In Iran people began to call Neda the angel of freedom. And, the world simply came to know her as the *one and only* image of the young Iranian woman whose brave protest ends in a tragic death. The world came to know young Iranian woman as extraordinary figures whose political struggles inspire the world. What the world seems to have forgotten are the stories of the *ordinary* young Iranian women; whose struggles are not restricted to only the widely known political repression in Iran.

Prior to the Green Movement, when Neda was growing up in the years of reform in Iran, western journalists would travel to Iran to face the fascinating paradoxes that the lives and appearances of Iranian women represented. These journalists, almost unanimously, portrayed the contradictory dualities in the lives of young Iranian women with a series of images that are now familiar to all of us. Their news documentary would often begin at a large Shia Muslim shrine setting or a mosque in or around Tehran where masses of men and women covered in black chadors would pray and furiously chant out slogans against the US and Israel. These news documentaries would then end with disco-like snapshots of an underground party in north Tehran where young women and men were dancing to western music, smoking, drinking and taking drugs. This was how we, Iranian women, were portrayed before the death of Neda.

I argue that even after the Green Movement and the death of Neda, the image of young Iranian women remained partial and not inclusive of the diverse realities of life in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). With Neda's images all over the media, the image of young Iranian women became symbolic, heroic and romanticized leading to a limited prism into the lives of young women in Iran.

Isn't it that the world is praising the bravery and beauty of young Iranian women who are, undoubtedly, making history and fearlessly taking their fates into their own very hands? What else do we expect from western media and policymakers if not their appraisal of bravery of those who peacefully stand up for their rights? My answer to these questions is that the romanticized and heroic figure that the media has made of young Iranian women deprives them of conveying their rather mundane frustrations. The world wants to either see them as beautiful, brave and consequently imprisoned or killed or else hateful, covered in a certain all black IRI style of Islamic veil and loyalist of the regime. The world is continuously fascinated by the relationship of young Iranian women with the Islamic state. Thus, it is in politicization of young Iranian women's figures that the world finds authenticity and truth.

The purpose of this essay is not to deny the acts of political bravery done by young Iranian women in standing up for their rights as women and as citizens. Rather, this essay aims to highlight *other* instances of challenges and struggles facing young women in Iran. While these rather neglected challenges of young women do not entirely or directly pertain to the current political turmoil, they illustrate the consequences of social, cultural, political and economic forms of discriminations against women and youth in the IRI.

Some of these young Iranian women whose struggles might seem too apolitical and insignificant to appear in international tribunes, are just as courageous as Neda was. It is just that their daily struggles are not classified as the "brave protestor" image that inspires the western media.

Young Iranian women face difficulties in entering the job market that best suits their education and dreams. The impressive rate of higher education among women is no mystery to the world. In Iran the rate of women to men parity index, as ratio of literacy rates, aged 15-24 is 0.99.⁵⁸ Further, currently women outnumber their male counterparts in universities. Nevertheless, high literacy rates and impressive enrolment in higher education institutions have not led to an equally notable increase in the economic advancement of women. Thus, with the economic situation serving as an example, there remain a series of neglected issues impacting young women's lives in Iran without improvement of which generations of Iranian women will ultimately face despair, hopelessness, frustration and depression.

A clear example of the socio-economic challenges facing young women in today's Iran is unemployment. As Valentine M. Moghadam states, "[W]omen constitute only 15% of the formal sector paid labour force."⁵⁹ According to the results of the 1385/2006 Iranian census, only 3.5 million Iranian women are salaried workers, compared with 23.5 million men.⁶⁰ According to existing statistics, women have 15.5% of the labour force while the world average of women's share in labour force is 45%. Further, women have 33% of professional jobs in education, healthcare and social services. Women form 20% of the university teaching staff; while this percentage is 41% in Australia, 38% in Tunisia, 38% in Turkey, and 36% in Bahrain. Moreover, less than 4% of employed women work in senior, executive and managerial positions.⁶¹

This is all while according to Iran's Fourth National Plan statistics "the rate of female-headed households has increased from 7.1% to 8.4% during the last three decades in Iran."⁶² Furthermore, the average age for marriage for women and the rate of divorce are increasing in today's Iran. In addition to the economic hardships facing Iranian youth in securing sustainable careers, the more liberal lifestyle pursued by the youth also have a role in the increasing age of marriage.⁶³ Overall, while struggling with various forms of discriminations, young Iranian women are confronted with the paradoxes of tradition and modernity that constraint them while raising their socio-economic responsibilities and needs.

Nevertheless, despite such challenges in the formal labour force, women continue to pave their way in conventional and unconventional areas of work. While in the past few years, we have been hearing about successful young female entrepreneurs, lawyers, doctors, university professors and other such careers, women from the less conventional and informal labour forces have also managed to do wonders with innovation, persistence and patience. The IRI takes credit for the notable achievements of Iranian women in various professions without acknowledging the socio-economic, legal, religious and political discriminations that young women have to overcome to succeed in the formal and informal job market. An example of the continuous efforts of the young generation of women to enter the formal job market in spite all the challenges—a statistical summary of which was earlier presented in this essay—is their entrepreneurial endeavours in various industries.

The challenge of unemployment or a level of employment that does not match with the acquired higher education along with the desire to innovate and professionally excel have led to a notable number of young female entrepreneurs in various industries. Nevertheless, the path to successful

⁵⁸ Statistical Centre of Iran (2009-2010). National portal of statistics. Vice Presidency for Strategic Planning and Supervision, Tehran. <http://www.amar.org.ir/default.aspx?tabid=52>

⁵⁹ That is, those entitled to paid holidays, maternity leave, pension, and other provisions of labour law.

⁵⁹ Statistical Centre of Iran (2009-2010). National portal of statistics. Vice Presidency for Strategic Planning and Supervision, Tehran. <http://www.amar.org.ir/default.aspx?tabid=52>

⁶⁰ <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2009/moghadam280209.html>

⁶¹ http://www.iranrooyan.org/sites/default/files/Economic_Rights_FS%5B1%5D.pdf

⁶² <http://ent.ut.ac.ir/Jger/Images/UserFiles/1/file/pdf/faghihi%204.pdf>

⁶³ <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1903420,00.html>

entrepreneurship is also rather challenging for young women who will have to overcome both environmental (social, economic and cultural) and personal challenges throughout their entrepreneurial endeavours. While having to prove their capabilities as women in gender-biased industries, they also have to overcome the bureaucracy and policy challenges that exist for all entrepreneurs in Iran. Regardless, many of these young women creatively fight their ways through environmental and individual challenges with the ultimate goal of gaining financial independence.

While female entrepreneurs have left a successful legacy in the conventional industries such as agriculture, manufacturing and services, there are also other unique fields where young female entrepreneurs are gaining recognition. As such, there are women such as Nayereh Aghaz in the transportation industry who has successfully set up a taxi service with female drivers that exclusively provide services to female customers in the religious city of Qom.⁶⁴ In rural areas, too, there are an increasing number of young women entrepreneurs that have gained recognition. For example, Shahnaz Yousefi is an entrepreneur living in the rural areas of Southern Iran who has successfully introduced an innovative method in the area of poultry lessens the rate of illnesses among the animals.⁶⁵ The list of women entrepreneurs in Iran is a long one reviewing which reveals unique and untold stories of women who, one way or another, struggle to gain financial independence in the midst of the economically ill society of Iran.

There are many success stories of women who, against all odds, make it in the formal or informal economy in Iran. However, there are also many young women who are left with hopelessness and despair. Some of these women have pursued other means for making money such as sex work or drug dealership. Many others suffer from undesired financial dependence and of becoming a burden on their parents while awaiting the opportunity to get married and at least begin an independent life within the realm of marriage. As stated earlier, young women in Iran are caught in the paradox of modernity and traditions in Iran. This leads to the loss of traditional support that a woman would typically receive from her original family, husband or the family of her husband and yet maintain some of the traditional and cultural constraints in the way of a woman who aims to gain independence.

Meanwhile, the economic, social and political crisis in today's Iran simply intensifies the complex challenges that young women undergo in their daily life. It has become ever more important that journalists, researchers and policymakers in the western world conduct more in-depth studies and policy analysis of the conditions of women in Iran that go further than only capturing the stories of the politicized young female heroic figures. Young Iranian women still have a wealth of untold stories and experiences the analysis of which could only help enrich the world's understanding of today's Iran. Think of it this way: If Neda were still alive, she would have been that ordinary young Iranian woman who was struggling to find a job suitable for her education and dreams. It is the *alive*, ordinary and hopeful Neda that the world needs to understand when addressing the struggles of young women in Iran. There are millions of her in today's Iran. Let us not forget them and their struggles.

⁶⁴ <http://www.tehrantimes.com/life-style/1686-iranian-women-shoulder-to-shoulder-with-men->

⁶⁵ http://www.iana.ir/detailed_news.aspx?news_id=19991

The Tragedy of Young Lives Lost

Neda

I write these lines as a young person born and raised in Iran who is now pursuing a post-graduate degree here in the UK. I am one of the fortunate ones benefiting from a secure family environment and parents who have dedicated their lives to their children. Against all odds, they have tried to instil in us the values of a good human being who does not lie as a matter of course, does not cheat to get ahead or ignore the rights of others in pursuit of wealth. You may be surprised at my use of words but, yes, I mean against all odds. Unfortunately, the society is such that one must lie to survive. We, the majority of the people of Iran in my opinion, lead two lives - one behind closed doors and one in public. We all know that we lie and so trust or indeed lack of it is a major issue.

Our society in Iran is embroiled in so many tragedies of young lives that it is difficult to only comment on one element without looking at it as a whole. Religious ideology disregarding the natural desires of young minds and bodies, economic hardship limiting opportunities for but a privileged few, advancement in technology and flow of images, music and information, prevalence of the culture of violence and finally the rule of lies and deceit as the only means of survival have hand in hand created a society sick with many ills. As young people who are the majority of the population in Iran, we bear the brunt of these ills. Our natural curiosity and aspirations are stifled by dogma and violence. At best we are angry, angry enough to want change and you witnessed us after the 2009 presidential elections. But there is another side, the side of those who are not as fortunate as my siblings or me. It is they who are the true victims of this 'just Islamic society' that we are supposed to be living in.

