

## MIT Open Access Articles

*The Rhythmic Beat of the Revolution in Iran*

The MIT Faculty has made this article openly available. **Please share** how this access benefits you. Your story matters.

**Citation:** FISCHER, MICHAEL M. J. "The Rhythmic Beat of the Revolution in Iran." Cultural Anthropology 25, 3 (July 2010): 497–543 © 2010 American Anthropological Association

**As Published:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01068.x>

**Publisher:** Society for Cultural Anthropology

**Persistent URL:** <http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/116117>

**Version:** Final published version: final published article, as it appeared in a journal, conference proceedings, or other formally published context

**Terms of Use:** Article is made available in accordance with the publisher's policy and may be subject to US copyright law. Please refer to the publisher's site for terms of use.





## The Rhythmic Beat of the Revolution in Iran

MICHAEL M. J. FISCHER  
MIT

*Mah, mah-e khun ast,*

*Seyyid Ali dar negun ast.*

[It's the month, month of blood,

Seyyid Ali (Khomeinei) will be toppled.]

*Montazeri na morde, hokumat morde.*

[Montazeri is not dead, the government is dead.]

—slogans chanted in Qum during the funeral marches for Ayatullah Hossein Ali  
Montazeri, December 21, 2009<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION: THE BEAT, THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE, AND THE SCENARIOS OF THE REVOLUTION

Coincidence and timing, as in music, are the tricks of politics. Instruments change: the new social media of the Internet, cell phone cameras, Twitter, and Facebook, are new. But some instruments remain the same: the passions of hope and anger. Repetitions repeat with a difference, anxiously conjuring costumes and slogans of the past to enact a new historic scene.<sup>2</sup> Not always does history repeat only twice, the first time as tragedy, again as farce.<sup>3</sup> More often the repetitions, including farce and failure, clear the way for the next movement. The actors need to catch the beat and move in harmonic concert, carrying minor notes and dissonance along.

In Iran religion is part of the music, and so are the ideals of secular constitutionalism. Religion in counterpoint percussion goes back in one steady beat to the

16th century Safavid establishment of Shi'ism as the state religion, and in different equally steady beat, back to pre-Islamic Zoroastrian tonalities.<sup>4</sup> The insistent secular constitutional rhythm also is not new. It goes back more than a century to the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11 and its antecedent movements. The musicality of Iranian aspirational discourse requires harmonics to proceed. To proceed it cannot mindlessly repeat as in an old-fashioned recording with a stuck needle.

Listen first to the passage of the month of Muharram 2009: the doubled *tombak* drum beat of Ashura (“the tenth” of Muharram) and the *dohol* drum beat of the death of Ayatullah Hossein Ali Montazeri (on the third of Muharram). The goblet shaped tombak played with the fingers has a bass (*tom*) note tapped in the middle of the drum head, and a high (*bak*) note on the edge of the drum head. The two-sided dohol is played with two sticks of different texture, one beat setting a rhythmic pace, the other sending out a beacon signal for those along the lines of march (among nomads along their migration routes to stragglers behind and to alert villagers ahead).<sup>5</sup>

Second, listen to the new instruments of our times that have been transforming the public sphere in Iran—the low-tech green armbands and scarves (the green wave, or *moj-e sabz*), and the high-tech Internet and cell phone cameras, inscribing and filling the spaces of perception.<sup>6</sup> (On the terms for civil society and public sphere, see Fischer and Abedi, 1993. And on the functions of the visual media of the 1990s, particularly film, see Fischer 2004.) What is new is the decentralized capacities of civil society, recognized in the slogan *resane shomaiid* [you are the media], articulating the subjectivity of a new informational flow (see below). The capacities have been in the making for over a decade both via the cat-and-mouse game between state censorship and the press, and also via the networking of a student generation marked by the violent repression of demonstrations in 1999, and a growing determined women's movement partly under the banner of the million signature campaign for women's rights launched in 2006.<sup>7</sup> The videos cited in the footnotes here are but only a few of the many available, a hint of civil society's new instruments, ones that Iran's government has also used to produce counter (dis)information and that it has tried to control in one of the two major struggles (the other is China) between civil society and government control of the new media.

Third, listen to the pulse, the long fetch, the waves receding and returning, the long-term respirations of the social revolution (1873, 1905, 1953, 1963, 1979) and the struggles against clerical reaction. In the 1905–11 Constitutional Revolution, Sheikh Fazlullah Nuri insisted that constitution (*mashruteh*) be conditioned (*mashru'e*)

by the veto power of the clerics, a constitutional provision that was to become trouble after the 1979 revolution. In the 1920s the clergy opposed Reza Khan's efforts to establish an Atatürk-like republic, causing him to declare himself shah instead. In 1953 Ayatullah S. Abol-Ghassem Kashani abandoned the coalition with Muhammad Mossadegh and threw his support to the young Muhammad Reza Shah. In 1979 Ayatullah Khomeini sidelined not only his liberal constitutionalist (Mehdi Bazargan, Ibrahim Yazdi, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr) coalition partners, but also the clerics (Grand Ayatullah Mohammed Kazem Shariatmadari, Seyyid Mahmoud Taleghani) who warned against the clerics exercising power as inevitably leading to the corruption and undermining of Islam.

And yet the social revolution—the slow shifting of power away from the hands of corrupt elites into more participatory and representative government supported by an increasingly educated populace—continues. It is evidenced in years of election processes, however controlled and flawed, at both local and national levels, not in its outcomes, but in the growing insistence on freedom and participation that will not be stilled. The social revolution requires not only free elections, but a shift from a dominating rentier economy, a move into a diversified knowledge economy, and employment of Iran's best and brightest rather than their export to Europe, North America, and Australia.

There is the possibility that, as in the 1920s, the social revolution will detour through another Reza Khan before the adjustment of a growing educated middle class with demands for open policy debate and political decision making participation can be effected, but the long fetch of the social revolution continues. At this moment of writing, the skies are darkening, the outcome is very uncertain, and at best in part III a risk scenario matrix of possible outcomes can be sketched.

This essay investigates three methods for reading topical events. In Part I, breaking news is read in terms of historically and structurally informed social theory, with an eye to how civil society and public spheres are structured. There is an aesthetics to these spheres, not simply a calculus of interests or a space where rational debate can be abstracted from the civil society into a political public sphere. Part II draws out the technical infrastructure within which social and cultural action happens and civil society is restructured, both low-tech and high-tech, and calls attention to the ways in which the Green Wave is a confluence of civil society movements of women, labor, students, and journalists, among others. Part III plays with a futuring method—rather like the scenario methods used in industry, and the simulation techniques used in the sciences—to plan for and evaluate alternative social logics that can play out in uncertain and underdetermined futures. The

methodology of scenario building, often using a two-by-two logic matrix, attempts to shift attention from keeping score of hits by one temporarily polarized side against another (a two-person game) or one political leader against another (Victor Hugo) to evaluating the political sociology and the strengths and weaknesses of alternative configurations or outcomes.<sup>8</sup> The number of cells can be increased, and subscenarios defined, but the object is to evaluate features of alternative configurations. In all three sections, attention is paid to what Lévi-Strauss (1964, 1971) called the harmonics and disharmonics of multiple strands and scales of social action, or what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1980) called striated versus smooth structures, and molecular versus molar scales.

### I. LISTEN TO THE BEAT, LISTEN TO THE CALL OF THE REED

Azadi-yet Montazeri, mobarak!

[You are free Montazeri, congratulations!]

Ashe mazlumen, va mate mazlume

[He lived a *mazlum*, he died a *mazlum* (wrongfully injured and oppressed)]

—Chants at Montazeri's funeral, December 21, 2009<sup>9</sup>

Listen to the reed, to the separation of the reed,  
to the sound of the ney (flute)

—Rumi, *Masnavi*.<sup>10</sup>

You don't need to be a historian of Iran or a Middle East expert to hear the beat and the sounds in the streets conveyed around the world by mobile-phone video uploads to YouTube. You just need, perhaps, a few program notes on the stage set and the actors. The decades- and century-long social revolution unfolding in slow bass percussion is one melody line; another important melody line is the yearly passion plays of Muharram, of the death of the third Imam, Ali, who sacrificed himself at Karbala as a call of witnessing against injustice so that later generations would take up his challenge to establish social justice in this world and not just the next. They articulate together, but not as you might think—not with traditionalists holding the second melody line while the modernists hold the first. There would be no music were it so discordant. Indeed, in the year 2008 (or 1388 by the Persian calendar, composed of both solar Zoroastrian and lunar Muslim components)<sup>11</sup> it is precisely the modernists who are calling the Karbala tune, wresting it from being a repressive state ideology frozen in false, and no longer sustainable, reconstructions of the revolution of 1979 used to legitimize the Islamic Republic of Iran, itself an

unstable locution teetering between republicanism and Islamist theocracy. Iran is not the only majority Muslim country struggling with this dissonance, although it is one of the few Shi'ite ones. There are harmonics (not just similarities but influences and consequences) for Turkey, Pakistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine most immediately, and a number of other places more distant. And there are harmonics with revolutionary and religious histories in Europe and the United States, which continue to reverberate in the reception of new migrants from the Islamic world.

### Grief, Rage, and Directed Anger

The chants of “Ya Hossein Ali!” are different this year, this Muharram month of 2009.<sup>12</sup> The actors have shifted roles in the annual passion play that plays itself out as national Iranian politics—and not just in the ritual marches and reenactments of the martyrdom of the third Imam (Hossein), son of Ali (the first Imam and son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad). Ayatullah *Hossein Ali* Montazeri—once the designated heir to Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini—has reemerged in this play as Hossein. And the man who replaced him as successor, and isolated him in his house in Qum, and whom Montazeri publicly mocked as unworthy of the role, the “Leader” (*Rahbar*) S. Ali Khamene'i stands now reviled by the chanting crowds as mere Seyyid Ali, reverting to his status when he was primarily known in Mashhad as a *membari* (sermonizer on the pulpit), Seyyid Ali Pa'in Khiabani (the Seyyed Ali of the Lower Street). Khamene'i was elevated to the post of *velayat-i faqih* (guardianship by the jurist) or supreme leader after the death of Khomeini in 1989 by the Council of Guardians in a move orchestrated by then President Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsinjani.

The crowds are enraged by Khamenei's “condolences” at Montazeri's death, in which he acknowledges Montazeri only as a teacher (*ostad*) from whom “some” benefited, and prays that God forgive Montazeri's serious sins: first, disagreeing with the late Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini over the execution of thousands of political prisoners in 1988; second, his condemnations in 1997 of the Islamic Republic as neither Islamic nor republic; and thirdly, his rejection of the tenth presidential elections in June 2009 as illegitimate and void (*batel*), and his calls for those who beat, jailed, and tortured millions who came onto the streets in protest to be condemned as criminals. To Khamenei's lame condolences, the crowds chant, “We don't want rationed condolences!” Khamenei's condolences are being labeled *kinah*, a form of vengefulness exacted when someone who has done something to you is already down, not an admirable passion. And more

generally the crowds chant, “Seyyid Ali qatel-e, velayat-esh batel-e” [Seyyid Ali is a murderer, his guardianship is void].

Ayatullah Sheikh Hossein Ali Montazeri died in his sleep on Sunday, December 20, 2009, the third day of the month Muharram, the month when the third Imam, Hossein, was killed in the Battle of Karbala. Montazeri’s *ruz-e sevjom* (seventh-day anniversary; important anniversaries after a death are the third, seventh, fortieth, and year) would come on Sunday, the 10th (Ashura) of Muharram, when Hossein was killed by Shemr, the general of the caliph Yazid. Montazeri died, doubly symbolically, on *Shab-e Yalda*, the celebration of the solstice, the slow rebirth of Mithra or Mehr (light, truth, honesty, generosity, and the guarantor of promises and contract, symbolized in ancient Iranian Zoroastrian tradition by the sun) and the coming of spring, as the daylight begins to lengthen.