No one knows the true figure of those who sleep hungry at night in this oil rich country of mine - rich enough for billions of dollars to be embezzled but uncaring enough for social inequality and injustice to prevail. Each ministry or public organisation has its own set of figure to suit their agenda. The Central Bank has one set of figures, the Trade Union another and the Statistical Centre of Iran publishes yet another set of figures. But if you live in Iran you do not need figures and statistics; you feel it with every molecule of your body. You see it with your own eyes. You hear stories. In Tehran, our city of contradictions, one would be standing at a street corner in front a modern high rise and witness the latest Mercedes pull up at the lights and little children run up to it sell chewing gum, flowers or offer to clean its windows even when their noses barely reach the door handle.

For a long while my mind was preoccupied with the question of street children and child labour. I joined several children NGOs and started working with them as a volunteer. Ultimately, I started teaching in one, which reached children in the most deprived part of Tehran. Little ones of eight to eleven attended the morning shift and the twelve to fifteen year old ones the afternoon's. I had one class in the morning and one in the afternoon. I was touched by their beauty and innocence despite their terrible family background and experiences.

Some of these children were street peddlers. At the beginning of the class they would hand in their goods to us and collect it after class to return to 'work'. Others returned to the sweatshops that employed them and the rest rummaged the city rubbish bins for recyclable stuff to sell.

Their home environment was generally dire. In most cases one or both parents were addicted to drugs or they lived with an addict father and a mother prostituting to feed his habit as well pay the bills. The mothers in general were victims of violence either by the men in their lives or the male dominated society. There was little or no attention paid to hygiene. Most of the children had been repeatedly raped and a deep-rooted anger and violence brewed inside them. Sometimes it would be weeks and months before we could crack their defensive shell and get through to them. Like all NGOs our budget was limited but we all tried to make sure that the children were fed at least once during the day. Without this they would not know when the next

meal would be and most suffered from digestive disorder and stomach aches.

I was immersed in their sad world and every day I would come face to face with a new definition for child labour. I met children who were professional thieves - children whose financial need had forced them to abandon school aged ten or eleven to help supplement the family income and job after job with little income had turned into young thieves with an uncertain future awaiting them. They had either a corner of a prison cell to look forward to or dancing at the end of the hangman's noose.

I also met another sort of children, those who were forced to use their bodies. Beautiful girls who aged twelve or thirteen experience their first sexual encounter, violently. An addict father, a brother full of hatred and violence, a husband as old as their grandfather who had bought them or a step-father who resented their every being... and so their lives changed.

Some of these little girls still had what they called a roof over their heads or some sort of a semblance of a family life at home but there were those who had run away from forced marriages or prejudices or simply poverty. They had no one waiting for them. If only they had a tiniest say, the smallest control in their tragic lives. They lived their lives in fear of rape, of gang rape (very common as I discovered later), in fear of being knifed, of being killed by religious zealots or of being arrested and tasting justice at the end of the whips and lashes that awaited them as punishment regardless of their young age.

While I was there I managed to get through to a few; to befriend them and listen to their tales without judgment. Amongst them was a beautiful, intelligent and brave young girl whose life was intertwined with the lives of boys who were criminals and whom I had also got to know. She hated outsiders and was very reluctant to get to know other women. Physically petite, everyone knew her story and so she would not frequent the neighbourhood. I am going to call her Sima – but this is not her real name. She turned sixteen in December 2011.

I had tried to get to know Sima through the boys. They were much easier to get through but she did not want to know. The boys had told me she was pregnant and we were trying to help her. She was petrified of being pregnant, of abortion, of her drug addiction. The fact of her addiction and her young age meant that it was very difficult to get her 'official' help. I spoke to her on the phone on several occasions but she would not agree to meet. Until one day one of the boys called me to say she was in hospital having miscarried and that they could not pay the hospital bills. The hospital would not let her leave until they had been paid. I met the boys and went to the hospital with them. Having paid the bill I was allowed in to help dress her. I was struck by her sense of pride and her sweet child-like face.

I took her to where she said she lived. For whatever reason, it seemed that she trusted me, which made me very happy. I took her to a private gynaecologist to make sure she was alright. She started telling me her life story. Her mother had given birth to her when she was only fourteen and her father had abandoned them soon after. Sima's mother had no family to protect her. She remarried several times with each choice being worse than the last one. She had become an addict and paid no attention to how her young child was being abused. Finally Sima's mother met a man who accepted her but not with a child. Sima was left with one of her many stepfathers who agreed to take her in. Sima called him 'uncle'. But this man had repeatedly sexually abused the eleven-year-old Sima in the past and this provided him with an opportunity to make money out of her young body.

Sima was attending school up to then but was forced to abandon school and got hooked on drugs. The arrangement was for him to provide her with what she needed as long as she was bringing him money and he would feed her habit. He knew if he kept her locked up she would escape so he allowed her out every now and then. It was on one of these journeys that she had met the boys who attended our school.

As she was staying out more and more 'uncle' had become sensitive and increased his demands when she went home. She chose not to stay there and moved in with one of the boys who lived with his unemployed addict father. She told me that she was subject to gang rape on several occasions. Horrifically, on one occasion she had voluntarily subjected herself to this to save the boy she was living with. Sima had got crack from a dealer and had promised to sleep with him in return but had not kept her promise. So, the boy was taken hostage until she went. The dealer wanted to take revenge and teach her and the others a lesson. Her boyfriend was also subject to rape.

After moving in with her boyfriend, his father and the other boys she stayed home and looked after the house while they went out on jobs, stealing. She was still addicted to drugs but her boyfriend looked after her financially as much as he could. She was not free from the attention of the other boys in the house and when her boyfriend was out she was forced into having sex with them; that is until she got pregnant.

None of them had any experience of pregnancy and were not sure what was going on and it was only into Sima's third month that they realised she was pregnant. I heard about the pregnancy after she was into her sixteenth week. In Iran abortion is illegal and can only be carried out under certain conditions. In any event, after four months it would be very difficult even for married women. But we were faced with a young girl, under eighteen years of age who was also a drug addict and had passed the four-month mark. Abortion would have been considered as premeditated murder. To add to the problems with every passing day her boyfriend was getting more attached to the idea of the baby. At that time Sima would not meet with me and only talked to me on the phone. She did not attend any of the appointments I made for her. She had turned to her 'uncle' who took her to a back street clinic. The so-called midwife had inserted a rod to rupture the womb forcing a miscarriage. This is where I came into the story. I should add that Sima did not tell me her life history as easily as I am writing it here. It took a great deal of courage for her to repeat her traumatic past and I heard her tragic life story in bits and pieces during many talks.

Sima is an intelligent girl and very keen to learn. She is a romantic with all the normal things a teenager would be dreaming about. Despite all that she has been through and has experienced she is still very naive. She went away with her boyfriend to the seaside but got arrested. She was fifteen and he just seventeen. The two of them were detained for two weeks, received sixty lashes each and then released. When she got back and told me of the arrest and floggings I was horrified. I could not imagine her petite physique under force of the whip – sixty times.

'How did you bear it? Didn't it hurt?' was the stupid question I asked her. She responded with a smile of a mischievous child saying of course it hurt but after the first few lashes her back went numb and she did not feel it any more.

A short while after they got back the boys were arrested. Sima was distraught. All her dreams were tied in with her boyfriend and he was behind bars. We did all that we could but these children were being treated like adults. They had been beaten violently to confess to other crimes. We were not allowed to see them. They would not allow us to get legal representation for them while they were 'being investigated'. They were brought to court with their hands and feet in shackles. There was no hope for them or for Sima. They were each given custodial terms. I should explain that they were kept with adults and treated as adults despite the fact that they had just turned seventeen.

Sima had no money. Her boyfriend's father asked her to leave after two months. Her 'uncle' also passed away of an overdose. We tried very hard to find her somewhere to live. The State provided homes for runaways, as few as they were, they were not suitable for a girl who had fended for herself on the street ever since she was eleven. Their dogmatic judgmental religious approach and punishments meant that even if she was accepted she would not last for long.

We tried to engage Sima in some form of vocational training but her addiction meant she could not attend

the classes regularly. As much as we tried she was not ready to give up her drug addiction. She told me being numb was the only thing she had left and the only way she could cope. I even thought of delaying my studies, getting a flat and bringing her to live with me but she did not accept it.

I left Iran to come to the UK but I talk to her often on the phone. I talk to her boyfriend regularly who calls me from prison. The NGO is doing all that it can with its very limited resources and with lack of support from the State because of the nature of these children's lives. Sima's story does not have a happy ending. She is back on the streets selling her body to pay for the small room she has rented. Sima is one of the many I met. Tragically, the Islamic system is only interested in punishment and denial. This is a face of Iran the Islamic regime does not want the world to see. This is the consequence of thirty-three years of Islamic rule and justice. I was not born when the Revolution happened I am part the generation that was born after 1979; and with Sima we are the consequences of this system.

I, and many others like me, are transient figures in the harsh realities of these tragic lives. What is needed is acknowledgment by the Islamic regime that the problem exists. From there solutions can be found. There is no denial that there are certain provisions in the state system. For example, according to the national laws the boys should not have been treated they way they were or imprisoned with adults. Child labour laws prohibit the employment of these children, but the laws are not observed or adhered to in practise. Or that the welfare agency, Behzisty, is responsible for these children but it is underfunded and tied with religious prejudices, political expedience and unable to cope with the true extent of the problem.

The laws certainly need revising but the Islamic Republic is signatory to the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Pressure should be brought upon it to observe its obligation and implicate the articles of the Convention in national laws. It should not be left to individuals no matter how generous or well meaning they are to carry out the duties of a government.

Judicial Processes involving Young Offenders

Mohammad Mostafaei

One of the areas of conflict and contention for criminal law experts and international organizations concerned with human rights, revolves around the issue of age of legal responsibility as well as providing a just system of prosecution for minors, as due to physical and social factors their circumstances are different that those affecting adults.

Minors are among those most affected by the society in which they live, and perhaps because they are undergoing the early stages of their personal development, judicial processes involving investigation as well as adjudication demands greater attention. This is so that there is a greater chance to guarantee their re-introduction to the society at large.

Unfortunately, despite widespread objection regarding the age of legal responsibility, the judicial procedure in Iran is based on a system that considers nine Lunar years⁶⁶ the legal age for girls and fifteen Lunar years for boys.⁶⁷ This calculation is based on Islamic Fiqh and Sharia. Although there is a great deal of disagreement among religious authorities on this issue, nevertheless, for purposes of judicial processes and criminal charges, the above ages remain in effect.

An exception of Article 49 of the Iranian Penal Code defines a minor as: "a person who has not reached the age of maturity as stipulated by Islamic jurisprudence." However, the code fails to refer to the age of legal responsibility according to Islamic jurisprudence. This is despite the fact that lawmakers cannot and should not legislate vague and ambiguous laws, especially when involving the rights of individuals, in particular their right to freedom or in some cases their right to life. In order to address this vagueness, judges mistakenly apply article 1210 of the civil code. In this article, the ages of nine and fifteen have been identified as the ages of maturity in relation to civil codes. The problem remains that many Islamic jurists avail themselves the right to express an opinion about such critical and specialised issues. Determining the age at which an individual reaches mental maturity is a matter that must be determined by medical experts, however, Islamic jurists maintain that it is their right to determine this age and do so in light of physical and sexual maturity with complete disregard for mental maturity. They do not consider whether physical development of sexual organs is related to mental maturity or the ability to determine right from wrong.

Nevertheless, the erroneous and unfair pattern remains a part of body of laws set by the Islamic Republic of Iran. For instance, should a ten year old girl and a fifteen year old boy commit a crime, they will be tried as adults and may even be sentenced to death by hanging or stoning, or face long sentences or amputation. These punishments are against human rights standards for adults, but in case of minors, they are nothing short of tragic. It is interesting to note that in Iran's judicial system, which is also based on Islamic Fiqh, in civil matters such as the right to vote, drive or the right to carry out business transactions, are only valid when carried out by individuals over the age of eighteen. If a person is below the age of eighteen, she or he cannot hold a driver's license or cast a vote in the elections. But when unwillingly or unintentionally is party to a childish act that counts as a crime, she or he is tried and punished as an adult.

This is an important matter in relation to the rights of minors in Iran and has resulted in numerous challenges deserving immediate attention. However, here is another matter worthy of attention that must be explored, that of judicial processing of juvenile cases. Are they given the benefit of a just system when facing criminal charges against them? Prior to 1999 minors were tried as adults. Objections by the legal experts and children's rights activists resulted in adding a short section on minors to the 1999 Criminal Code of Procedure.

⁶⁶ Eight years and eight months according to the Gregorian calendar

⁶⁷ Fourteen years and seven months

In this Code, in light of Article 49 of the Penal Code, an exception of Article 219 identifies a minor as one who has not reached the age of legal maturity in accordance with Sharia. In order to give the appearance that cases of minors are conducted differently than those of adults, exception 220 determines that criminal cases of persons under eighteen years of age will be tried according to General Provisions. This is the first instance since the Islamic Revolution that legislators observed special consideration for individuals under the age of eighteen. However, this is only with regards to the hearing procedure and does not apply to type and degree of penalty. Furthermore, it does not apply to crimes which penalty includes execution and retribution. It must be mentioned that in 2002 the representatives of the Guardian Council passed articles that in practice worked against public interest and special consideration for children's rights and in a way undermined criminal procedures for children under the age of eighteen by interfering in criminal proceedings for minors.

Article 20 of Public and Revolutionary Court Act determines that crimes resulting in penalties such as retribution, execution, stoning, hanging or life in prison, as well as political or press offences are processed through provincial courts.⁶⁸ These two legal measure, article 22 of the Criminal Proceeding Code and article 20 of Public and Revolutionary Court Act, have for years resulted in ambiguity among judges resulting in their decision to refuse to rule in cases involving minors for a variety of reasons, until contradictory and inconsistent verdicts resulted in a decision in 2006 by the highest judicial authority, High Council of the Judiciary, which verdict is binding on all judicial authorities, issued a procedural verdict. The Council clarified: "in accordance with an amendment of Article 220 of the Criminal Procedure Act of the Public and Revolutionary Courts approved on 11 April 1992 cases pertaining to crimes punishable by retribution, execution, stoning, hanging or life imprisonment as well as political or press offences will be carried out at provincial criminal courts" and because of this amendment, in first instance, dealing with offences in this Act according to their importance and severity of punishment and the need for greater precision in terms of social factors, general jurisdiction of the juvenile court which is presided by one judge, are separated and instead relegated to the exclusive jurisdiction of the provincial criminal court, which is usually presided by five judges. In light of the above, according to the majority vote of the Supreme Court Council, investigations pertaining to criminal offences by adults younger than eighteen years of age, with the approval of the amendment of Article 20 of the Amendment Act of Public and Revolutionary Courts in 2002, are exempted. This verdict poses a number of fundamental problems:

1. Judges presiding over juvenile courts investigating offences committed by children under the age of 18 know the children first hand and have gone through the necessary training on interactions with minors, as mental and emotional immaturity may result in sensitivities and vulnerabilities and the atmosphere of courts and inappropriate interactions with minors can cause them to stray from a healthy and socially acceptable lifestyle.
2. Although there are five judges presiding over provincial criminal courts and their majority vote determines the judgment of the accused, in reality because most judges in such courts lack sufficient knowledge about mental and emotional needs of children, and are exposed to many other cases involving professional criminals, they may disregard the accused minor's lack of mental maturity, and issue sentences that cause additional emotional and mental pressures for the accused.
3. Many provincial criminal court judges are unaware that children committing a crime under the age of eighteen are not referred to as guilty. They are 'children in conflict with the law' as applying the terminology of guilty and criminal, due to their violent nature, yield a negative impact on the personality of the child and causes them to lose confidence in pursuit of a socially acceptable lifestyle and remain vulnerable to the slightest possibility to stray away. When such judges lack proper awareness about child behavior and psyche, is it possible for them to adjudicate over cases of minors, even if there are five?
4. In some cases verdicts have been issued, where three of the five judges have condemned, while two have acquitted the accused under the age of eighteen of the death penalty, for the reason that the

⁶⁸ Provincial criminal court is a branch of appeals court that operates with five judges

accused lacks proper mental maturity. So if these two judges had presided over a juvenile court, the accused would have been acquitted.

The result is that lack of a just system for minors under the age of eighteen, in and of itself can result in verdicts that can result in a minor's death and threaten the legal safety of minors. Therefore, it is essential for defence of the fundamental rights of minors in courts, that a law is passed which ensures their rights.

However, with regards to cases involving children (girls below nine lunar years and boys below fifteen lunar years) and also minors less than eighteen years of age, who commit civil offences, the laws does guarantee some of their rights. Although in practice we witness that some judges and even law enforcement authorities disregard the laws, nevertheless, laws have been passed that apply to all persons below eighteen years of age, such as:

- When investigating cases of minors, the court is obliged to inform the parent or guardian to attend the sessions in person or identify a legal counsel. Should the parent or guardian fail to do so, the court must assign the case to a public defender.
- Should it be necessary to investigate the emotional or mental condition of the minor, his parent or guardian or his social environment, the court can employ whatever means at its disposal to do so or engage the services of experts.
- Summoning a minor for the purposes of carrying out preliminary research and investigation must be done so through her/his parent/guardian. Failure to appear, in accordance with the relevant laws, will result in arrest. This matter does not prevent the court from summoning and detaining the minor.
- If detaining the child with a view to investigation or collusion of the crime is not essential, or if the child does not have a parent or guardian and the person in charge of his care or any other person is unwilling to face legal liability or place bail, the accused minor will be temporarily kept at the juvenile correctional centre. Should one not be available in the given location, the court will determine another suitable location.
- Criminal investigation will both be carried out in public and instead it will be attended by the parents and legal guardians of the child, lawyer, eyewitnesses and witnesses and a representative of the juvenile correctional centre whose presence the court considers necessary.
- Should it be in the interest of the minor, parts of the investigation will be carried out in the absence of the accused but the verdict of the court will consider the accused as present.
- If one or more children were party to the crime along with other adults, the case of the minor(s) will proceed through juvenile court.
- Criminal juvenile courts, based on progress reports of the accused received from correctional facilities, can review its previous verdict once and decrease the sentence for up to one fourth of the original duration.

As demonstrated above, although a number of legal articles regarding the relevant criminal procedures for minors are included in the body of laws set by the Islamic Republic, yet they are not sufficient to protect the rights of minors below the age of eighteen. On the other hand, Iran signed the Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1994. This Convention includes 54 articles that apply to Iran. However, practically, we see that the Islamic Republic has simply accepted these articles to appear as a defendant of children's rights. So although Iran has made certain reservations, the Convention applies to Iran and its articles must be implemented.

The many puzzles thrown at Iranian society since 1979, includes Sexuality, in its many definitions

Saghi Ghahraman

One of the strongest opponents to the Sharia laws governing Iran since 1979 has proved to be the youth of Iran.

The *problem* of sexuality and state interference has remained a constant irresolvable battleground between the youth of Iran and the Islamic state over the last thirty years. Curbing the natural urges and inquisitiveness of young minds has remained the biggest problem on the regime's social and political agenda - from dress codes, attempts to segregate public spaces and invasion of their private spaces, to banning books and access to independent information on the topic have been tried and defeated.

Intertwined with concepts of religious guilt and sin gender, sexuality, sex, equality, opportunity, right, wrong, rights and pleasure are defined in the context of Islamic Sharia without any opportunity for healthy, independent and up to date dialogue with heavy punishment for anyone who challenges this interpretation and morality. Individuals are left to find out answers for themselves with little or no independent guidance.

Sex, acknowledged as a physical need of heterosexual men is recognised and sanctioned within marriage – hence legal polygamy - with very little available in Persian that deals with cultural gender imbalances. The slow progress of the feminist and queer movement in Iran can be in part be blamed on the limited clinical and theoretical knowledge in this field.

The youth of the middle and upper middle class families are able to explore and experiment thanks to their privileged position and courage in the face of harsh punishments. They engage in single and group sex; exchange partners; experiment with different positions; use it as a drug as well as along with drugs; equate it with modernity and include it their works of art and literature.