Already at his funeral, in the eulogy by his disciple Hojjat-ul-Islam Qabel, and in the streets, Montazeri was being called by Hossein’s honorific, *mazlum* (the wronged one, the oppressed one, the unrevenged slain one): *Montazeri-ye mazlum*. “He lived a *mazlum*, he died a *mazlum*” (Arabic, *ashe mazlumen, va mate mazlume*; Persian, *mazlum zist, wa mazlum mord*). One does not call the other Imams by this honorific. One doesn’t say Ali *mazlum* or Hassan *mazlum*, only Hossein, the son of Ali, is *mazlum*, and now Hossein Ali [Montazeri]. Inside the Shrine of Hazrat-e Masumeh (Fatimeh, the sister of the eighth Imam, Reza) where he was buried, the crowd chanted “Ya Hazrat-e Masumeh!, Ya Montazeri Masumeh!” according to Montazeri the epithet “the pure soul” usually reserved for the Imams. In an effort to block his growing centrality, his exposure of Khomeini’s execution order against thousands of leftist prisoners (incl. a photostat of the signed and sealed order in Khomeini’s hand), and the circulation of his memoirs and documents, the regime shut down his website the day after his death. But events had already run far ahead.

### Who Was This Cleric Montazeri?

Montazeri had a checkered career, but even his critics agree he was honest and spoke his mind even when it might have been wiser to bide his time. And he did change course when he saw things going awry in a tyrannical direction, although he could have listened to the earlier and quite similar warnings by Seyyed Mahmud Taleghani in 1979 at the beginnings of the Islamic republic. On the anniversary of the Black Friday massacre at Jaleh Square, a turning point in the revolution [1978], Seyyed Taleghani (who had received the largest number of votes in the elections for the Assembly of Experts [*majlis khabregan*] but had been outmaneuvered for

its presidency by Montazeri and Ayatullah Beheshti, head of Khomeini's Islamic Republican Party), spoke at the Behesht-e Zarah cemetery, warning Iranians to avoid a return to despotism masquerading as religion. It was against Islam, he reminded his listeners, to deprive people of the right to criticize, to protest, and to express grievances. A few days later on September 9, he died. He had long argued for democratic local councils, and to honor his memory—or to avoid protests in his name—local councils were hurriedly organized a month after his death in provincial towns. Crowds in the street chanted, as they do today for Montazeri, "Taleghani, you are the soul of the revolution."

Montazeri would echo Taleghani's warnings a decade later in 1988, and more and more forcefully against the hardening dictatorship under Khomeini's successor, Khamene'i. It is one of many repetitions in the revolution, soundings of a democratic beat, pushed again and again by those marginalized by authoritarian controls.

On the antidemocratic side, Montazeri stands accused of having helped forge the idea of *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship by the religious leaders) in the early 1970s, even before Khomeini; of having helped write the undemocratic elements of the constitution;<sup>13</sup> of having started the idea of the Pasdaran (consolidating the militias as a parallel counterforce to the army to enforce the state Islamist ideology). He promoted export of the revolution to Bahrain, eastern Saudi Arabia, southern Iraq, and particularly among the Shi'ites in Lebanon (Amal, and then Hezbollah). The antics of his son Sh. Mahmud "Ayatullah Ringo" sometimes caused embarrassment (and the nickname) as when he flew to Libya without a passport proclaiming that revolutionaries didn't need passports. This son was killed by the bombing of the Islamic Republican Party headquarters in 1981. Ayatullah Montazeri and "Ayatullah Ringo," father and son, are now buried next to each other in Qum in the great shrine of Fatimeh, Hazrat-e Masumeh.

Selected by the Guardian Council to be Khomeini's successor, and holding this position for eight years, in 1988 Montazeri objected to the mass killings of leftist political prisoners after a failed plot against the life of Khomeini; and as his criticisms did not soften, Khomeini asked for his resignation. Montazeri was known for sending money to the families of prisoners, regardless of their politics. His critics argue that he made a horrendous miscalculation at this time, not biding his time until he could succeed the old man, and then turn the republic in a more liberal direction. It was not the first time he was accused of the sin of stubborn (some say stupid) honesty for which he is today celebrated.



The first time was in the early 1970s when he wrote the introduction to a book that got him ostracized by the religious community. The book, “The Eternal or Living Martyr” (*Shahid Javid*) by Hojjat-ul-Islam Nimatollah Salahi-Najafabadi, argued that Imam Hossein had not gone toward Kufa with divine foreknowledge of his martyrdom, but that he intended to establish an Islamic government there, and that he had miscalculated his chances, leaving it to future generations to try again. The book caused a furor. Accused of demeaning the Imam to a mere politician, a series of refutations were written by leading clerical figures Jafar Sobhani, Nasser Makarem, and others, and a dream poem circulated in which Shemr, the slayer of Hossein, thanks God for Hossein Ali Montazeri who after 1,400 years wipes away the sin of killing an Imam, converting it into merely a political struggle between competing dynasts. Montazeri was reduced to isolation in Qum.

When I lived in Qum in 1975, people still spoke of him cautiously as a good man who had made a bad mistake. But that was the year when things began to change, when a rehearsal for the revolution to come was staged in Qum, and the arguments began to take on force that one should not cry for Hossein during the Muharram celebrations, but follow his example to try to create an Islamic government in the name of social justice. Suddenly everyone was saying what Salahi and Montazeri had said, and that became the foundation of the notion of *velayat-i faqih* in the political arena, a doctrine that Khomeini clumsily tried to make in his *Hokumat-i Islami: Velayat-i Faqih* around the same time (see an analysis of his arguments in Fischer and Abedi 1990). Montazeri had been a student in Khomeini’s classes on gnostic ethics (*ifan*) in Qum before Khomeini’s 1964 exile from Iran, classes described by fellow student and roommate, Morteza Mutahhari, as conducted with much crying and wailing, always concluded with the teacher raising his hands and giving a long and moving prayer, which again would bring tears to the eyes.

Montazeri’s credentials in the revolution were almost unassailable, but with his demotion by Khomeini, jokes were circulated to ridicule and demean him as *khol* (a fool, senile, even insane). But his 1997 public speech (available on YouTube) in which he pointed out that Rahbar Khamene’i was not even a *marja’-e taqlid* (guide for imitation, one whose knowledge of the law is secure enough to be followed by ordinary Muslims), and mocked him as a mere kid (*bacch*) stung, and Montazeri was put under house arrest from 1997 to 2003.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed Khamene’i’s credentials were repeatedly called into question during the 2009 tenth presidential elections and their angry aftermath, with former president Ayatullah Akbar Hashemi Rafsinjani warning that he had elevated Khamene’i

to his position and could also unmake him. When Khomeini died, there was a brief attempt to use the senile Ayatullah Ali Araki as an issuer of fatwas to bolster the government, until Rafsinjani decided that making the junior cleric Khamene'i, who had no independent power base, the nominal velayat-e faqi of the republic would allow him (Rafsinjani) to lead, with Khamene'i deferring. This initially was the case.

### **The June 2009 Presidential Elections and Muharram**

In June 2009, in a badly managed electoral coup, Muhammad Ahmadinejad was declared the winner for a second term without observing any of the niceties of taking the time needed to count the ballots or vet them as required by law. Khamene'i fatefully threw his support behind Ahmadinejad and his supporters in the Revolutionary Guard, the Pasdaran, who had been gaining control of both the economy and the security apparatus of the state. Khamene'i repeatedly issued dire warnings to people to stop protesting, and the security forces attacked demonstrators. The attacks were caught on hundreds of video clips, with the almost black and white clarity of graphic novels as crowds of hundreds of thousands of unarmed civilians were attacked by layers of intimidatingly dressed and armed security forces: riot police in the latest helmets, body armor and shields; officially uniformed Pasdaran with rifles; black shirted young men of the Baseej militia on motorcycles with batons and chains moving through the crowds beating and running people down; white shirted local baseej neighborhood enforcers; and plain clothes agents with pistols.<sup>15</sup> Injured victims were seized from hospitals and killed, bodies were disappeared, and others were returned to families only after paying for the bullets expended by the state. Intellectuals and dissidents were arrested, tortured, and made to give televised confessions (without concern for believability) to being agents of foreign efforts to conduct a velvet revolution against the state. Outworn metaphors of infection and contagion from abroad were deployed, with their implication that the pathogen carriers must be neutralized, silenced, or killed. Never has an admission of insufficiency of Islamic ideology to resist other ideologies been so open.

Montazeri's June 16, 2009, public reaction was uncompromising:

Declaring results that no one in their right mind can believe, and despite all the evidence of crafted results, and contrary to the people's protests, in front of the eyes of the same nation who carried the weight of a revolution and eight years of war, in front of the eyes of local and foreign reporters, attacked the

children of the people with astonishing violence. And now they are attempting a purge, arresting the intellectuals, political opponents and scientists.

Now, based on my religious duties, I remind you:

1. A legitimate state must respect all points of view. It may not oppress critical views. I fear this will lead to the loss of people's faith in Islam.
2. Given the current circumstances, I expect the government to take all measures to restore people's confidence. Otherwise, as I have already said, a government not respecting the people's vote has no religious or political legitimacy.
3. I invite everyone, especially the youth, to continue reclaiming their rights calmly, and not allow those who want to associate this movement with chaos to succeed.
4. I ask the police and army personnel not to "sell their religion," and be aware that receiving orders will not excuse them before God. Recognize the protesting youth as your children. Today, censorship and cutting telecommunication lines cannot hide the truth.<sup>16</sup>

On the day of Montazeri's funeral in Qum, tens of thousands attended despite government warnings not to go.<sup>17</sup> A now-frequent intimidation tactic was ineffective: phone calls from the security forces to intellectuals and leaders warning them to stay home. Presidential contenders, former prime minister Mir Hossein Mousavi and former speaker of Parliament Mehdi Karoubi, however, called for a national day of mourning and invited people to go to Qum. On the return to Tehran, Mousavi's car was harassed by Baseej on motorcycles, one breaking a back window. In Qum itself, a ceremony on day two was canceled by the family when security forces occupied the mosque where it was to take place.

On Ruz-e Sevvom, the third day, the government repeated its ban on mourning ceremonies. In Qum, the homes of Montezari, his son, and that of Ayatullah Yousef Sanei (a possible successor to Montezari's mantle of critic of the government) were attacked by the Baseej, and Sanei was prevented from holding memorial services for his friend. In Isfahan, Ayatullah Jaleedin Taheri (a disciple of Montazeri, former Imam Jome of Isfahan, and another potential heir to Montazeri) was prevented from holding ceremonies, and the main eulogist (Hojjat ul Islam Masud Adib) and some 50 others were arrested. Police blocked entry to the Seyyid mosque, beat mourners inside, and released tear gas, while Baseej and plain clothes agents beat mourners in the streets. In Tehran, the Hosseiniyeh Ershad, famed for being the

site of Dr. Ali Shariati's galvanizing lectures in the 1970s, was blocked from holding ceremonies. And there were more clashes in Najafabad-i Isfahan, Montezari's home town, and in the city of Zanjan.