In conversations with me a young emerging female writer from the alternative contemporary literature school living in Iran said, 'we have abundant access to sex. We begin experimenting with sex when we're still very young'. When asked about safety and protection she added, 'we just follow trial and error, and we hope to manage without much damage to ourselves'.

And what happens if they are caught? A young male feminist artist/photographer in Tehran said of his own encounters with his girlfriends who he would meet in his apartment, 'Every time, my body would be in severe pain with fear in anticipation of the Moral Police kicking the door down to arrest me and my girlfriend. I can never relax and enjoy myself. My orgasms are always twinned with paralysing fear of arrest there and then'.

Another, a woman of 38, recalled her arrest when she was 17. She was arrested with an older male friend while out walking. They were taken to the police station, detained, assaulted and then released on bail on the condition that they would marry. Her parents were ordered to arrange the marriage between the two and she was forced to remain in a loveless abusive marriage for twenty years.

These are common experiences of many during the first years following the 1979 Revolution. Many will have similar stories to tell. The years that followed saw flogging and detention replace enforced marriage as punishment. Many young people have had to learn how to deal with the physical and emotional scars of such treatment.

On the other hand, the youth belonging to the poorer families fall victim to paralyzing limitations caused not only by the governing Sharia but by their own binding class-originated circumstances. This is particularly harsh on women whose fundamental rights are denied them and unlike their richer counterparts cannot buy

their way out of problems or cannot afford the luxury of negotiating marriage contracts that may secure them some civil protection later on. Young girls are married off to older men for money or women are forced into Sigheh (time specific temporary marriage) for financial or societal safety. The problem of sex and sexuality is turned on its head with girls as young as thirteen (or even younger⁶⁹) forced into marriage or prostitution with no say, choice or control over their sex life. They exercise no choice over the age, look or intellect of their partners as whether married or not their young bodies are being used as commodities.

The outcome of this paradox in the sexual behaviour of the youth in Iran is like all other contradictions of extremes and excessive behaviour within the Iranian society under Sharia law – the struggle between progress and primitivity. However, as far as sexuality is concerned the society is not only divided between the progressive and the primitive, privileged and the poor, religious and the secular, traditional and the modern members of society, but it is also divided in terms of homosexuality versus heterosexuality which carries its own set of peculiar dilemmas.

Between them, those who live a colourful if risky life style, those who are victims of state-sanctioned paedophilia under Sharia based marriages and those whose sexual orientation and gender identity deem them hunted ghosts in their own homeland, have together created a ‘carnival of violated rights’ during the past three decades. The youth of Iran have literally recorded violations of human rights over their bodies; it is hard to imagine any other section of the society complying with such suffocating limits of Sharia.

While the heterosexual youth suffer under the strict laws of Sharia they nevertheless, enjoy relatively more freedom and support from their families than the homosexual and transgender youth. Sexuality remains the worst dilemma for this group under Sharia law.

There is much less understanding of sex as gender and sex as sexuality when it comes to gender identity and sexual orientation, in any written material in Persian; or in the mind of the mainstream whether they are parents, teachers, counsellors, therapists, or judges dealing with the life and livelihood of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) in Iran. While a straight girl or a boy is certain about his or her gender identity, and is in harmony with the culture regarding his or her sexual desires, and knows pretty well what are her or his rights according to culture and legislature, a transgender girl or boy is puzzled about his/her own gender identity and is attacked for this same reason by the society. A homosexual girl or boy is understandably puzzled about his or her sexual orientation, wondering why he or she is not attracted to those he or she is supposed to be. There is hardly anyone to help, support or understand a transsexual or homosexual teenager with up-to-date information or to put their mind at ease. At best they are given wrong counselling and information hoping to ‘cure them’, and worst still is the fact that they are given deadly punishments because of their identity and orientation.

While being homosexual is forbidden and punishable by death as the most heinous crime, being transsexual is conceived as being ill and in need of cure through surgery - surgery that is carried out without adequate care, support and counselling, leaving the ‘patient’ mentally and physically scarred for the rest of his/her life.

So, how do the young homosexuals and transgenders cope with their identity and their sex life? How do they deal with complications of growing up in a community that disowns them, eliminates them, exploits them and takes advantage of them from early ages? Based on my interviews and conversations with the Iranian gays and lesbians, every gay man I interviewed had made at least two attempts on his own life before his 30th birthday. He was also heavily reliant on anti-depressants. Based on the same interviews every lesbian girl was fighting to escape forced marriage, or was trying to survive the wifely obligations expected of her. To escape enforced marriage and exposure of their orientation many girls run away from home to live in parks and in the street only to be forced back home after arrest and into forced marriage. In these loveless

⁶⁹ 9 Lunar years for girls, 15 for boys

marriages they have no choice but to put up with constant marital rape. As a result of this traditional social setting girls have no way of survival if they're not surrounded and supported by their families.

Based on my interviews and conversations with Iranian transsexuals (TS), every TS who has had sex reassignment surgery suffers from painful, debilitating side effects due to unsuccessful or incomplete surgeries. Before surgery their sex life was crude and unsatisfactory and after surgery not much improved. Religion and tradition together with physical and psychological limitations before and after surgery put the vulnerable transsexual and homosexual individual at great risk of abuse.

Misunderstandings and confusion over sexual orientation and gender identity coupled with the Islamic regime's keen interest in the denial and elimination of homosexuality result in many being labelled as transsexual and consequently as a cure coerced into erroneous sex change operations which in a tragically twisted way trap them in wrong bodies with their lives ruined. The problem remains unresolved as to how with sexually repressive religious laws and morality gender-reassignment surgery can address larger issues of gender, sexuality and sexual orientation.

Without a doubt, the young generation in Iran has and will continue to find its own way and answers; however, their experiences differ greatly according to their social and financial status and family culture. It must not be forgotten that despite the positive or successful sexual exploits of some, even they are not safe from the wrath of the State if caught. As many explore and discover their sexuality many more fear the extreme punishments and are afraid of arrest and sexual abuse and rape during detention at the hands of their accusers. Others fall victim to incest and sexual violence at home. The problems of the LGBT community are far more as not only do they have to fight State persecution they have to fight their own self doubt and unanswered questions at the same time. They are vulnerable and fall victim easily.

While the straight youth fights for their rights, the LGBT youth fight for their life. Under Sharia law for them the physical act of sex means death and not joy or pleasure – as it rightly should be. By continuously demanding their equal rights they keep the fight alive - for them celibacy is not an option. They look to the Iranian society and the International community for support in their struggle for recognition and equality.

A gay poet, Barbod Shab, display the scene of a blind date between two gay men in Tehran:

The Seconds

By: Barbod Shab (2005)⁷⁰

What could the meaning of your gaze be?

We are here to pass the moment

We are here to conquer moments

Do not forget my presence

I am watching you with all my might

Are you thinking of pulling out my eyes with that fork?

What if you've poisoned this dish?

We are here to pass the moment

We are here to conquer moments

Have you made a bed for us?

Why this sheet is red all over?

What mischief have you planned for me?

Is your belt tough enough?

We are here to pass the moment

⁷⁰ Collections of Gay Poetry by Iranian Poets (residing in Iran) http://ketabkhaneh88.blogspot.com/2010/07/blog-post_9659.html

We are here to conquer moments

The shimmering white under your shirt does not blind me
Do you always keep a rifle at home?
Why the fruit knives are razor-sharp?
Did you know I carry a knife, too?
Show me your nails
Is it because you play guitar or...?

We are here today only to pass the moment
We are here today only to conquer moments

What's your favourite music?
Did you know I could yell loud?
Why did you turn the sound so high?
So no one can hear us making love?
By accident we are here today to pass the moment only
By accident we are here today to conquer moments

A glass of juice would be nice after all the bustle
What if you mixed something with the juice?
Sure you haven't locked the door?
Can I believe my eyes? Am I really leaving now?
Wouldn't you clutch on my neck when you say good-bye?

The moment is passed
We have been conquered

I am leaving now

Can I believe that this cab will take me home?

**Our Only Nightclub for Performing is Our Website: The Internet's Role in the Dissemination of Iran's
Unofficial Rock Music**
Bronwen Robertson

Although scholars argue there is nothing in the Quran to validate a ban on music,⁷¹ music and Islam have always had a complicated relationship. In countries like the Islamic Republic of Iran, where Islam is inseparable from systems of governance, this disaccord has had dramatic consequences on the musical scene. Music was banned following the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The hard line Islamists, who had seemingly snatched away the rewards of a populist movement for themselves, considered music to be a western construct, a residue of the shah's totalitarian monarchy. Perhaps, considering that Khomeini's campaign had actually been bolstered by anthems sung en masse in the streets of Iran,⁷² the new authorities were aware of the power of music, and were afraid of its potential to derail their momentum in the fragile first years of the Islamic Republic. Although music was banned following the revolution, these anthems continued to be sung and promoted across all levels of social life as the Islamic Republic of Iran was ushered in. As one particularly politically embittered young musician suggested in a focus group interview in Tehran on July 9, 2008 (my emphasis),

[After the] revolution they announced a total ban on music. A song had been written for Khomeini's return to Iran that went 'Khomeini oh Imam, oh fighter, oh sign of honour, oh sacrificer of thine life for the purpose.' We all sang it in school. [The Islamic government] came out and said music is a sin and forbade everything to do with music. One of our great and quick-witted composers asked boldly, 'so how are we supposed to perform "Khomeini ey Imam" then? With our farts?' But of course performing that song was ok, because *the government decided that it wasn't really a song*

Gradually Iran's classical and folk music enjoyed resurgence in popularity as spaces opened up for their performance. And this music played a crucial role in rebuilding the nation in the years following the Iran-Iraq war, whilst Iran was reconstructing its decimated population. But pop and rock music, which had been relatively abundant prior to the revolution, remained hidden until well into Khatami's presidency when certain pop groups began receiving permits to perform and record music. The reappearance of pop and rock music coincided, *not coincidentally*, with a time when the Internet was becoming available to a larger proportion of the Iranian population through public Internet cafes. As Shahab argued (interview with the author, July 10, 2008), "Rock music was always in Iran ... Maybe it was in bedrooms for fifteen, twenty years, but it was always here."

In Iran, any music that is heard in the public domain has been approved by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (*Vezerat-e Farhang va Ershad-e Eslami*).⁷³ The ministry comprises many different departments and, like all of Iran's governing bodies, is overseen by the Supreme Leader (Ayatollah Khamane'i, Khomeini's successor) and the Council of Guardians. Iranian musicians must navigate a lengthy application process if they are to release their work in the public sphere, applying to both the Council of Music and the Council of Poetry.

There are three sets of forms comprising twenty-four sheets of paper in total. One set of forms is for a permit for lyrics (for either a recording or for a concert), another is for a permit to hold a concert, and the third set is for permission to release a recorded work. While applying for permission for their lyrics, musicians must sign a declaration stating that they have observed "all applicable laws, rules, requirements,

⁷¹ See Amnon Shiloah, 1995. *Music in the world of Islam: a socio-cultural study*. Aldershot: Scholar Press, page 32.

⁷² Elton Daniel and Ali Akbar Mahdi, 2006. *Culture and Customs of Iran*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, page 192.

⁷³ The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance's official website is available online at <http://www.iranculture.org/>. The site's introductory video features still shots of prominent clerics and politicians. The music that accompanies the slide show is that song that is not a song—an instrumental version of *Khomeini Ey Imam*.

regulations and directions” and accept that they “will be held accountable for any instance where violation and indictment has occurred.” The permission request forms for staging a concert are even more comprehensive. Musicians must submit three copies of a high quality CD or cassette, a typed copy of the pre-approved lyrics, a photograph of the group with their respective instruments, and the appropriate forms, which include the Form for the Information Bank of the Country’s Musicians. This form requires applicants to disclose a great deal of personal information this is a very specific mode of surveillance (as well as being a frustrating and time consuming procedure). Unofficial rock musicians do not want to disclose their personal details to a system that will most probably reject them, especially when they can be held accountable at a later time.

The rules regarding what is and is not acceptable in terms of musical content are not delineated, and only a very select few rock and pop musicians have received permits to perform and record music in the public domain. It is not clear what sets these musicians apart from others attempting the same feat but one prerequisite seems to be that the music should not provoke audiences to dance or to think about anything more than banal topics like unrequited love and nature. Another criterion seems to be that the lyrics should be in Persian, but considering that many of Iran’s unofficial rock musicians play introspective music and there is an increasing trend to sing in Persian (O-Hum’s rejected album from 1999 was entirely in Persian), it is perhaps that their lyrics tend to include social critique that is the problem. In any case, bands like 127 and O-Hum were subjected to heavy state surveillance after being rejected by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.⁷⁴

Thankfully, modern technologies have enabled unofficial rock musicians to bypass the government’s time-consuming and demoralising system. While it takes a number of hours to fill out these forms, deposit money into the ministry’s bank account and post the forms to the appropriate places, followed by months waiting for a verdict, musicians are technologically equipped to write, record and distribute their music via the Internet in the space of a day. In a focus group interview with his band, Hassan described why they would never consider applying to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance for permission.

We don’t even try to get permission [to perform]. The culture minister said something really interesting recently. He said, ‘Our recent successes are reflected by the fact that an author who knows that their book won’t get permission to be published is no longer bringing it to us.’ And he said this as if it were a good thing ... well, in many ways he was right. When, as a musician, I’m certain that my work won’t get permission, why even bother trying?

The first Iranian rock band to ‘surface from the underground’ was O-Hum, and in 1999 they released their first album online and became instantly popular with young, middle-class (and higher), urban intelligentsia living in Tehran. Then, in 2002, TehranAvenue.com, a website hosted by a group of journalists and activists, hosted an online music competition called ‘TehranAvenue UMC [Underground Music Competition]’. Three recording studios pooled together and invited a handful of groups to record tracks, which were then released online for an audience to vote on. The competition was an immense success, with the 21 songs reaching an accumulative download total of 126,000, but it drew a lot of unwanted attention from the authorities, not least because of the use of the word ‘underground’ in the competition’s title.

As I argue in my forthcoming book, Iran’s rock music is not underground in the common understanding of the term; this music is not going against a current art movement, it is simply forbidden.⁷⁵ Yes, Iran’s rock music is very often performed ‘underground,’ in spaces of temporary autonomy snatched away from the

⁷⁴ O-Hum’s website is available online at <http://www.o-hum.com> and 127’s Facebook page, through which they share their news and tracks, is available at <http://www.facebook.com/official127>.

⁷⁵ Bronwen Robertson, 2012. *Reverberations of dissent: identity and expression in Iran’s illegal rock music scene*. New York: Continuum.

state (car parks, cellars, basements, disused gymnasiums in apartment complexes), but the terms unofficial music (*musique gheir-e rasmy*) or illegal music (*musique gheir-e ghanuni*) better describe the scene.

TehranAvenue.com's music competition became a biennial event but over time its popularity dwindled. What happened was that TehranAvenue created a niche, whereby Iran's unofficial rock musicians became aware of the potential the Internet offered for the dissemination of their craft, thereby making itself effectively redundant over a period of eight years and four online festivals for unofficial music. As bassist Arya expressed, "Now you can make connections with various people in the business all over the world from the comfort of your rehearsal room" (email communication with the author, February 15, 2009). Sia, a guitarist and lead singer argued, "In Iran you need three things to be a *proper* band. First, you need band mates, then you need a practice space, and then you need a Myspace page."

127 band's drummer Yahya told me,

[Before the Internet] there was no way of getting your band known. Not for us, not for any group. The year that the first underground music competition was held in Iran, it was the Internet that made it possible. There weren't any real live shows. They put a bunch of songs on the website and people went to it and voted. The Internet started this scene. And that's with the Internet speed of that time! At 2 kbps it took two days to download one song!⁷⁶

There is no doubt that these online music festivals and competitions have helped young Iranian rock musicians to build a community for them. In fact, without them, I strongly believe the establishment of such a vibrant unofficial music community would not have been possible. Unable to network in the public domain through an absence of fora to perform in, and unable to release their albums to a paying public within their own geopolitical borders, Iran's unofficial rock musicians had no choice but to turn to the Internet. Over the years the possibilities proffered by the Internet have secured Iranian bands such as 127, Hypernova, the Yellow Dogs and TarantisT performance slots at SXSW, the world's largest festival for independent music, which is held annually in Texas. Hypernova would not have received visas to travel to the US if it were not for a high-ranking senator reading of their plight on the Internet and making contact with the American Embassy in Dubai over email to personally recommend the visas should be issued. On June 25, 2009, SXSW published an email they had received from TarantisT, a plea for financial support in the tumultuous time following the controversial presidential elections: "Iran's government has beaten one of our band members badly in Iran so he can't walk; also they threw tear gas into the basement where the guys were practicing" (www.sxsw.com/node/1853).

The Internet has become an understudy for a live stage in the absence of officially sanctioned settings for performance. The Internet mobilises unofficial rock musicians, enabling them to present new works and interact with their audiences, whether through TehranAvenue's music festivals or through their own websites and Myspace pages. The Internet is a mediator, a platform between the musicians and their audience, just as a stage does in a concert. As Sohrab, 127's singer, argued in a documentary following the participants in the UMC, "Our only nightclub for performing in is our website."⁷⁷

Using the Internet to disseminate their music is not unproblematic. The government engages with these musicians online in the soft war (*jang-e narm*), filtering websites that become too popular (like Myspace, Facebook, and the websites of popular bands), and surveilling the populace. At least half of the musicians I worked with while I lived in Tehran from July 2007-2008 have since left the country, but they maintain close ties with their peers in Iran via the Internet. In November 2011, King Raam (the lead singer of Hypvernova) and 127 released new albums online, and when they did so they ensured free download of the tracks would

⁷⁶ Personal communication, July 11, 2008

⁷⁷ *Saz-e Mokhalef*, dir. Mojtaba Mirtahmasb, 2004, 28m15s

be available for their peers who remain inside Iran, beset by international sanctions that make purchasing items online nigh on impossible.⁷⁸

The Iranian government now speaks of nationalising the Internet, purifying it, and reinventing it as a ‘halal’ technology for the Islamic Republic, but if this happens the unofficial music scene and Iran’s hoards of other minority communities who rely on the Internet for cohesion and community-building will suffer. We need to continue to provide young Iranians with technologies they can use to evade censorship if we are to continue to see social and political change inside Iran. Music played an immense role in the unification of reformist voters during the 2009 presidential elections and it helped them to mourn their multiple losses in the months following the announcement of the controversial result. The most popular song from 127’s new album, which is spreading like wildfire through social networks as I type this piece, is “*Jang*” (war). Sohrab, who is known for his lyrically gymnastic verses and simple sing along choruses, repeats the hook “*nemijangam*” (I won’t fight) throughout the song, which is ironic, seeing that is exactly what these young musicians are doing.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Raam’s album is available from <http://kingraam.bandcamp.com/>. Those outside Iran were urged to pay for the album if they could, but were also advised that they could enter ‘zero’ in the amount field and still download the tracks.

⁷⁹ The song “*Jang*” is available online at <http://www.soundcloud.com/127band/02-jang-127>

Music, Young Women & Human Rights

Somi Arian

In an authoritarian mind-set, gender segregation is a key factor in controlling the society. Iran's male dominated society derives concession for containing women, directly from the *Sharia* law, or the will of God, as interpreted by high-ranking clerics who also happen to be male.

Not only is God referred to as 'he' in the Islamic scripture⁸⁰, but it is made clear in Quran & the *hadith* that men alone are suited to holding the highest positions in the Islamic court. One will never observe a female Imam in the mosque, more importantly one is discouraged to question the credibility of all such verdict; even developing such thoughts and imagination border on blasphemy. Not only in the mosques, but also in the leadership of, *Ummah* (the Muslim nation), all positions of significance are strictly held for the highest, and male, cleric of the time.

Human rights activists around the world have made rightful observations of many areas in which women are subjected to violation of their basic human rights in Muslim communities. One cannot turn a blind eye, when women are stoned to death and prosecuted for sex outside marriage. It is not a small matter that the value of women's lives, as well as their words as witnesses in court, are only half of their male counterparts. However, the atrocities against women are not limited to treating them as merely half human in matters of life & death.