On Tasua, the ninth of Muharram, the government for the first time banned the Tasua and Ashura ceremonies at the shrine of Khomeini. Police searched travelers' bags in subway stations confiscating anything green, the color of the opposition. They checked cell phones and confiscated those with images of protests. They jammed satellite television programs from abroad and slowed the Internet to a crawl. The chief of police warned again that so far the police had used only minimal violence but were prepared to "do what was necessary." There were clashes, beatings, and injuries in the three central squares of Tehran (Engelab or Revolution Square, Imam Hossein Square, and Ferdowsi Square), and in north Tehran at the Jamran mosque used by Khomeini when he lived in Tehran. Former president Khatami was to speak at the Jamran Mosque but he was disrupted by Baseej armed with chains and pepper spray.<sup>18</sup> Responding to the support of the protesters by members of the Khomeini family, a building belonging to them was attacked by Baseej breaking windows and shouting "Ya Abolfaz, keep Khamene'i safe." Thousands of protesters converged on the mosque and were met by reinforcements of government forces with tear gas, beatings, and threats of live fire. Dispersed, they fanned out and streets were jammed with cars honking in support of the protests.<sup>19</sup> Earlier in the day, Khamene'i gave the noon sermon at the same Jamran mosque, but the fact that it was not publically broadcast, and that only a few of the key state leaders chose to pray behind him on this highly symbolic date, was taken as a sign of being at least momentarily on the defensive.<sup>20</sup>

A video clip from Tehran shows protesters in a public bus chanting, "This is the month of blood, Yazid will fall," and another clip from Isfahan showed the chant had become an explicit threefold identity:

*In mah, mah-e khun-e, regime sar neguneh*

*In mah, mah-e khun-e Sayyid Ali sar neguneh*

*In mah, mah-e khun-e Yazid sar negune*

[This month, month of blood, the regime is toppled, Seyyid Ali is toppled, Yazid is toppled]

Ashura was indeed bloody. After days of phone calls threatening his life S. Ali Mousavi Habibi, 43, a nephew of presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi, was shot through the heart as he witnessed a four-wheel-drive Nissan Patrol vehicle outside his house running down people (presumably to position him as the mark for

the assassin); five men from the vehicle stepped out and one shot him. Authorities seized the body at the Ibn Sina (Avicenna) hospital, spiriting it away, and warned the family not to hold funeral ceremonies.<sup>21</sup> Although police denied opening fire at protesters, at least four others were reported shot in Tehran and 17 were being operated on at Naimeh Hospital plus 60 others with serious head wounds.<sup>22</sup> At least four were shot dead in Tabriz and one in Shiraz. Protests raged in cities across the country: Mashhad, Shiraz, Tabriz, Isfahan, Arak, Ardabil, Babol, Qum, as well as Tehran and Najafabad (the latter being placed under military curfew). Police cars and Baseej motorcycles were set on fire as was a Baseej police station. Some police joined the protestors, taking off their helmets, one even sporting a green headband. The chant “this is the month of blood, Yazid will fall” became widespread as did the chant “tup, tank, basiji, dige asar nadari” [cannons, tanks, and baseej are no longer effective]. This and many other slogans were copied from the revolution of 1979 with slight modification to fit them to the new situation. Government efforts to control or stop Muharram ceremonies in parts of south Tehran had residents defiantly wearing the green fabric of the protest movement as they went to nightly rituals.

### **We Are Not Bought-Off Citizens!**

Most important was the chant “Ma ahle-Kufe nistim, Peyro-e Yazid nistim” [We are not from the city of Kufa (who were paid off by Yazid to abandon Hossein whom they had called to help them against Yazid); we are not followers of Yazid]. Women in full black chadors, beating their chests, were among those chanting this slogan. The slogan commented on the paid pro-government demonstrators that are regularly mobilized by the state, and that had skeptics of the green movement clucking when the state mobilized thousands in counter demonstrations to the huge crowds of the green movement, giving them time off from work, busing, free food, and payment.

Eleven hundred people were arrested in Tehran during the Ashura protests and four hundred in Isfahan, including children and siblings of leading figures. Three aides to Mousavi, Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi (first foreign minister of the Islamic Republic, and head of the Freedom Movement of Iran), the sister of Nobel Laureate civil rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi, human rights lawyer Emadeddin Baghi, and the son of Ayatullah Jaleddin Taheri, were among those arrested. A video clip circulated of police vehicles running into and over people in a crowd. Other clips showed bloodied youths triumphantly holding up helmets and batons taken from the armored police, and the stoning of huddled helmeted police and the burning of their motorcycles.

A collaged video of the traditional Karbala passion play *pardehs* (painted cloths of the scenes from the battle of Karbala to which the stories would be narrated) shows scenes from the protests.<sup>23</sup> Mehdi Karoubi, the presidential contender and former speaker of the Majlis, issued a sharp protest against a state that would resort to violence on Ashura. No clearer identification with Yazid needed.

The faces of two young people killed in the June protests (on June 20) are posed in the green turbans of the martyrs of Karbala next to the lion of Ali, the first Imam: they are Neda and Sohrab. Neda Agha Soltan's death was caught on two video clips that made her an icon of the protest movement. Her name, meaning simply "voice" or in a gnostic sense "call" or "divine message," became quickly the cry, voice, call, or soul of Iran, especially of the youth of Iran. The chant became "Neda-ye ma namordeh, in dolat-e ke morde" [Our Neda, our cry, is not dead, this government is dead] and "ma bache-haye jangim, bejang ta bejangim" [we're the children of war, fight and we'll fight back].<sup>24</sup> The government tried to claim that it was American agents or others who killed her and put out an arrest warrant for Dr. Arash Hejazi, the man on the scene attempting to stanch the flow of blood, and who chose to speak out and later had to flee the country amidst threats to his life. Sohrab Arabi was one of the others killed that day. The names Neda and "Sohrab" (the famous hero in the national epic, the *Shahnameh*, who was killed unwittingly by Rostam, his father) have become an iconic pair: Neda and Sohrab, resonating with the famous pair of lovers who died of mutual grief, Leila and Majnun, and the paternal-filial love gone wrong and ending in grief, Rustam and Sohrab. The government's blatant attempts to get family members to change their stories of what happened (diverting blame from state forces) in exchange for designating Neda a "martyr" was denounced as shameful by an outraged Karoubi.<sup>25</sup>

### **Return of the Repressed**

A telling incident on this day of Ashura from the town of Sirjan symbolically illustrated the fading government's ability to orchestrate its own theater of truth. The public was invited to witness a hanging of two men for armed robbery or harboring weapons, but the people seen on YouTube cut the men down (whatever the charge, the mode of execution was no longer tolerated). It was not unlike the failure of the forced confessions of intellectuals on television (that they were working for foreign regimes to foment a velvet revolution), which were often comically unbelievable if excruciating for the victims, albeit perhaps reinforcing to those who wished to believe in the state's convoluted conspiracy theories. In both settings the outcome was still in the coercive hands of the state, but not smoothly

so: the police in Sirjan fired pistol shots hitting stone-throwing angry young men, and resealed and killed the two men, just as those forced to make confessions were confirmed in their sentences or released conditionally under threat of severe retribution should they not remain silent. But the veil of passive acceptance was broken.

The killings on Ashura added power to the cycles of mourning for the 80-odd protesters killed over the summer, particularly that of Neda Agha Soltan and the large demonstrations on her fortieth in July. There was an uncanny replay of the events of 1977 and 1978 that led to the toppling of the shah. The ban on mourning for Montazeri repeated the ban the shah imposed when Khomeini's son died in the fall of 1977. In 1978 clashes at mourning rite demonstrations generated new deaths, which added momentum for further demonstrations at funeral processions, that together with strikes by increasing sectors of the economy would grow into the overthrow of the shah. The percussion of nightly chanting on rooftops of Allah-o-Akbar, a signature sound of 1978, began again in June 2009 in reaction to the election fraud, continuing for months on end.

### **Repetitions with a Difference: The Pixie and the Undercover Agent**

Because of the experiences of 1978, the state understands well the potency of the ritual cycles, and yet seems not to know what to do. Demonstrations were prohibited on Ashura, but intimidation failed to dampen the protests. Notes of economic unrest, normally under tight press blackout, also surfaced. In Shiraz on the second day after Montazeri's death, workers disrupted speeches by President Ahmadinejad holding signs "We have not been paid for 11 months" and "We have no bread to eat."<sup>26</sup>

I met Ayatullah Montezari in his house in Qum in 2004, across the *kucheh* (alley or little street) from where the late Ayatullah Marashi's house was. We went through a security check at the door and were led into a little office with a desk and some visitor chairs. Montazeri came in and sat at the desk. My notes say, "little pixie man in simple pyjama, white shirt, and white skull cap with ready smile." It is an image now familiar through the many videos of him circulated after his death. He welcomed me in English warmly (there is a video on the Internet of him entertaining an interviewer with Benjamin Franklin's "early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise" and no doubt he entertained me with the same). He quoted Rumi, gave permission to take pictures of and with him, spoke of freedom as the way of Islam. He laughed about the film that was

the talk of everyone that season, *Marmulak*, “Lizard,” spoofing the clerics. Starring the accomplished Parviz Parastoei, and directed by Karmal Tabrizi, it is about a convict who escapes dressed in a cleric’s turban and abba, who has to play mullah for a community and slowly becomes revered by the community although he’s also trying to smuggle himself out of the country. Montazeri had seen it in an “edited” (pirated?) version, and was amused by its allegorical bite. He spoke of his website, quoting its URL ([www.montazeriws.com](http://www.montazeriws.com)) saying he had to shut it down and modify it; it gets many queries, but also insults. More specific queries he parried with generalities, but he gave the impression of being genuinely friendly and glad to have American visitors.

When we left, a grubby, slightly overweight middle-aged man, in unpressed white shirt and three-day growth of beard, came up to us on the street and demanded our names that he wrote on a scrap of paper. I parried and sent S. to our friend who had taken us to see Montazeri, a former cleric. He came up to the man demanding to know why he wanted our names, saying I was invited by, and an official guest in Iran, of the Foreign Ministry. The man insisted he just needed to know the names of my Iranian companions. I asked him his name. “Hosseini” he said and avuncularly patted me on the shoulder and said not to mind. We gave him some names, one made up for the protection of the young woman with us, and left. It was one of those police state encounters meant to simply remind that we and Montazeri were being watched.

At the turn of the year 2010, each side continued to calculate its moves in a fluid crisis. Government employees were given two days off work and bused to attend massive progovernment rallies on December 30 and 31, 2009 in Tehran, Mashhad, Shiraz, Arak, and Qum to try to make the symbolic point that protestors did not represent the country as they had claimed just days earlier in the spectacle of violent state repression on Ashura. U.S., British, and Israeli flags were torn up, and some wore shrouds to say they would die to defend Khamene’i. The progovernment forces are angry, furious that their claims to Islamic legitimacy have been so forcefully contested. The National Chief of Police, Brigadier-General Ismail Ahmadi Moghaddam, and the Pasdaran Brigadier-General Mohammad Jaafari have repeatedly tried to issue warnings to the Green Wave protestors, claiming the government has been moving with restraint and measured moves, but this restraint may not last, and police would deal with protestors (who try to disrupt the government demonstrations) “without mercy.” Reports of additional troops and Chinese armored vehicles with twin cannon for



hot and cold water and chemical irritants being moved to Tehran were reported. Threats were made by a unit of self-proclaimed suicide bombers that if the Green Movement leaders were not dealt with by the government, they would do it themselves.<sup>27</sup>

Each side calculated its moves. From Paris, where he claimed to serve as a spokesman for the Mousavi camp and the protest movement more generally, famed filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf released first a Persian-language, and then English-language, exposure of Khamene'i and his family's accumulation of horses and other luxury goods such as his eight-million-dollar airplane.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, people in Tehran joked that the plane was being readied in case he needed a quick escape to Moscow, which is suspected of having tried to coach the state in manipulating the June elections. This is the stage of exposure. As in the French Revolution, and against the shah in 1978, *exposés*, scatological cartoons, and other ridiculing devices have helped to tear up the image of the leader beyond repair. This already began earlier with the circulation of cartoons of President Ahmadinejad scribbled on banknotes labeled "enemy of the people."

In response during the ten Days of Dawn leading up to the 31st anniversary of the Revolution (22 Bahman, February 11) the state prepared carefully, arresting many human rights and other activists, and issuing bellicose religious and martial warnings. Ayatullah Ahmad Janati, head of the Council of Guardians, labeled Mousavi and Karoubi *mohareb* (enemies of God who should be executed), while Gen. Hossein Hamedani, commander of the Pasdaran for Tehran, warned that "anyone who protests against the government on February 11 is not part of the Iranian people" and could be treated as foreign agents. The assassination of Tehran physics professor Massoud Ali Mohammadi, by a bomb planted on a motorcycle put next to his car and set off by remote control when he approached, sent a chill through the already-besieged academic community.

The government mobilized massive demonstrations as it had on December 30–31, brought in large numbers of security forces, and cordoned off Azadi Square. In the event the Green Movement's "Trojan horse strategy" misfired. The Trojan horse tactic was to go unmarked to the demonstrations and during Ahmadinejad's speech to unfurl waves of green. But the security forces were ready; leaders such as Mir Hossein Mousavi were prevented from leaving their houses, and others were identified and beaten. After this show of control, the state also flexed its forward foreign policy initiatives in Lebanon, Gaza, Iraq, and Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup> The opposition would need to evolve new tactics.