The interference of the Islamic rule into every private aspect of human life is specially wide and deep when it comes to women and young girls. This article is primarily aimed at shedding light on how musical expression is contained in Iran's Islamic republic particularly in the case of young women. Here, once again the system has succeeded in suffocating one of the most basic human needs, that of self expression by means of art.

It is worth noting that the discussion of human rights violation in Islamic countries, in this case in Iran, are often wrongly diverted from the actual facts and events, to whether this is the true Islam or it is the result of incorrect interpretation of the Quran and Sharia law. The point of this article is not to argue the degree to which practice of religion in Iran has remained true to Islam in its 'original' form. The reality is that restrictions are posed on human lives, human choices and their freedom to explore the arts, to express themselves in unique ways, and to communicate and integrate with the rest of the world through the common language of arts and music. These restrictions are imposed and justified by means of religious authority.

In Iran's Islamic Republic, from the moment of its inception by Khomeini, music was one of the many art forms that faced scrutiny. In 1970s, prior to the revolution, on par with their Turkish and Indian neighbours, Iranians were on their way to establishing their unique sound in the world of popular and classical music. With the rise of the Islamic regime in 1979, the country underwent a cultural revolution that aimed to undo every bit of progress made in music and arts over the past centuries and decades. This had the greatest impact on the progress of young women who were involved in the field of music professionally or vocationally.

Suddenly, the female portion of the society was no longer allowed to sing or play music. When young women sing and express themselves musically, the tone of their voice is thought to cause distraction and sexual excitement in men. After the 1979 Islamic Republic, while women were prohibited from appearing on stage altogether, the male portion of Iran's musical society was also driven away from

⁸⁰ And in almost all major world religions

the country and mostly went into exile. There was no longer any place for popular music, let alone rock music and other forms that were never allowed to flourish among the Iranian youth.

If women cannot sing, and men cannot sing about women and about human earthly love, that's essentially the end of popular music. However, the traditional Persian music was also pushed back into a corner and it has not been truly celebrated, explored, and developed in Iran after the Islamic revolution. There were still musicians who remained in the country and tried to continue producing traditional music or some form of a more modern music. Some were silenced; others resigned to producing only certain kinds of pro-Islamic revolutionary anthems to meet with the approval of the regime.

For the best part of the first decade of Khomeini's rule Iran was engaged in a war with Iraq. During this time people's priority was to survive. All means of import and export for luxury items, such as musical instruments, from the West, was completely closed. For the first few years after the revolution some families had only had their old cassettes and vinyls from the Shah's era. Soon the Iranian musicians in exile majority of whom now re-settled in Los Angeles, California, began to produce music, which was then smuggled into the country by passengers visiting their families in Iran. This was the start of a movement that brought back some life into Persian music, although one could face a penalty for carrying music cassettes, listening to them or selling them.

The Islamic Republic played the greatest role in keeping the Iranian culture from integrating many aspects of modernity, yet, modern technology found its way into Iranian homes; CDs and videos, E-books, Internet, and satellite TV channels are illegally accessed by many Iranian families. This has opened the eyes of the younger generations to a degree of freedom of expression in music and the arts, in the modern world, that is otherwise inconceivable for a young person growing up in Iran. For the first time in many generations, Iranian youth, especially the females among them, have begun to pose questions about many of their rights or lack thereof. Musical expression is possibly one of the most important means through which, young Iranian females can hope to get their voices heard, literally and metaphorically, a voice that had been silenced through three decades of Islamic rule.

The Politics of Writing and Young Authors after the Rise of the Green Movement

Azadeh Davachi

Introduction

The social and political lives of Iranian people have undergone a radical change in the last thirty odd years; this is particularly so for Iranian writers. The Constitutional Revolution, over a hundred years ago, was the catalyst through which Iranian people took their fate into their own hands by active participation in politics. It also gave new life to artistic expression through all mediums. Today, artists although still hindered by custom, tradition and the recent rise of religious fundamentalism, have found new forms of expression through literature, cinema and the social sciences.

By placing Shi'ite clerics in the mainstream of political affairs, the 1979 Revolution has had a major impact on Iranian culture and society. The clamp down and restrictions put on the print media saw many writers flee Iran and many more intimidated, arrested and imprisoned under terrible conditions. Consequently, in an effort to safely keep the dialogue alive with the outside world, Iranian writers had to find a new language for expressing their political dialogue through literary work. They hoped that this new style would offer them protection from persecution. It could be argued that finding ways of resisting censorship and thought control shape their literary work and takes them to new realms of creativity.

Although the threat of persecution has shadowed over the arts and literature for many years, the Ahmadinejad presidency since 2005 took it to new heights. Many books have been banned particularly those in the field of art and social sciences and writers face new obstacles to their freedom of expression. It was at this time that cyberspace, Internet and weblogs proved to be the champions of free expression. Yet, if possible, the situation has taken a turn for worse since the disputed 2009 presidential election, which saw Ahmadinejad take office for a second term with an alleged 83% of the votes. While hundreds of thousands of Iranians marched through the streets demanding change and rule of law, the streets were occupied by the military firing rounds of live ammunition into peaceful protestors killing hundreds and arresting many thousands more. It is here that the young generation of Iranian writers find themselves in the crucial position of telling the truth and raising their voice above repression, censorship and persecution. In this article I will argue about how different styles of writing have evolved since 2009 and how political oppression is being resisted in these different forms of writings.

The role of writing in Iranian political movements

In most transitional societies, literary writings have not only been a modern form of communication, but also a cogent means for offering people a new understanding of contemporary life, values, concepts and political goals. In dictatorial societies such as post-revolutionary Iran, literary writings, beside new forms of the written language, embody the potential to enlighten public's views regarding existing social, political and economic conditions.

With Ahmadinejad's victory in 2005 presidential elections, the political sphere became even more repressive and the opposition groups - writers among them, found it harder to survive. Writers either had to conform to harsher censorship requirements or see their efforts turned into pulp. Deliberately, instead of becoming tools for a despotic regime, writers and artists echoed the mass grievances adapting and changing styles as and when necessary. Thus, it can be assumed that Iranian literature in all fields is able to reflect the conditions of Iranian society while at the same time alerting the world's conscience as to what is going on in their country. In 2009, by manifesting themselves through various forms of writing, writers and bloggers become the voices of the oppressed and spoke up for the democratic struggle in Iran. The on-going persecution of writers and bloggers in the 'Green Movement' meant that their language and style had to be lucid yet readily adaptable to change as control and censorship took new dimensions. The cycle of arrest and protests to the arrests, required free writers and bloggers to implement new tactics and strategies. They had to look to new forms of expressions to demonstrate their resistance, and challenge the regime's authority by inspiring the public.

Their impact in keeping the spirit of the 'Green Movement' alive is undeniable. As the authorities were successful in their intimidation, resistance and protest moved from the streets onto computer screens and pages of publications and the young bloggers and writers have kept the movement alive. This explains why they have repeatedly become the targets of security forces and pursued with such vigour. They have become inspiring and influential agents for change and as far as the regime is concerned must be silenced. Political and social activism of this young generation of writers – often influenced by the 'Green Movement' – expose the shortcomings and weaknesses of the state. This young generation of writers, some with experiences of political and social activism, are nevertheless under threat and have had to find new outlets for their creative expression.

Blogging: A new form of writing for young authors

Looking for new outlets meant taking full advantage of the new technologies available and Internet proved to be a most effective tool in freedom of expression especially among the young writers. Taking advantage of the relative anonymity the cyberspaces provides the young writers responded to regime's censorship and repression by utilising the cyberspace – which in itself offered its new forms of control through state filtering. Internet is not free and as reports demonstrate Iran has blocked over 10 million websites deemed politically or socially offensive.

The Internet, therefore, became an alternative means of publishing poetry, short stories, commentaries and other writings, which enable young authors to directly comment on the political struggles at any given time. It also opened them to a global audience breaking the barriers of State censorship. Young people utilized these technologies to keep the voices of their resistance alive by mobilising people inside and outside Iran. Individual authors post their poetry, writings and suggestions in weblogs, websites or social networks. The Internet enables young authors to expand their views and gather feedback on their writings and at the same time depict the crucial moments of the Iranian protesters in the streets. They have gradually become the messengers of protests through their writing; they depicted the live incidents of the demonstrations through their writings. The Internet accelerated the access of the authors to people, shocking their readers through providing news and images depicting the violent suppressions of the protesters by security forces. This immediate access to information coupled with effective reporting awakened people's minds in and out of Iran to the brutality of the regime. The use of internet in this way broke all social and political barriers of the past collectively refusing to conform and obey. Creativity was witnessed through new designs and layouts of new weblogs and websites.

With every new achievement new waves of arrest and intimidation, new efforts to censor and control were enforced by the regime. In its desperate attempts to silence dissent and free expression the regime has been forced to set up specialised monitoring bureaus to identify bloggers and writers, to draft new laws and forms of punishment even death to clamp down and control this new outlet of expression in any way that it can.

It can be argued that although in the past the anonymity offered by internet helped the young authors liberate themselves from constant societal pressures and the control of ruling regime and that it served as a relatively safe place for the disenfranchised especially youth and women, to express themselves freely and to be more visible, recently it has become an effective and useful tool for the young Iranians in their struggle for democracy in Iran.

Poetry and short story and the politics of resistance

Unquestionably, social and political changes have affected the creative output of poets and writers throughout Iran's long history. The events of the 1979 Revolution were no different nor were the consequences of the 2009 disputed elections. Young poets and writers are among the most influential groups in shaping protests and recent uprising in Iran. Therefore, individuality has been profoundly impacted by social and political causes and many famous Iranian poets and writers have been persecuted for their

observations and contributions. Today more than ever, as the climate of repression grows, the role of Iranian writers has never been more crucial in the struggle towards socio-political change. Through their command of the language and creativity they tell the story of hope and resistance and put a mirror in front of the state oppression to expose it for all to see.