## II. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

To understand the direction(s) of the revolution, its harmonics, disharmonics and movements—forward and backward, repeats and introduction of new melodic lines, time signatures, out of joint timings, repetitive stuckness or involutions, movements up and down the scales of political involvement and across resonances in local, national, and transnational circuits—one must pay attention to the organizational and technical infrastructures within which social and cultural actions happen, and by which the civic spheres have been restructured over the past decade. In Iran, legacies of women's, labor, and student organizing have been critical, as has been the development of new modes of signification. Two modes of revolutionary signification have been especially important: the color green and the mobile phone, with its camera capabilities and its place in the new networked media.<sup>30</sup> One low tech, one high tech; both decentralized, and resistant to state appropriation.

The “Green Wave” (*moj-e sabz*) is the confluence of a number of different civil society movements, including the women's movements, the largely but not entirely repressed labor movement, student movements, insistent journalism, and blogging and Internet activism. It might be noted that the names of the presidential contenders of the June 2009 elections, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi, have figured courageously but only modestly in section I. They occupy places of leadership in a decentralized evolving movement. The Green Wave has effectively mobilized the Karbala Paradigm, the Shi'ite paradigm of struggle for social justice, against the government, although the government has not given up its own claims to that narrative.<sup>31</sup>

It is important to note, however, that the Green Movement has appropriated the Karbala Paradigm differently than during the 1977–79 revolution. The differences are critical indices of the changing structure of the public sphere. The secular “left” factions of the 1977–79 revolution either did not fully appreciate the eschatological discursive power of Shi'ism, or they wanted to consign it to the past. The Green Movement instead has skillfully deployed the Karbala Paradigm, turning it in a nonfundamentalist direction and contesting the state's capture of its discursive power. In 1977–79, the Karbala Paradigm was used as a mobilizing device by the religious factions of the revolution to inject morality and social justice as the goals of politics; today it is the “secularists” who are using the Karbala Paradigm to claim both politics and morality from the assertion of monopoly control over interpretation of Islam by clerics and their allies and followers, an interpretive

control that is explicitly antidemocratic and antirepublican. The latter view politics and democratic or republican forms as merely plebiscitary affirmation of decisions by a patronage state based on the control of oil and the key economic sectors, and on a new elite of war veterans and their clerical allies.

Central among the Green Wave's slogans are "we are many" (*ma bishomarim*) meaning diversity of opinion as well as multitudes that cannot be easily contained; and "you are the messenger, you are the media" (*resaneh shomaid*), meaning that singular individuals coming together in a diverse multitude is the message, strength composed through the weaving together of diversities. There is both a play upon a redefinition of the "messenger of God" in this recognition of the spark or voice of the divine in each human being, and a recognition of the multitude in contrast to singularizations of the vox populi through any charismatic leadership.<sup>32</sup>

### Women's Movements

The women's movements have a long history of protest against the more repressive sides of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), beginning with the very first days of the republic and massive marches for women's rights, met with violence and physical attacks. In a more sustained fashion, women's magazines, especially the flagship journal *Zanan* (shut down by the government after 16 years of publication in 2008), have kept women's issues in the forefront of the public sphere. But since 2006 the campaign for One Million Signatures for the Repeal of Discriminatory Laws (*Yek Milyun Emzā barā-ye Laqhv-e Qavānin-e Tab'iz Āmiz*) has provided a grassroots and transnational frame that has sufficiently concerned the IRI that it has repeatedly jailed activists of the campaign as well as those who have simply taken part in open air assemblies at Haft Tir Square and elsewhere in Tehran. The campaign is to collect signatures from Iranian nationals calling for an end to discrimination against women in Iranian law. The campaign also calls itself "Change for Equality." Coincidentally, and perhaps ironically, the first arrests of 42 women and 28 men at Haft Tir square occurred on June 12, 2006, exactly four years to the day before the explosive election day of June 2010. Officially launched the following August at a seminar on "The Impact of Laws on Women's Lives," the campaign lists seven broad goals, including collaboration and cooperation for social change, power in diversity, power in numbers, amplifying women's voices, identifying women's priorities, paying one's dues to society, and promoting democratic action. This could equally be the manifesto of the Green Wave.

Since the state violence against the protestors of the June 2010 elections fraud, another important women's group has been formed and is also subject to

attacks and arrests: the weekly gatherings in Laleh Park of the Mourning Mothers of children killed in the antigovernment protests, or Mourning Mothers of Laleh [Park].<sup>33</sup> Among the prominent mothers is the mother of Neda Agha-Soltan.

### Labor Movements

Workers' strikes, especially that of the oil workers in Abadan, were crucial to the Islamic revolution of 1977–79, and in its immediate aftermath workers' councils were formed in many factories. After 1982, these were expelled and replaced by state-supervised Islamic workers councils.<sup>34</sup> The IRI has since tried to block independent union organizing (as well of course anything connected to either the old and important Tudeh (communist) movement of the 1940s and 1950s, or to the anti-Tudeh leftists of the late 1960s and 1970s who were an important part of the 1977–79 revolutionary coalition, in competition with the religious revolutionaries led by Khomeini).<sup>35</sup> Many pundits have argued that the Green Wave cannot succeed unless there are major worker walkouts, but workers—under conditions of high unemployment, increasing use of contract labor rather than salaried labor, as well as state repression—are even more vulnerable to losing their jobs and basic sustenance than they were thirty years ago. Major walkouts have not yet occurred by spring 2010, but the labor front is not quiescent.

In 2005 the Union of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company came back to life.<sup>36</sup> It set up workshops and classes on organizing, the history of the labor movement, and legal and constitutional rights for workers.<sup>37</sup> In December of that year bus drivers, demanding better pay, went on strike, causing havoc in Tehran's transportation system but garnering much support, even from working-class Baseej militia men and the mayor (who addressed a rally of 10,000 in hopes of calming them). The leaders (Mansour Osanloo and Ebrahim Madadi), however, were arrested, released and rearrested, tried for "acts against national security" (*eqdam 'aliye amniyat-e melli*) and "propaganda against the regime" (*tabligh 'aliye nezam*) in Branch 14 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court, and given a five-year sentence, confirmed by Branch 36 of the appellate court in Tehran. They remain in jail in 2010 and are prisoners of conscience of Amnesty International as well as among the labor leaders named in a Labor Day call for release by the International Trade Union Confederation and four other international unions.<sup>38</sup> A demonstration to release Osanloo was met by force and five hundred people were said to have been detained. Many of the bus lines were privatized, with resulting removal of workers' rights and ability to organize collectively.

In June 2008, five thousand workers at the Haft Tepe Sugar Refinery in Khuzistan province formed an independent Syndicate of Workers of Haft Tepe Sugar Cane Company after a 46-day strike for payment of six months of unpaid wages. In December 2008, in anticipation of February 2009 elections to the Refinery's Islamic Labor Council, five leaders of the independent union were charged with "endangering national security" and "antigovernment propaganda." Turnout for the Islamic Labor Council elections was so low that the independent union leaders were rearrested. Union president Ali Nejati was released after 45 days, 33 in solitary confinement, but in March, with four others, was sentenced to a year's further imprisonment.

Other prominent labor activists in jail include Farzad Kamangar, of a teacher's union (jailed since 2006, sentenced to death in February 2008), and Mahmoud Salehi, of a baker's union in Kurdistan, jailed for trying to organize a 2004 Labor Day demonstration. Others have been subject to public whipping for trying to organize Labor Day demonstrations. In 2009, the Labor Day demonstrations in the town of Sanandaj were attacked by thugs.

Just before May 1, Labor Day 2009, activists' families were threatened by phone calls in an effort to intimidate them and warn against demonstrations during the lead up to the presidential elections. Some two thousand workers gathered in the same Laleh Park as used by the Mourning Mothers, next to Kargar (Worker's) Street. They were hemmed in, beaten, and some 150 arrested, by security forces. Photographs were taken of demonstrators by police for future identification. In the aftermath, police raided the cooperative offices of the Metal Mechanics Workers of Tehran.

As one labor activist puts it, the labor situation has never been so bad for workers as the government has actively attempted to dismantle any ability to organize against deteriorating wage and contract relations, but young workers still know about older worker's organizing, and many underground workers' solidarity groups exist.

### **Students**

Two key turning points, and now symbolic dates, in the genealogy of student demands for liberalization of the regime are 18 Tir (July 8–9) 1999, and the older 16 Azar (December 7) 1953, now known as Students Day. Student movements now stage demonstrations on 16 Azar to insist on their continuity with students in the 1960s and 1970s, as a way of blocking efforts by the IRI to label them as creations of the West.

Many of the survivors of the 18 Tir 1999 traumatic event, when riot police entered dormitories at night, became committed then to civil society activism and are among the informal network of leaders of the Green Movement (often sleeping in different houses each night to avoid arrest). The 1999 event began with a peaceful march against the closure of the reformist newspaper, *Salam*, of the Association of Combatant Clerics, to which President Mohammad Khatami belonged. The students were showing support for President Khatami's reform program against the hardliners who controlled the judiciary, which closed the paper. The hardliners set out to teach the students and Khatami who was boss, and the students were appalled that Khatami was powerless to help. While uniformed police stood by, several hundred paramilitary forces (Ansar-e Hezbollah and Baseej) smashed through the dorms, setting fires, throwing students from balconies, killing at least one student, paralyzing another, injuring hundreds, and detaining thousands in the next days as student demonstrations erupted across the country. Baseej militants are said to have shaved and disguised themselves as students, throwing bricks into shop windows to discredit the students. Buses were burned. On July 13, students took their demonstration to the Ministry of the Interior, and President Khatami disowned them saying that continued demonstrations were an attack on the foundations of the regime. On July 14, the state organized a huge rally of tens of thousands with government employees bussed to the event.

On the 2009 anniversary of 18 Tir (July 9) some two hundred demonstrators holding green balloons aloft marched to the gates of Tehran University where they were confronted by hundreds of riot police. It was a dramatic gesture that, after weeks of repression of demonstrations against the fraudulent elections of June 12, the demonstrators were not going to be intimidated or go away.

Students have been important in keeping the agendas of reform and liberalization alive in the public sphere. In 2002, during a similar struggle over hard-line versus somewhat more liberal power centers, students mounted the largest demonstration since 1999 to protest the death sentence for "apostasy" of history professor and war veteran S. Hashem Ashjari for suggesting that Iranians not follow clerics blindly.<sup>39</sup> Ashjari did this in a speech on the 25th anniversary of the death of Dr. Ali Shariati, who had voiced the same slogan in the 1970s, and whose legacy the IRI has sought to contain. After condemnations by President Khatami and Ayatullah Montezari, intervention by Khamene'i, and an international outcry, the sentence was gradually reduced, and Ashjari was finally released in 2004.

Students were important volunteers in the election of President Khatami, but the disillusionment grew so much that in 2005 one of the largest student groups

advocated boycotting. Students have continued smaller protests periodically since the election of President Ahmadinejad, even heckling and chasing him from the campus of Amir Kabir Polytechnic University in December 2006. Student's Day (16 Azar, December 7) 2009 was again a day of demonstrations that students would not be intimidated by the harsh tactics of the security forces.

In return the government of Ahmadinejad has increasingly turned on students and their teachers, calling for another purging of the universities, and particularly ridding the universities of the humanities and social sciences that, according to one Ahmadinejad speech, teach only values inimical to the Islamic Republic. Students have even been warned that foreign degrees might no longer be recognized in Iran. Students suspected of political activity have had stars placed in their files, denying them further enrollment in classes. Faculty are warned to not have contact with foreign academics, and the Ministry of the Interior published a list of foreign organizations deemed enemies of the state, including Yale University and various Centers for the Study of Democracy. Behind the bluster there are hard facts: there is a special track of regime loyalists for educational seats and funding in the scarce elite programs, and professionally trained students are leaving Iran in large numbers to contribute their considerable skills to Canada, England, Germany, Sweden, Australia, and the United States, where they also contribute to the diaspora's organization in support of the Million Signature Campaign and other green wave movements. Indeed it is sometimes suggested that in the case of journalists, it was a mistake for the IRI to force so many into exile where their platforms and influence are possibly broader.

### **Print and Internet Journalism and Blogging**

No account of Iranian civil society and public sphere infrastructure would be complete without acknowledgment of the determined efforts of journalists. People remember the euphoria of the immediate days after the 1979 revolution when there was a flourishing of all print outlets, and the serious joke of the ensuing years has been the cat and mouse games of government closing of newspapers only to have them pop up again and again under different names. Many journalists in the process have been in jail and suffered financial and other pressures. Print journalism remained the primary medium through the 1990s. Gradually, beginning in the late 1990s, there was a migration to an online presence both for reportage and for blogging. The reportage served both to keep the diaspora and international audiences informed, and to coordinate activism internally, including mounting international campaigns to release political prisoners. Although much of the blogosphere is for

personal expression and socializing, mass uptake of the tools of the Internet have constituted a new civil society infrastructure whose utility even parental generations now acknowledge. Clerics recognized the power of the Internet quite early, not only the youth among them but also the top clerics, who have always specialized in outreach, persuasion, and message dissemination in competition with one another.

### **The Green Wave**

The green cloth as the symbol of the protest movement was a stroke of genius. It was at first the campaign device for Mir Hossein Mousavi's presidential bid, then the symbol of protest against the fraud in the electoral process and declaration of a winner, and eventually a sign of the protest against the entire authoritarian system (*nezam*) of Khamene'i, Ahmadinejad, and the security and economic apparatus of the Pasdaran, Baseej, and Ansar-e Hezbollah. *Nezam*, an old Persian political term (dating back to the 11th century Seljuk period),<sup>40</sup> designates what in informal English we call the "system" or the "regime," and in various other tutelary politics, as in Suharto's Indonesia, is called "the order" or "the New Order."

A stroke of genius for three reasons: evasive visibility, value assertion, open-source decentralized organization. First, it was something the state could not control yet something that could be made to fill up the visual perceptual arena. Anyone could find scraps of green cloth to wear as a scarf, armband, or patch. It need not be the same shade of green: "We Are Many" was a slogan of the movement, and it meant also diversity of opinion. Green body paint and cosmetics also became popular to dab on the forehead and fingers; green nail polish, green eye shadow, green hair ribbons, bandanas, and headscarves were also worn. But the cloth could easily be hidden, displayed and put away as need arose. It required no electricity or other networked infrastructure that could be interfered with. It could be draped on buildings or statues in visible and symbolic places. Among these a favorite is the green cloth students placed on the statue of Ferdowsi in Tehran, the grand teller of Iran's epic stories from ancient times with a slight Shi'ite inflection (the *Shahnameh*), stories that are used as moral parables, especially about the fall of rulers who abuse their power.

Green also is the color of Islam and one of the colors of the Iranian flag. A key strategy of the reform and protest movement in 2009 was to deny the state the control of Islamic terms and symbols, and to reappropriate them for Muslims of all ideologies. For some, it was a retrieval of the original values of the revolution as Mir Hossein Mousavi, a former prime minister and associate of Khomeini, argued



during the presidential campaign. For others, it was a retrieval of Islam from the revolution's coercive nature and reacknowledgment of Islamic pluralism and tolerance. And for still others, it signaled a need to move beyond constant reference to Islam. (Proregime fundamentalist graffiti that tried to reappropriate the color green soon began to appear on walls, and there seemed to be some evidence that IRI sites modified color on the flag so that if reproduced by opponents the green would not show true but become blue.)

The effectiveness of the green protest soon became clear. Modeled on Barack Obama's effective use in a different context, it was an open-source, self-organizing tool, one that didn't need electricity, computers, or networks that the state might disrupt. It was in this sense a model of and for an expanded open-source set of tools for organizing overlapping interests, depending more on pragmatism than ideological uniformity. Both its visual effects and the movement it helped consolidate were called the "green wave."

Green is one of a series of neural media, a transformation of the tactics of the "little or minor media" of the 1977–79 revolution.<sup>41</sup> Graffiti appear on walls. Wall posters with pictures of those in jail call for their release. Antiregime slogans deface the currency (so much so, the government warned it will not accept such currency as valid tender). Slogan chanting erupts in the subway. Cartoons of Ahmadinejad are circulated with captions such as "enemy of the people." Bureaucrats and employees slip the word green into cryptic messages, such as, "Copenhagen failed, but we can still look ahead with *Green* hopes and *Green* ways to a *Green* future."<sup>42</sup> The neural media are part of an inventive civil disobedience movement that refuses normalcy to the regime and keeps the sensory field full and active.

Initially the green was material to fill the visual perceptual arena. It effectively countered the state's dismissal that the Mousavi campaign had too few followers to be seriously concerned about. On the contrary, the flutter of waves of luminous green cloth in crowds and on the streets of daily life both attracted more people to the cause, sensing that a vote for Mousavi might not be a fruitless gesture, and eventually worried the state. On June 8, four days before the election, a human chain of tens of thousands held up a huge ribbon of green cloth for some fifteen miles, from north to south Tehran along Valiasr (Pahlavi) Avenue. That something momentous was in the air was clear, and it was this threat that perhaps moved the Ministry of Interior apparatchiks into a series of crude attempts to ensure that the election would come out in favor of Ahmadinejad's reelection bid. Indeed, a memo (*fatwa*) from Ayatullah Mesba-Yazdi gave them permission to do as much, and in the aftermath Mesba-Yazdi unrepentantly proclaimed that Islamic elections were

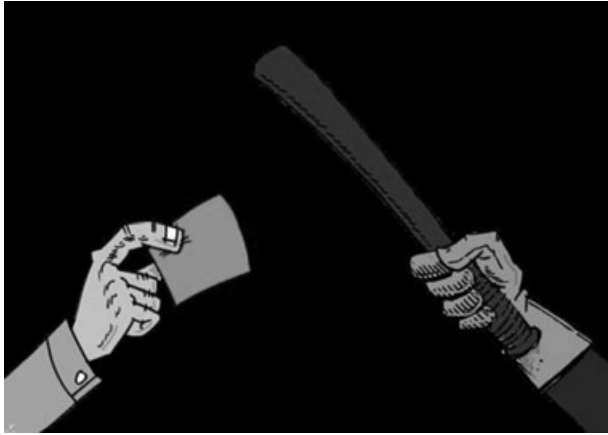


FIGURE 1. “Sabz” (Green), by Nikahang Kosar, published June 21, 2009 on Roozonline, <http://www.roozonline.com/english/news/newsitem/article/////sabz.html>, accessed 17 May 2010.

not to give people choices but to give them a chance to affirm Islamic governments. This is the hard-line interpretation of *velayat-e faqih*: the *faqih* or *rahbar* is not to be questioned, and is close to knowing the divine will (even if the actual assertion of that might be heresy for most Islamic scholars).<sup>43</sup> Even more, Mesba-Yazdi and allies would during fall 2009 begin a campaign to discredit the grand ayatullahs who sided with the Green Wave, and to call for summary executions “as in the early days of the revolution.”<sup>44</sup>

Among the many green images, two cartoons perhaps capture the essence. The one by Nikahang Kosar, published June 21, 2009 on *Roozonline*, called simply *Sabz* (Green) contrasts the Green Wave’s luminous green ballot with that of a dull military green club. The other, either by or in the style of Marjane Setrapi, shows an enraged girl in green demanding (her rights) as did the protestors chanting, “Where Is My Vote?” (see Figures 1–2).

### The Cell Phone and New Media

Given the hard-line positions of Khamene’i and Ahmadinejad, and the increasing power of the Pasdaran in both security and economic affairs, networked new media have also been critical for Iran’s democratic movement. Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and especially cell phones, with their cameras and video capacities that could be quickly uploaded to anonymized servers outside Iran, have all been central.

Iran has become, after China, the most active experimental site in the cat and mouse game between state authorities’ efforts to control these media and citizen



FIGURE 2. “Where Is My Vote?” by or in the style of Marjane Satrapi.

efforts to push the envelope of open access and information circulation. Iran is also a site of generational division, and now reconciliation, over the use of these media. Until spring 2009, parents looked askance at the time their children spent on the Internet, seeing it as frivolous because it only sought fashion, music, and consumption, not social action and betterment of society. The “criminalization of youth culture” by the state (Khosravi 2007) also made parents cautious about their children’s Internet explorations. But the capacity developed over the years both to use the networked resources and to evade censorship and filtering made these tools a latent democratic infrastructure awaiting its political moment. Suddenly in June 2009 the parental generation no longer had qualms, and the younger generations suddenly found themselves singing old revolutionary songs of their parents with new meaning and relevance. A generational gap was healing.

Perhaps the most significant sign of these shifts was the grudging reembrace by liberals and progressives of Mir Hossein Mousavi’s campaign song, taken from the democratic left in the early days of the revolution. At first this was seen as a violation of a sacred memory, a cynical reappropriation for venal political ends. Mousavi, after all, was blamed for being prime minister at the time of the 1988 massacre of thousands of political prisoners held in jail. He had said nothing, even if he himself was not involved. He did have a good reputation as the steward of the economy of Iran during the difficult days of the Iran–Iraq war. His stock among

the skeptics suddenly shot up first during the unprecedented televised presidential debates when he called out Ahmadinejad and others for corruption and challenged their fabricated statistics, and even more so after the election when he stood fast against the intimidation of the regime. Now his appropriation of the old song was no longer begrudged. He was able to stand up against Khamene'i, not only out of moral fiber but because, like Montazeri, he knew Khamene'i intimately having served with him as premier when Khamene'i was president; they had increasingly disagreed then as well.

Although the new social media have been crucial for the decentralized initial successes of the Green Movement, it is not clear that the state monitoring and filtering efforts have not been equally successful.<sup>45</sup> The battle over the media is sophisticated and continuing. On June 12 some e-mail was blocked even before the end of the balloting. On June 13 and the days immediately after the election, the Internet was briefly cut off (the state-owned Data Communications Company of Iran is the gateway for all providers in and out of the country). There are six cables into and out of Iran; Reliance, Singtel, and Türktel are the three biggest. At one point it was reported that only Türktel was not cut off, only slowed. As trade and the government also use these cables, it is unlikely that they would be cut off completely for any length of time, particularly with Turkey, a major trade partner. Although video transmission did not return to preelection levels, e-mails returned at a reduced rate (see Figure 3). It seemed the state was able to use the

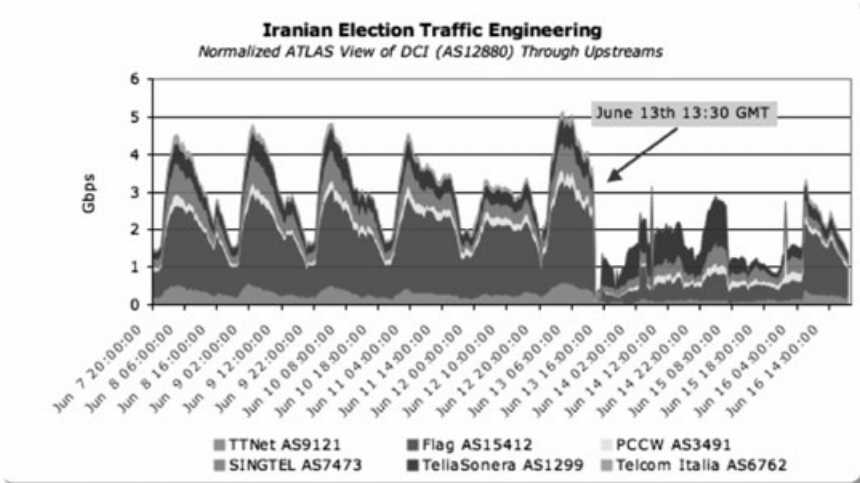


FIGURE 3. Iranian Election Traffic Engineering, graph courtesy of Arbor Networks, <http://asert.arbornetworks.com/2009/06/iranian-traffic-engineering/>, accessed May 17, 2010.

bandwidth requirements and characteristics of different functions to allow blocking of some more than others. Secure protocol (SSH) and web streaming was the most blocked, followed by such file-sharing programs as flash, bit-torrent, pop, alternate web ports, http proxy sites, and webcam functions. Games and services like Xbox Live and World of Warcraft were little affected.<sup>46</sup> During demonstrations, power interruptions were used by the state to disrupt transmissions and cause computers to reboot, causing the transmission of images to fail. Other tactics included selected telephone switching networks on and off, cutting cables, and raids on buildings to disable and remove satellite dishes.