Some young writers after the 1979 Revolution developed and mastered this literature of resistance. The same can be said of the young writers of the 20-35 years old age group of the 'Green Movement' who have followed in their footsteps adapting and responding to new forms of censorship and political oppression. Most of their work is dedicated to depicting the complex socio-political changes in Iran. Concerned with the ideas of democracy and freedom they criticise the government explicitly and express the desires and concerns of their generation. Their contribution in shaping the political discourse within the 'Green Movement' is enormous and cannot be denied. Their work spread rapidly on the internet reaching Iranians internationally. Using their technological know-how they beat the regime's filters and censors and manage to share their message successfully. As young cyber journalists reported on the brutality on the streets, poets and writers cooperated by writing about freedom.

There were numbers of collections of poetry and short stories published either in cyberspace or in print outside Iran that included the depiction of Iranian people's struggles for freedom. One of the most obvious examples is the inspired this is the tragic death of Neda Agha-Soltan in front of the world's eyes. The immediacy with which the news spread internationally and the collective condemnation of the international community was a powerful example of the power of this media. Her death inspired many poets and writers to reflect the scenes of her murder through their work and at the same time offer a new perspective of her death through poetry and fiction. The body of work produced at this time is important in its power to delegitimize the regime and undermine its authority through depicting people's struggle for democracy. The figurative expression and the glorification of the role of Iranian people and young generation have been witnessed in most of these works.

They remain at the centre of attention of the intelligence and security forces and the cycle of protest, publication, intimidation, arrest and detention has yet to be broken. But it does not stop there. Attempts to silence them and the voice of dissent result in using every means available to the State. This includes prohibition and banning from publishing their writings anywhere (magazines, newspapers, national media as well as social networks and the internet) by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance; thus attempting to remove their voice from the literary circles and the democracy discourse.

Conclusion

As I have discussed in this article literature has played a crucial role in both commenting and shaping Iran's socio-political changes. 1979 Revolution and the ensuing repression gave birth to new forms of resistance literature. This is witnessed again following the disputed 2009 presidential elections. Every generation has used the tools and media available to it to best express itself. The young generation of 2009 relying on technology and their own technological prowess have tried to express themselves freely while fighting a never ending cyber war with the State for control over the Internet. Young poets and writers have increasingly turned to blogs and websites set up online for the publication of their thoughts with hope of influencing and bringing about democratic change. The 'Green Movement' is enriched and kept alive by these and similar efforts. Whether they have remained in Iran or have been forced to choose a life in exile this young generation of writers are paying a heavy price for striving to realise their aspirations and desires.

They remain intimidated but not beaten. They risk serious threats to their physical integrity and liberty. Yet, they will continue to write and publish their poems, short stories and diaries and carry on influencing and inspiring others. They choose to do so in the knowledge that their work will accelerate the necessary social and political changes for the establishment of democracy in Iran no matter how small their contribution may be. There is no other choice.

Observing Human Rights: The Lost Link of Sports in Iran

Arash Adibzadeh

It was barely a year and half after the Revolution when the first sounds of intolerance and religious dogmatism were heard in the utterance of the man in charge of the fate of the nation's sport, 'Why are these donkeys playing in shorts?' Davoodi-Shamsi was referring to the players of the national football team with his usual vocabulary. Still shaking from the resonance of such utterances, the broadcast of wrestling – a historic national sport – was banned from our television screens and so began the war against sport. Very soon with the cries of war, sportspeople were declared nothing more than 'national traitors' and 'spoilt rich'.

Our sport became intertwined with political expedience as such actions were gradually accepted as the norm by the public. The see-saw tales of sportspeople and nouveau-politicians were tragic stories to tell. Any sport victory would dampen the nouveau-politicians malice yet before long their egotism would force sport into further isolation.

The Iranian Armenian Olympics

It can firmly be claimed that the Iranian Armenian Olympics whose torch would be lit annually at the Ararat Sports Stadium was the most organised stadium out of the reach of the politicians. It had successfully safeguarded the real essence and heart of sport and the footsteps of the political change witnessed elsewhere in Iran were nowhere to be seen.

Nevertheless, the narrow-mindedness of those steering the nation's sport could not even tolerate the achievements in this old stadium and their unfair glances fell upon them – one day the manner of the dress of the young Christians was a problem and the next their actions appeared to offend the governing Islamic morality.

This was repeated often enough until one day a misguided representative speaking at the Islamic Consultative Assembly called the stadium 'a nest of corruption' and 'a public bar – a place for wine drinkers'. And so the sports of Iranian Armenians became the new target and ruined bit by bit. Initially Armenians were denied visas to participate in the annual games and then Iranian Armenians comings and goings were restricted. This went on until the gathering of the Armenian youths at a sports stadium was deemed 'unjustified' and with it sparks of discrimination took flame.

Apartheid in Sport

With the collapse of Armenian Sport, Christian sportspeople had no choice but to try and find position among other teams. This proved to be a futile attempt which held nothing more than humiliation, ill treatment and discrimination for them.

The presence of zealot Muslims as sports managers had very unpleasant consequences for the Armenians. The following is an example of the treatment they received at the hands of a religious manager:

A man named Seyed Kazem Oliyaie was appointed as the executive manger of the popular Esteghlal Sports Club. The procurer for the club was a hard working and much respected Iranian Armenian called Vahik. He was liked by all and no one doubted his loyalty and sincerity. Nevertheless, Oliyaie could not tolerate his presence due to his Christian religion. In a Nazi style act he sacked Vahik claiming that as a Christian Vahik was unclean and the water he brings for the players is unclean and he, Oliyaie, had a religious duty to cleanse the place of such undesirables. These kinds of ill-treatment are experienced by Christians who have weathered the storm and somehow have managed to remain in the national teams.

Inquisition

Despite the many years since those dark Taleban-like actions, sports managers still require their members to answer about their religion. 'What is your religion?' must be answered in every application form regardless of it being for a small local team or membership in a national sports federation. In other words the sportsperson must declare his/her faith before joining. It goes without saying that their political loyalty to the Islamic regime must be ascertained before any acceptance.

Official Religion

The lucky religious minorities in Iran are Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians who based on the Islamic Constitution have been accorded limited rights. Yet, as stated they suffer varying levels of discrimination. The plight of those not recognised such as the followers of the Bahá'í faith or Buddhism is far worse. The extent of the discrimination is such that even Sunni Muslims at times choose to identify themselves as 'Shi'a' with the hope of evading future problems. It would therefore not be surprising if others also chose to lie and write down 'Muslim' in the box.

Women in Sport

It goes without saying that women have suffered the most in this ideological approach to sport. Enforced Islamic cover, prohibition of male coaches attending training sessions, lack of enough competent female coaches and prohibition of participation in many sports such as swimming which has recently been extended to the martial arts as well tell a sorry tale of discrimination. They are not even allowed to attend football matches. The docu-film 'Offside' shot in Iran told this story eloquently. The film highlighted the discrimination and the determination of the women to carve a place for themselves. Yet discrimination is polluting the air. When will this air be clean again?

A look at Modern Spirituality and the Youth in Iran

Ali Shirazi

The formation of 'modern spirituality' in my country Iran, particularly among the youth and middle classes, has met with contradictory reactions. These modern or new forms of spirituality can be understood in the framework of 'new religious movements'. They are also referred to as 'cults', 'sects', 'replacement religions', 'pseudo-spirituality', 'modern spirituality', 'mysticism' and so forth. The growth of a varied collection of new spirituality in Iran is born out of a combination of religious and social realities experienced in the last few decades and is therefore hard to attribute to one specific factor.

In reality, the birth and development of such phenomena were first experienced in the USA and Western Europe, then after the fall of the Soviet system in Eastern Europe and finally in countries such as Iran yet the question to answer has remained the same, 'is the appearance of this phenomenon a logical consequence of modernity and the modernising process or is it a direct reaction to modernity?' in the context of secularisation theories, 'modern spirituality' is assessed as humanising God or deifying humans; as such, religion or at least a form of religion cannot be eliminated from our modern world.

In Iran this phenomenon has manifested in various shapes or forms among the youth. In its organized form it is in contact with the public realm. In effect the 'modern spirituality' can be divided into two groups; one is the exactly in keeping with the western formula and the same has a branch in Iran like Transcendental Meditation (TM) or other branches such as Hare Krishna. Others work on a global level and have branches in Iran – their representatives are identifiable and known to many institutions and the security and disciplinary forces alike. They have official headquarters and charge hefty fees for their various types of self-awareness courses which they hold regularly. The first signs of such groups in Iran were witnessed around 1986/7 but reached its height in 1996. Since then they have expanded extensively and there is hardly any city without one of their headquarters.

Some of the principles and characteristics of this modern spirituality include: a combined mentality in a sense that they include selective measures of Shi'a Islam and rely heavily on characters especially on 'Ali' – the first Shi'a Imam; they are reliant on mystic figures and specifically on Rumi, the Persian mystic poet and philosopher; others are reliant on some eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism; they are institutionally structured; are hierarchal; have inner power structure; have detailed teachings and accepted rules of behaviour; have clear boundaries between members and non members; have layers in a sense that they recruit members and invest and deal with them according to their level of input and energy; sometimes one hundred per cent devotion is demanded and sometimes they classify members based on the level of their financial investment; some of the trends reject the idea of an absolute truth. Their types also differ according to social class but are predominantly of the middle and upper classes; some are exclusively made up of the youth but others include all ages; the founder or the beloved has a particular title and is mostly male but not exclusively so; interestingly, some pay particular attention to the mundane and daily life in contradiction to traditional mysticism; they are very modern in their approach in propagating their ideas and religious power is handled delicately; they are not exclusive and easy to join; unlike traditional religion one can be a member of several different groups therefore one can maintain an established religion while being a member; although they stress the importance of the individual they engage in group activity or in other words they breakdown the traditional barriers between the individual and the collective; they place a great deal of importance on mental and spiritual health.

Another feature which I would like to stress that applies to much of the 'new religious movements', 'modern spirituality' or even to religious ideology of the Iranian intellectual from 1961 onwards is that while they all reject 'authority', they readily accept it in these new forms. In other words they may object to the power of the father within the family or reject the clerical power as the official source of religion or stand up against

the incumbent political power but in their created relationship they very clear obey a hierarchal authority which is never horizontal. Of course, this cannot be attributed to all modern spirituality but is true of most.