Hackers around the world, in China and Asia as much as in Europe and North America, scrambled to help provide the Green Movement with anonymous proxy servers, but countermeasures were constantly being updated by the Iranian government. Young Iranians had long been using Chinese filter-breaker gateways set up by the Chinese diaspora for dissidents inside China. This usage exploded in the days of sending accounts of the protests after June 12 to the point where Iranians were the most numerous users of these gateways and the sites were so clogged that they had to be closed to Internet provider (IP) addresses from Iran. Meanwhile the Iranian authorities seemed to be installing deep packet inspection programs that allow looking at content as well as traffic. Instant messaging had been logged by the state for the previous four years, it has been reported, providing authorities with a searchable database. Indeed, women arrested as part of the Million Signature Campaign have been shown, by their jailers, transcripts of instant messages they had sent.

Phone lines have long been subject to monitoring. Nokia Siemens supplied Iran in 2008 with its sophisticated telephone monitoring program that can interrogate data on fixed land lines. One of the most recent tactics has been face recognition technology for crowds. Iran has hired special staff to search for people and then track them down. The headquarters for these activities is said to be the old telecom center at Sepah (Khomeini) Square, built by Israeli contractors in the 1970s.

Such monitoring groups as Harvard's Berkman Center were early in the game of trying to monitor Iran's censorship filtering of the Internet, mainly cataloguing keywords and URLs that were blocked. But the game has become more intense with the ability to alert security monitors within milliseconds of feeds of interest. According to DEBKAF, a prominent website of intelligence and analysis founded by journalists: "In a flash, intelligence analysts get a fix on the sender and the electronic addressee which are then placed on a surveillance list for further monitoring. Once identified, the sender or receiver and their connections are closely shadowed

by field agents.<sup>47</sup> Iran's intelligence agents were also able to invade computers and cell phones to lay false leads and disinformation.

The struggles over control of the means of communication are rarely limited to the boundaries of the nation-state. The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) complains continually about the media and culture wars from the outside, and dissidents inside Iran as well as members of the diaspora equally complain about the IRI's efforts to block the free flow of images and information. Iran has launched "Press TV" with news anchors in London to compete with Cable News Network (CNN), Al-Jazeera, and other global news media. But beyond these digital, satellite and cable media, a new terrain of competition may be emerging with the use of so-called future civic media platforms that aggregate and facilitate participatory visual documentation, fact finding, citizen journalism, and dynamic networks that continually search for holes and tunnels in censorship firewall filters and provide anonymizing proxy services to get around them. Freegate (Dynamic Internet Technology, Inc.), Austin Heap's "Haystack" (custom designed, he claims, for Iran), Psiphon's Citizen Lab (University of Toronto), and the Ushadi platform are among such technologies.<sup>48</sup>

### III. THE ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS OF THE REVOLUTION

On December 21, the morning following Ayatullah Montazeri's death, I wrote to a friend: We are now in Moharram and if the dissent remains active, it could grow and either force an open declaration of military rule (the Reza Shah option, albeit in nonmonarchical dress, more like Egypt perhaps), or ideally force a new constitutional convention with key *maraje'* (senior religious leaders) weighing in to give Islamic cover, and moderate Pasdaran leaders weighing in with their military and patronage cover against an uprising by the Baseej and families who have been financially indebted to the Islamic power structure.

How, in other words, can the long stalemate of IRI politics be loosened, who is in position to do the brokering, and what alternative opportunities for a future can be provided for the current beneficiaries of the oil rentier state, with its nouveau riche elites and Pasdaran-Baseej dependent families? These puzzles cannot be solved as zero-sum games. Just as Iranians have proved to be creative chess players in foreign affairs (see n. 29) so they also can walk back a gridlock. Tehran is the only place I have ever seen a true traffic gridlock where drivers, determined to get across an intersection, ended literally locking themselves together so there was no room for movement forward or back. Young men eventually had to walk the cars back in all four directions to open some space for maneuver. Perhaps the technique of scenario-construction can similarly begin to provide some machinery for walking

the political gridlock back, for working through more than zero-sum outcomes, for exploring the social dynamics at play, and for reconfiguring alternative outcomes.

The events of Moharram and the violence on Ashura transformed the cautious demands in response to the mishandling of the presidential elections of June 2009 into increasing demands for a revision of the structure of a government that has been exposed repeatedly for economic mismanagement, financial corruption on a massive scale, cooking the national statistics, torture, extrajudicial killings, forced confessions, ending the academic careers of star students who participate in politics, driving many of the newly minted engineers and physicians abroad, and above all for instituting a system (like the old Soviet Union's) in which commitment to state ideology trumps all credentials of expertise. The focus shifted from the degree of play within the political system to the rigidity of the system itself, from Ahmadinejad to the Leader Khamene'i, whose very basic credentials as a *marja' taqlid* have been publicly shredded. The chant in the street is often now "death to Khamene'i." The Muharram ritual cycle repeatedly identified him with Yazid, the arch evil figure of the religious passion plays who destroyed the social justice promise of Islam, although of course there are others who continue to swear fealty.

It is often said that there is no room for compromise, that the opposition on the one side has no real charismatic leadership that could broker some resolution, and on the other side there is fear that any show of compromise would be seen as weakness and invite the fate of the shah. What is needed is for a group of pragmatic Pasdaran leaders and Green Wave secularists (in the constitutional sense, not necessarily antireligious) to forge a new legal system by which all can live—something like the group around Mikhail Gorbachev just before perestroika.

This would mean the firm rejection of Ayatollah Mesba-Yazdi's extremist views that elections and democracy are only for people to confirm Islamic state decisions.<sup>49</sup> It also would require some strong moral leadership from Ayatullahs, such as a combination of Sanaei, Taheri, Dastgheib, and Seistani, who would return to a founding idea of the Islamic republic—seeking social justice but not rule by clerics, no veto power, no Guardian Council, no Assembly of Experts, no unaccountable leader (no *velayat-e faqih*). Pasdaran leaders would be needed to restrain the coercive powers of the state, and to institute explicitly meritocratic rather than ideological governance. Among those Pasdaran current or former leaders often mentioned are Qalibaf, Reza'i, and Larijani, but history often brings forth names not yet in view, and the current names are but tokens for qualities that might be in play. Qalibaf, mayor of Tehran and a former national police chief and Pasdaran general, at one time was fond of saying that what Iran and especially

Tehran city government needed was another Reza Khan, and he would be such a mayor and get things done. Presidential contender in the June elections, former Pasdaran general Reza'i argued for a real multiparty state. Ali Larijani, the current speaker of Parliament and former nuclear negotiator, is related by marriage to a number of different factions, a networking feature important to brokering. There will have to be a group of such pragmatists and technocrats even if the current state completely collapses, perhaps arising from below the top ranks. On the Green Movement's side, the talent pool is huge—lawyers, economists, and many other trained personnel exist both inside Iran and in the diaspora where they have also gained further valuable sociotechnical skills relevant to the remaking of Iranian politics.

There will be difficult issues in any such new constitutional order. One will be some sort of nonbloody and nonvengeful “peace and reconciliation” process. How should one deal with someone like the former Tehran prosecutor Said Mortazavi responsible for so much torture and extra judicial killings, for example? It is not only such easily identifiable individuals, but also the many enforcers in the Basij militias whose salaries, access to higher education, and government positions come from the patronage system.

Another issue will be Iran's nuclear capabilities. This may be easier to solve under any of the three outcomes detailed below except the theocratic dictatorship. The formulas for Iran pioneering a new international model for the control of the fuel cycle for nuclear reactors of all types might be feasible.

Negotiating discourses of secularism will be yet another difficult issue. The term “secular” itself is notably not a useful one at the moment in internal Iranian political discourse. Much as fundamentalist Christians in the United States have tried to stigmatize the phrase “secular humanist,” so too the Iranian government in the past has stigmatized both “secular” and “Western humanist” philosophy. Mousavi and Karoubi have tried to reframe the dichotomy of secular versus religious, by reminding that there were multiple religious discourses at the foundation of the Islamic republic. This allowance of religious legitimation makes some of their followers nervous, but is a critical move in turning religious discourses against authoritarian interpretations.

The problem solutions and personnel configurations are many. Mapping the multiple networks in play, and openings for change, will be critical. As a third way of reading contemporary Iran, in this section, I lay out the possibility of thinking in terms of alternative scenarios. All of these scenarios are underdetermined at this juncture, and they could interplay and hybridize. The effort of mapping possible



	REPUBLICAN	RELIGIOUS
CIVILIAN	Green Movement	Green Movement with IRGC backing
MILITARY	Reza Khan/Attaturk	Ayat. Mesbah-Yazdi

FIGURE 4. Scenario matrix.

configurations is thus an exercise in political and social imagination rather than political prediction.

Four initial configurations or possible outcomes can be produced in a classic two-by-two scenario matrix (see Figure 4): the Green Movement becomes sufficiently strong to sweep away the current government and establish a secular constitutional democracy (call this the secular republic); the Green Movement in combination with pragmatic and technocratic factions of the Revolutionary Guard creates a new constitutional order (call this a tutelary republic); a military figure takes over ala Reza Khan in the 1920s, Atatürk in Turkey, or Mobarak in Egypt (call this a dictatorship that could be more secular, or more religious as Zia ul-Haq was in Pakistan); or the Revolutionary Guard could install Mesbah-Yazdi (or disciple) as the new Supreme Leader (a theocratic dictatorship).

It is important for Iran’s future and that of the world that more attention be focused on these alternative outcomes, so as to avoid the worst of them. Iran needs less our intervention or sanctions than an insistent questioning of who the players and their connections and alliances are. Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi, the leaders of the Green Movement, may or may not be enduring leaders of the movement, but they know the people they are confronting. The decentralized Green Movement needs to also be clear and prepare for the next steps.

These next steps require not just immediate tactics, but strategies for all four possible outcomes. Basic to such strategizing is exposing or making increasingly transparent the alliances and connections among the factions and players in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), to anticipate how they might move, and to hold them accountable. The IRI runs on secrecy, innuendo, backroom negotiations, and ambiguities. These need exposure to the healing light of the sun. The complex marriage alliances of the clerical elite families need to be understood and made open to pressure, just as the state allows home visits, books, and other affordances to its prisoners, as well as seizing property and bank accounts, as ways of trying

to manipulate them. Just because someone is an in-law doesn't mean the two sides agree on politics or actions, but they are usually available to one another and so possible levers of pressure from democratic forces as well as from the other side.

### **The Direct-to-Secular Republic Scenario**

In an ideal outcome for the Green Movement, the IRI state apparatus will collapse allowing a purely civilian leadership to guide the control of events. This would require the clerics and Revolutionary Guard currently in control to turn on their closest allies and thereby undermine their own power. Both security forces and clerical legitimation would thus shift to the side of the Green Movement. In classic revolutions, this has happened when the state, needing money, turns on its primary supporters to extract the most immediately available sources of wealth, as when royalty taxes the aristocracy or the finance bourgeoisie, thereby losing their support.

In Iran this happened under the shah when severe bottlenecks developed in the wake of the inflationary expansion of construction after the 1973 price increases, and the regime first tried to scapegoat the bazaars for rising prices, then squeezed other sectors. Today, the potential parallels lie in the underemployment of the educated classes, the pressure of rising prices for the working classes, and the increasing demands to know where billions of petrodollars have gone in a corrupt system. Indeed this last was perhaps one of the most damaging charges fired during the 2009 televised presidential debates, one of the places where cleavages within the elites began to be exposed.

Should there be this kind of collapse, then perhaps there would be time and space for a transition to allow a new constitutional convention that would create a framework for checks and balances and accountability in the structures of governance. The transition requires a coalition of leaders of constituencies, leaders who can speak to religious and security constituencies, to civil rights issues, to economic planning, as well as some guidelines for how to deal with the past. Musicians and media creators, including comedy, might well be important in this transition to model the ability of different people to interact—chadored women with unveiled ones, for instance.

So will leaders who can make the distinction between secularism in governance (that religion, Islam, has been and is inevitably corrupted by involvement and attempts to control daily politics) and secularism in belief (a secular republic does not require giving up of faith or belief, only not forcing it violently on others).

After all, the high road of Islam, particularly in Iranian poetry, parables, and epics, has always been internal purity and faith while living in a corrupt world.