Why is it that we have witnessed the appearance of such phenomena in Iran since 1986? In my opinion, it firstly goes back to the modernisation of the society and one of its important factors, personal choice. This is not exclusive to the 'new religious movements' and can be witnessed in all new movements. Secondly, it is as a result of experiencing a fundamental crisis in our cultural values, of which a major part is religious. Certainly, its roots go further back than 1986, but it takes hold and spreads from then on. Thirdly, it is in the face of traditional institutionalised religion that is represented by the clergy which clearly lacks spirituality. Fourthly, it is a direct consequence of the crisis in political Islam and the religiousness of its ideology. In other words, as soon as religious ideology gained political power, the first generation of religious intellectuals were faced with a crisis of faith. Many who follow the 'modern spirituality' are followers of Dr Ali Shariati, the revolutionary religious sociologist. Many others are those who have turned their back on establishment religion. And finally, the attempts at the enforcement of religious morality by Islamic Republic's political establishment was responsible for turning many towards new forms of spirituality.

The pathology of the movement identifies several points. The first point is the fact that modern spirituality is without the restrictions and austerity of traditional religion. The second crucial point is the weakness of religious epistemology. Another factor is the stress on disciple husbandry despite their claim and insistence on individuality and personal growth. Final point is lack of clarity in some of the organised groups. It is a case that the more organised they are the more closed they are and the more their financial affairs are shrouded in a cloud of secrecy – it may be that as a condition of joining, one may even have to assign one's home and other belongings to the group.

In Iran today, more than ever before we are living in a society where we are faced with 'supermarket religion' syndrome – in the same way that we shop for food for our bodies, we now have the choice of shopping for spirituality off the shelf for our minds. This is how some choose to give meaning to their lives and search for their particular answers regardless of how right or wrong this may be.

Appendix

Released in June 2012 as an expression of solidarity, **United for Iran** has collaborated with musicians from Iran, Egypt, Libya, South Africa, U.S., Palestine, Iraq, Sweden, Japan and more to produce **AZADI: Freedom Songs for Iran**. United for Iran hopes their message reaches all youth in Iran and encourages them on the path towards freedom. Azadi is available on-line at: www.azadimusic.bandcamp.com

Joint statement by a number of international organizations on the Islamic Republics policies against the universal right to education and academic freedom, available at:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/033/2012/en/66dd4554-74a9-4efc-bb66-8868ffb0f7a7/mde130332012en.html>

In her new book, Nazanin Afshin Jam looks at her life in parallel to that of Nazanin Fatehi, the 17 year old on death row whose life she helped save. She uses their accounts to encourage all Iranians to make personal initiatives in serving fellow Iranians, starting in our homes and neighbourhoods. Through the sale of 'The Tale of Two Nazanins' available at www.nazanin.ca she hopes to raise funds in order to support organizations working to combat violence against women.

In its 2012 report on human rights in Iran, Peace Jam focuses on the dynamics affecting all Iranians, including youth. Peace Jam encourages youth and Nobel Peace Laureates to collaborate through education and service. On the same site, there is a message from Archbishop Desmond Tutu to Iranians on the third anniversary of the post-election uprising:

<http://www.peacejam.org/documents/msgboard/Staff%20Resources/2012%20Iran%20Human%20Rights%20Report.pdf>

A grassroots initiative seeking justice for the victims and survivors of executions carried out by Islamic Republic officials during the 1980's, Iran Tribunal, held its truth commission sessions during the third week of June 2012 in London. More than 85 victims provided testimonies in person and otherwise. In order to submit a statement please see: <http://www.irantribunal.com/PDF/witness%20statement%20form-En.pdf>

About the authors

Barbara Lochbihler MEP is the Chair of the European Parliament sub-committee on Human Rights. She joined the European Parliament as a representative of the German Green party. Prior to joining the Parliament she served as General Secretary of Amnesty International Germany for ten years, having previously served as general secretary of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (Geneva) from 1992-1999. She is a founding member of the German Institute for Human Rights and the founding member of the Human Rights Foundation.

Tahirih Danesh is a Human Rights Researcher and Documenter specializing in the case of minorities in Iran. She is an independent consultant dedicated to in-depth investigation, research and documentation, analysis and reporting of human rights abuses in Iran; focusing on allegations of serious violations of human rights and international criminal law against minorities based on religion, ethnicity, gender or age; monitoring hate-based propaganda through Iranian media; promotion of public awareness of issues concerning democracy and human rights in Iran; and an advocate of human rights education for the younger generation of Iranians both in Iran and abroad. She is a Senior Research Associate at the Foreign Policy Centre where she is the series editor of the Iran Human Rights Review and is also an honorary research fellow at the University of Roehampton.

Roya Kashefi is the head of the human rights committee of the Association of Iranian Researchers (ACI), an international non-profit organisation dedicated to unbiased and objective study of Iranian issues. She regularly participates in and presents papers at international conferences as well as attending sessions at the United Nations Human Rights Council. In addition, Roya comments on international Radio and Television and has been involved with and assisted in the production of television and radio documentaries on the Islamic Republic of Iran. Her current research focuses on two issues. First, education and job opportunities for women in Iran, and second, national laws and policies affecting the lives of Iran's ethnic and religious groups.

Mehr Emadi is a researcher and lecturer at Universities of Warwick, Coventry, Staffordshire, Visiting Professor at University of Prague (VSE), St. Petersburg University, University of Tirana, Visiting Fellow at Cornell University, Prague School of Economics, Keil University, state University of St. Petersburg and Associated Fellow at Industrial Economics Research Programme (Cambridge University), OECD-EU research Programme on Financial Reforms in Eastern Europe, Emadi has taken part in EU Projects on Privatization, Industrial Competitiveness, Human resource Upgrading, Technology Transfer and Foreign Direct Investment and Policy Advisor. He has presented and published more than seventy papers and appeared on major media outlets including BBC, CNN, Euro News, Russian TV, Rasa, VOA, and Sky News.

Hossein Ladjevardi is president of Association de Chercheurs Iraniens (ACI) an international non-profit non-partisan think tank researching issues concerning the future of Iran. Dr Ladjevardi is a sociologist. His areas of expertise include statistics and demography. He has written extensively on socio-political developments in Iran and most recently published a series of four books offering his thoughts for the way forward for Iran's young generation.

Saeed Paivandi is a professor of sociology at the Paris-8 University. He has an extensive background in education and specific expertise in Iran's post-revolutionary education system. Dr. Paivandi has written more than 34 articles, numerous research papers and comparative studies on topics related to education, including a book entitled, Religion and Education in Iran: the Failure of Islamicising Schools, published in 2006 (L'Harmattan – Paris).

Open Doors is supplying Bibles, training church leaders, delivering Scripture-based literacy programmes and supporting Christians who suffer for their faith in over 50 countries. In the UK and Ireland Open Doors strives to raise awareness of global persecution, mobilising prayer, support and action among Christians.

Nasser Boladai is spokesperson of BPP (Balochistan Peoples Party) and a member of the International Committee of the CNFI (Congress of Nationalities for a Federal Iran). Boladai is a member of the editorial board for a Balochi and Persian magazine called TRAN, which is devoted to political and cultural discourse among Balochs, and other Iranians. He has contributed numerous articles to this magazine on national self determination, people's sovereignty, Federalism, Balochi language and literature specifically in the area of Balochi Folklore. At the present he is cooperating with Uppsala University to compile a Balochi dictionary.

Azadeh Pourzand is a recent graduate of Harvard John F. Kennedy School of Government and Nijenrode Business Universiteit in NL. She works as a freelance consultant and a researcher for a number of international organizations focusing on strengthening civil society in the Muslim world.

Mohammad Mostafaei was a human rights lawyer in Iran focussing on the rights of children. A graduate of law and political science at Tehran University, Mostafaei's wife was briefly detained in as a hostage in 2010 in order to force Mostafaei to stop his human rights activities, particularly those pertaining to the case of Sakineh Ashiani, a woman sentenced to death by stoning. Mostafaei and his family now reside in Norway.

Saghi Ghahreman is the president of the Iranian Queer Organization - a non-profit organisation that defends the human and civil rights of Iranian LGBT individuals living in Iran or among the diaspora. A published poet, Saghi is the first openly lesbian Iranian who has written extensively on the controversial issue of homosexuality and gender fluidity against the oppressive norms of Iranian culture. An interview with her published in 2007 in an Iranian daily, Sharq, forced a two-year suspension of the popular reformist paper. Saghi fled Iran in 1984 to Canada with her young son and husband, whom she divorced five years after.

Dr Bronwen Robertson is Small Media's Research Manager and Editor. She graduated from the University of Melbourne with a PhD in Ethnomusicology in 2010 and her book, Reverberations of Dissent in Iran, was published by Continuum (New York) in June 2012. Her reports on Tehran's unofficial rock music scene are based on a year of participant-observation field research conducted between July 2007 and July 2008 in Tehran and through on-going contact with the scene via the internet. Bronwen has also worked as a music tutor and translator for Afghan and Iranian refugee children in London.

Somi Arian was born in 1981. She lived in Iran until her move to the UK in 2005, where she earned two masters degrees in political science and political philosophy from Dundee and St Andrews Universities. She works as a TV producer and director at Manoto TV, and the lead singer of a metal band, Mortad.

Azadeh Davachi is a PhD student in Post Colonial And Iranian Women's Literary Studies at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Her Master Degree is in English literature, focusing on Iranian modern literature and Western philosophy and the comparison between them. She has published two collections of poetry and two of her books including a collection of her articles on Iranian women's rights and feminist movements in Iran are under publishing, all of which are in Persian. Since 2010, beside her political and social activities, she is undertaking her PhD on feminist politics and resistance in selected novels by contemporary Iranian women writers.

Arash Adibzadeh is a Sports Journalist and owns a film production company in Paris. Arash is also a regular producer with Radio France Internationale's Persian program.

Ali Shirazi (pen name) lectures on human rights law in Iran.

The Foreign Policy Centre



The Foreign Policy Centre
Suite 11, Second floor
23-28 Penn Street
London N1 5DL
United Kingdom
www.fpc.org.uk
events@fpc.org.uk
© Foreign Policy Centre 2012
All rights reserved