### **Tutulary Republic Scenario: Focus on the Transition**

The transition period may not be so smooth as in the “direct to secular republic” scenario. In the 1979 revolution, although there was a period of euphoria and coalition, and although the security apparatus was neutralized, the transition over the course of the year, and through the process of writing a new constitution, turned into a struggle for power and control. As in so many revolutions, an authoritarian outcome emerged, followed by a terror and violent retribution against members of the old regime, which turned also against coalition partners. In Iran’s 1979 revolution, it took the form of the *velayat-e faqih* bolstered by a series of cleric-dominated control bodies (the Assembly of Experts, the Council of Guardians).

In addition, as in many revolutions, a dual power structure was established that became first the defenders of the revolution and then the enforcers of state ideology: the Revolutionary Guards were unified into a military parallel to the army and eventually grew stronger than it; there were revolutionary courts, revolutionary councils in factories, bureaucracies, and universities. Rather than being transitioned out, these grew over time, a process reinforced by the emergency of the war with Iraq. In the aftermath of the war, children of those killed, as well as veterans, were given various kinds of compensatory access to higher education and jobs, again establishing a dual structure in which ideological commitment was credited over expertise. Ideological exams were part of entrance to universities, and separate funds were made available to the ideological cadres. On the streets as well, veterans guarded their legacies and trained a new generation of militias (*Basijis*), some of whom ritually engaged in attacks on more affluent youth in north and west Tehran.

To guard against a repeat of this history might require the hand of a strongman, and the problem always is how to ensure that the tutelary structure so imposed does not become permanent. The primary function of such a strongman, presumably coming with backing from pragmatic factions of the IRGC, is to prevent bloodshed and mayhem by stirred-up *Basijis*, families supported by the IRI’s patronage system, and former officials and enforcers fearing retribution by a new order of affairs.

Indeed one line of speculation is that Khamene’i would prefer, or has so acted to make more likely, such a succession. He might fear, for instance, being succeeded by a more unpredictable cleric, who could find it politically expedient to purge Khamenei’s family and holdings in the name of a corrupt past that needs

purification and correction (see scenario four below). Khamenei might distrust Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi and his allies, and, despite the latter's ties to Ahmadinejad and key figures in the Revolutionary Guard, be cannily playing to outmaneuver them within the IRGC ranks.<sup>50</sup>

The three closest examples are Atatürk, Reza Khan (who thanks to the clerical opposition to a republic crowned himself shah), and Mohammad Reza Shah (who was restored to power not only with American and British help, but with the support of Ayatollah Kashani who divorced himself from supporting Mohammad Mossadegh). All three committed themselves to modernizing their societies, and arguably did far better than their counterparts in Pakistan. One could conceive of a new Reza Khan who would build upon those efforts and those successes of the IRI such as expanding university education both demographically and to the Ph.D. level, and the expanding experience with the idea of elections, who would also learn to allow democratic institutions to be built. Ideally, this again would be a defender of a secular constitutional structure, with well run, transparent, and accountable elections. And it would be a defender of a transparent judiciary that did not rely upon the national security state of the secret police (SAVAK and SAVAMA) or extrajudicial killings and disappearances approved by clerical or political authorities.

Free and popular elections are not sufficient. Plebiscitary elections by themselves are subject to wild emotional swings of mood, and are unstable means for policy making. A true democratic structure is one with various institutional checks and balances to channel and regulate the competing interests and power formations in a society. This was the point of the arguments in the Federalist Papers of the period leading up to the American Constitution; recall that the Americans did not get it right the first time, and required important amendments the second time around.

Here, some of the goals of the democratic coalition of 1978 in Iran might be recalled: to diversify the economy away from an oil rentier state, to diversify trade relations, to institute a free press and civil rights, to build a democratic political structure. These need to be thought through again, and not allow the Plan and Budget Organization, for instance, to be a place of just making up numbers, or slogans of social justice to be unproductive distributions of money that tie people to patrons.

Arguably a mixed tutelary republic would, in foreign affairs, engage in regional and global diplomacy that would build upon Iran's strategic interests to stabilize the region, expand the diversity and robustness of its global trade and technical

links, and in that context strengthen its position in the nuclear arena by helping to pioneer a new age of international controls over the nuclear fuel cycle for energy, and give up its nuclear weapons programs (as Brazil did in an earlier decade) in exchange for becoming a robust economic power.

### **Civilian-Led, IRGC-Backed Mixed Republic**

One of the foundational problems of the tutelary (Atatürk) republic scenario is legitimacy, even more the case if Britain and the United States have a hand in helping it to come about, however grateful some segments of the population might be. This, despite the aid of Ayatollah Kashani, was the problem of Mohammad Reza Shah's restoration. It is a moot point now whether if he had democratized and diversified the economy, gradually empowering the growing middle classes, the outcome might have been different.

The better alternative then would be a Nelson Mandela–like scenario. In South Africa (to simplify greatly), Mandela, with the backing of the armed African National Congress, was able to lead a negotiated civilian transition from the old Afrikaaner security state. And with the help of Bishop Tutu, Mandela was able to institute an imperfect, but still politically effective, public peace and reconciliation process.

Whether or not a Mandela figure emerges in Iran (alternatives to a singular figure can be imagined in the range of potential coalition figures), it might be possible for a strongman or faction of the IRGC leaders to back such a civilian-led transition and the process of establishing a new secular constitution. The role of senior clerics such as Ayatollahs Sistani, Sanei, Dastgheib, and others could be helpful in maintaining a strong sense of the moral authority of Islam. Again, a secular state does not require an antireligious population. In many societies, class structures contain popular religious enthusiasms, and can again in Iran, in the sense that religious *hayats* (ritual and mutual help organizations) need not be abandoned, but they need to be integrated into productive economic networks (as they were once through the bazaar economies) rather than being greased with state ideology-tied funds. The *tariqat* (Sufi organizations), often tied to middle-class teachers and bureaucrats with their mystical understandings of Islam, need no longer be suppressed as they have been by the IRI.

It is possible to imagine a vigorous democratic debate leading to a robust constitutional republic supported and made accountable by the rich press and Internet activity of the past decades, and aided by the talents of lawyers, economists, engineers, social scientists, polling professionals, and others whose talents have been

underutilized, coming together from both inside Iran and the diaspora. Most of the more hopeful elements of the previous scenario could then apply here.

### **Reinforced Theocratic Scenario**

Finally there is the scenario in which either an IRGC coup installs Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi or one of his allies as Khamenei's successor, or Yazdi maneuvers successfully to have this done by a vote of the Assembly of Experts without a coup—or even, in a repetition of 1979, through the outmaneuvering of an initial liberal coalition transitional government.

There are multiple logics by which this could occur. One logic includes the fear among groups of the IRI elites of retribution from any new constitutional order. It has been speculated that unlike the affluent classes of the 1970s, these elites might find it less easy to leave Iran, having considerably less experience and comfort outside the country. It has been speculated by many commentators that Khamenei and other IRI leaders are stiffened in their resistance to compromise by their memories of 1978, that any sign of weakness or compromise will only engender further demands.

A second logic is the rationale of so-called “hardliners” since the taking of the American Embassy hostages in 1979, that Iran needs protection from domination by the corrosive capitalist Western and global economy, which distorts the ability of Iran to pursue its own independent course. The heightened emotional populism of the embassy takeover helped pass the Constitution that had seemed defeatable, and institutionalized the multiple institutions of clerical “supervision” of the government. Arguably one of the successes of the IRI has been to diversify its trade relations and global political alliances, initially a Third Worldist approach, but eventually building important relations with India, Turkey, both Koreas, and perhaps China. In any case, this second logic—that only from a position of strength can one negotiate—is one reason that such a scenario would likely imply intransigence on the nuclear weapons front. It, together with the third logic, is also the source of the language of infection and contamination used to fend off the commoditization and lifestyles of the West, and effect a “criminalization of youth culture,” as Shahram Khosravi puts it in his 2007 book, *Young and Defiant in Tehran*.

The third logic is ideological: the claim that an Islamic state can be created with will and discipline, force, and executions if necessary, and that the result will be one of a good society sustained by faith. In this logic, faith is protection against mental illness and depression, homosexuality, and social deviance. This logic has authoritarian hard edges, apocalyptic messianism, and a kind of Heideggerian care

of the soul, of authenticity, and of Being. This claim to knowledge of authenticity and Being as a guide to care of the soul melds with a claim for access to the divine intent and ordering of the world. This knowledge is revealed to the true faqih. It also can be expressed in a language of intimate family-like paternalism, which followers can find comforting.

Even if this scenario were a temporary outcome, the danger is of a renewed major terror, with executions of opponents justified in the ideological terms that have already labeled leaders of the Green Movement “corrupters of the earth” and similar terms that carry the death penalty. It is likely that there would be, as is already being called for, another “cultural revolution” as when the universities were shut down for three years in the early 1980s with purges of students and professors. Marx might speculate that such a scenario stage might have to be undergone in order to finally isolate and destroy this faction of the ideological state. One hopes not.

Mesbah Yazdi and his prominent allies among the clerics cannot act alone. This is a reason, as argued from the beginning, that one of the most important tactics, certainly not the only one, in the short term is to track and make visible the networks of influence in the institutional structure that this faction is building and to redirect or block them.

#### IV. UNDERDETERMINED FUTURES

Watching social upheavals unfold in various time frames and through different narrative devices has become the bread and butter of social science over the past two centuries, at least since the 18th century bourgeois revolutions in Europe and the United States, and the tutelary projects of modernization in both the “socialist” and “capitalist” worlds. The unfolding seems more turbulent in recent decades in part because so many more parts and forces are interacting transnationally as well as within the boundaries of nation-states. In the competition of position taking, sometimes made frenzied by the need to dominate the eye and to colonize the media circuits, the rhetorical or category masques named “tradition,” “religion,” and “modernity” morph into strange new social formations, anxieties, paranoias, and emotions that upset the calculations of many political agendas. Nothing is as it seems, as it was, or as it was thought things were supposed to be. In times out of joint, grief, rage, and directed anger struggle with adaptability and moving on. Neither plans of return to the past, nor enthusiasms for the future negotiate these times without upset.

To deal with these complex turbulences, I have tried to suggest the need to devise three-multidimensional tools more in the mode of a composer who

orchestrates harmonics and dissonances than in the mode of a planner who rationalizes “externalities” into a simple plan. These are the analytic tools of deciphering the aesthetics, technical infrastructures, and scenario modeling of Persian civil society, public spheres, and political forcing of choices.

The aesthetics of politics has a genealogy in the analysis of political emotions of mass politics in Europe. It is not always a pleasing aesthetics, but rather one filled with inversions of the sacred, theatrical methodism, metaphors of contagion, and fantasies of immortalization, of the hardness and purity of the body, and of the erotic ecstasy of battle. Many of these aesthetic-political processes operate also in Iran. One need look no further than the IRI’s fear of cultural “contagion” and “infection” from the west, and its martial language of those who can be killed without judicial procedures (*mohaareb*, “warrior,” *mofsed fil arz*, “corrupters of the earth,” *monafegh*, apostate).

But there is more to the aesthetic of politics in Iran as I have tried to illustrate not only with the ritual cycles and the Karbala paradigm (of social justice as a cosmological and moral frame of reference), but also with the rhythms of repetition and allusion linking events in sonic and emotional chains over long periods of time, carrying historical memories, engendering grief and rage, as well as determination and perseverance. Think simply of the chains: “Montazeri is not dead, the regime is dead”; “Neda is not dead, the regime is dead,” Neda as the call of Iran, the call of the reed separated from its beloved, its roots, its soul from its body in Rumi’s *Masnavi*; Neda and Sohrab, Sohrab and Rustam, the patriarchal tyranny of fathers killing sons, not allowing independence, succession, maturation, and growth (Iran’s so-called “Rustam complex” instead of an Oedipal one).

The aesthetics of politics play upon the instruments provided by the technical infrastructures of civil society and the public spheres, and these have been changing. There is more to say than that the new media have a role, that 2009 was facilitated by cell phones and the Internet as the revolution of 1977–79 was facilitated by cassette tapes produced by Khomeini in Paris and mechanically reproduced and disseminated in Iran. There is no technological determinism here, but there is a determined confluence of social movements of women, labor, students, journalists, and the youth, routed through the switches of a technological infrastructure. One of the most dramatic of emotional aesthetics is generated by the rapprochement of generations through the events of June 2009: Parents who had dismissed the Internet as so much frivolity, unnecessarily attracting the evil eye of the regime, suddenly found themselves lauding their children for having honed their hacking and digital communication skills. Suddenly old songs from the parents’ youth of



the hopeful days of revolution 30 years ago no longer seemed unbearably maudlin and old fashioned to the youth. The peopling of technologies is as important as the technologies themselves.

Finally, the future is always underdetermined, dependent on the political forcing of choices. This is often not a pretty game. But simulations and scenario building have become important tools for anticipatory flexibility toward emergent alternatives. When done well they draw attention to structural forces, to configurations of patterns, to coincident connections, to disjunctions, and to trade-offs. In social science, as in the simulation sciences of the natural world, they can be hypotheses generators, shock absorbers, ways to work out revealing permutations and patterns that might otherwise be missed, and most of all identifiers of crucial and useful things that need mapping for further scenario building and pattern recognition.

The aesthetics of politics play upon the instruments provided by the technical infrastructures of civil society and the public spheres, allowing the production of alternative scenarios of futures to come. Listen to the strange new music transforming the masque of a singular vox populi—one per nation-state, ventriloquized and stolen, by a leader—into the harmonics of multiplicities, of *ma bishomarim* (“we are many”) and *resane shomaid* (“we/you are the media”), of subjectivities etched in the new information flows. Listen to the tombak and dohol drums, the plaint of the ney, the pulse, the long fetch, the respiration, and the ebb and flow of life’s restructuring.

## ABSTRACT

*This essay investigates three methods for reading topical events, in this case events in Iran in 2009. Timing, as in music, is part of the trick of Iranian (as also other) politics. In Part I, breaking news is read in terms of historically and structurally informed social theory, with an eye to how civil society and public spheres are structured. There is an aesthetics to these spheres, not simply a calculus of interests or a space where rational debate can be abstracted from the civil society into a political public sphere. The (dis)harmonics of the Karbala Paradigm and the Islamic and pre-Islamic reference system of the 1979 revolution have been rescored in the aftermath of the June 2009 elections. Part II draws out the technical infrastructure, both low tech and hi tech, within which social and cultural action happens and civil society is restructured. It calls attention to the way in which the Green Wave was a confluence of civil society movements of women, labor, students, and journalists, among others. Iran is seen as a key test bed for struggles over the control of the Internet, as state control becomes more flexible, targeted, and pervasive. Part III plays with a futuring method—like the scenario methods used in industry and the simulation techniques used in the sciences—to*

plan for and evaluate alternative social logics that can play out in uncertain and underdetermined futures. The scenario method, to be used iteratively with several axes, helps clarify where there is need for better mapping of the networks of the players and their “small worlds” (“six or two degrees of difference”) cross-faction relationships.

**Keywords:** Iran, revolution, politics, religion, Internet, scenario building

## NOTES

*Acknowledgments.* I would like to thank Kim and Michael Fortun, Mehdi Abedi, Orkideh Behrouzan, Mazyar Lotfalian, and Kaushik Sunder Rajan for valuable suggestions in shaping and refining this essay, and also Danny Postel for the suggestion that originally got me started on this essay as well as the short portion of part 3 that appeared on *Tehran Bureau* (Fischer 2010).

1. See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogadF\\_IzjTc&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogadF_IzjTc&feature=related); accessed March 30, 2010.
2. See Fischer 1987.
3. Refrain from the opening of K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852).
4. For other harmonics and multiple ways Iranian actors narrate the revolution, see Fischer 1982, 1983, 1993, and 2005.
5. Various kinds of drums at Ashura in Shiraz; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=up0pm0Is4ml&feature=related>, accessed March 30, 2010; and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=up0pm0Is4ml&feature=related>; accessed March 30, 2010. For a sense of the traditions of Ashura, see the video of the carrying of the naql (bier of Hossein) in Taft-e Yazd, followed by the beat, the rhythmic chanting and breast beating of thousands of men with women watching from the top of the hosseiniyeh, Part 1 of 3: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgkctE2QthI&feature=related>, accessed March 30, 2010; Part 2: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tve2DkIAJ0E&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tve2DkIAJ0E&feature=related), accessed March 30, 2010.
6. On the terms for civil society and public sphere, see Fischer and Abedi 1993. And on the functions of the visual media of the 1990s, particularly film, see Fischer 2004.
7. For a partial time line of this campaign and repression against its activists: [http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/defenders/hrd\\_iran/hrd\\_iran\\_timeline.htm](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/defenders/hrd_iran/hrd_iran_timeline.htm); accessed March 30, 2010.
8. On scenarios, see Fischer (2000). The reference to Victor Hugo is from the introduction to the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, where Engels and Marx distinguish the “great man in history” approaches of Victor Hugo, and mechanical forces of history of Proudhon, from their own structural approach, which relies on the active creation of political consciousness to seize opportunities to leverage shifts in forces of production and create new relations of production, inscribed in new constitutional forms.
9. See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNogGT\\_kCJk&feature=PlayList&p=4D6129EBCC88.F9FE&index=12](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNogGT_kCJk&feature=PlayList&p=4D6129EBCC88.F9FE&index=12), accessed March 30, 2010; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUhpUaOl8cU>, accessed March 30, 2010; <http://www.youtube.com/onlymehdi#p/u/3/PEOA6lqiTY8>, accessed March 30, 2010.
10. The iconic line of Maulana Rumi’s *Masnavi* (“listen to the reed/ney-flute, the complaint of the separation of the reed”) is doubled in 2009 by the icon of Neda, whose name means “calling” or “voice.” Neda Agha Soltani was shot on June 20, 2009; see the section “We are not bought-off citizens,” below.
11. It is 1388 by the Iranian solar calendar; 1431 by the Islamic lunar calendar. The secular months of the Iranian calendar have ancient Iranian names; the months of the religious calendar have Arabic names. Thus Muharram 1431 fell during the Iranian months of Dei and Bahman 1388.
12. *Khashm-e enghelaabi*, revolutionary anger is that anger that the revolutionaries legitimate as necessary to overcome resistance and obstacles. The rage expressed by the protesters is against

- this legitimation of extrajudicial violence by the state, which informally allowed the baseej (semiformal militia) to beat and slap people for infringements of dress code or public behavior. In the tutelary language of the Islamic Republic: “Baa motekhalfeaan barkhord khaahad shod” [those who break the law will pay for it], meaning beatings and *barkhord-e ghaate* (severe punishment). The dynamics of emotion are central.
13. He would insist that he always meant the veto power of the clergy and the velayat-e faqih itself to be supervisory not actually running the government.
  14. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnNJ93Qju7A&feature=related>, accessed March 30, 2010.
  15. See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNogGT\\_kCJk&feature=PlayList&p=4D6129EBCC88F9FE&index=12](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNogGT_kCJk&feature=PlayList&p=4D6129EBCC88F9FE&index=12), accessed March 30, 2010; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8rRSXAYT-w>, accessed March 30, 2010; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SraGdvAWqlo&feature=related>, accessed March 30, 2010; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkCxUmuXtj8&feature=related>, accessed March 30, 2010.
  16. See <http://kojayi.wordpress.com/2009/06/16/ayatollah-montazeris-letter/>, accessed March 30, 2010.
  17. Procession with the casket in Qum: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_knNlh3-ZOY&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_knNlh3-ZOY&feature=related), accessed March 30, 2010; <http://www.youtube.com/user/onlymehdi#p/u/298/z76smsysd80>, accessed March 30, 2010; crowd in the shrine chants “Ya Hazrat-e Masumeh, Ya Montazeri Masume” [Oh Honorable Pure One (Fatima sister of the eighth Imam), Oh Montazeri Pure One]: <http://www.youtube.com/user/onlymehdi#p/u/298/z76smsysd80>, accessed March 30, 2010; funeral procession with brass and drum band, banners and standards in Najafabad: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbyDsb8-\\_Sg&feature=PlayList&p=107BBED3FD6C0951&playnext=1&playnext\\_from=PL&index=64](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbyDsb8-_Sg&feature=PlayList&p=107BBED3FD6C0951&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=64), accessed March 30, 2010; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmR11O0hp1Y&feature=related>, accessed March 30, 2010; Mohseni Square in Tehran: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogadF\\_IZjTc&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogadF_IZjTc&feature=related), accessed March 30, 2010; at Sharif University in Tehran: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmR11O0hp1Y&feature=related>, accessed March 30, 2010; at Arak University: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWJsHAmxroo&feature=related>, accessed March 30, 2010.
  18. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVFA1-kQbh8&NR=1>, accessed March 30, 2010.
  19. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BihsuueVq4&feature=related>, accessed March 30, 2010.
  20. President Ahmadinejad, Tehran mayor Muhammad-Bagher Qalibaf, and speaker of the Majlis Ali Larijani were present.
  21. The body of S. Ali Mousavi Habibi, 43, was allowed to be buried in Behesht-e Zarah on December 30, under heavy security with about 40 family members present including Mir Hossein Mousavi; see Fathi 2009a. In the days before his assassination, he had received a series of phone calls threatening his life in an attempt to intimidate and keep Mir Hossin Musavi quiet. See <http://www.makmalbaf.com/news.php>, accessed March 30, 2010; see also Worth and Fathi 2009.
  22. Worth and Fathi 2009. The names of the five shot to death in Tehran released by Jonbesh Rah-e Sabz are Mehdi Farhadinia, Mohammad Ali Rasekhinia, Amir Arshadi, Sharam Faraji, and S. Ali Mousavi. Video clips of the deaths of the young men are archived, along with many other clips, on <http://www.youtube.com/user/onlymehdi>, accessed March 30, 2010.
  23. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mv9ehsW6PN8>, accessed March 30, 2010.
  24. The references are to the angry “lost generation” of the 1360s or 1980s whose childhoods were traumatized by the grim discipline of the war years, and to their second traumatization in the euphoric election of President Khatami in 1997 followed by his and their defeat in the violent crackdown on the 18 Tir demonstrations of 1999.
  25. Neda’s grave in Behesht-e Zahra cemetery was subsequently desecrated by members of the Baseej. The 40th (July 30, 2009) saw a major protest both at her gravesite and later around the large new Mossallah. For a participant’s account, see: <http://www.voteforiran.com/2009/07/3507/>, accessed March 30, 2010.

26. In 2005 (April 10, 1384) there was a major strike by hundreds of bus drivers in Tehran, despite raids the previous days on their union leaders. Although crushed, it was one of a number of economic strikes, and efforts to organize, that have periodically flared up.
27. On the threat of suicide bomber units, see Alfonch's (2007) account of "Iran's Suicide Brigades" organized under the Doctrinal Analysis Center for Security without Borders (*Markaz-e barresihai-ye doktrinyal-e amniyat bedun marz*), an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps think tank, directed by Hassan Abbasi. This particular group calls itself the "bright shooting star suicide bombers brigade" based in Qum.
28. "Khomeinei's secret in English with photos," see <http://www.makmalbaf.com/news.php>, accessed March 30, 2010; <http://homylafayette.blogspot.com/2009/12/makmalbaf-secrets-khameneis-life.html>, accessed March 30, 2010.
29. President Ahmadinejad went to Damascus on February 26 to meet with Hassan Nasrullah (head of Hezbollah in Lebanon) and President Bashir al-Asaad of Syria. The following two days in Tehran he hosted a meeting on Palestine with Khaled Meshal (of Hamas), Ramadan Abdullah Shallah (of Islamic Jihad), and Ahmed Jibril (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command). In Iraq, Ali Lahrijani had brokered a Shi'ite alliance between the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (led by the Hakimis), Moqtada al-Sadr, former prime minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, and Ahmed Chelabi; and just before the March 2010 elections, Chelabi and Ali al-Lami who control the Accountability and Justice Commission barred some five hundred candidates from running for office on grounds of Baathist ties, mimicking the Iranian style of control of elections. The banned included sitting members of parliament, and the sitting Minister of Defense. On March 10, Ahmadinejad went to Kabul just as U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was concluding a three-day visit, and the two traded barbs. See Dreyfus 2010; see also <http://www.alalam.ir/english/detail.aspx?id=99230>, accessed March 30, 2010; <http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-1499769&Lang=E>, accessed March 30, 2010; <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62917V20100310>, accessed March 30, 2010.
30. On the role of the press, a valuable log of the many journalists who have been jailed can be found in the annual reports of Reporters without Borders: those from 2003 and 2004 give a particularly clear picture of the structure of refusal to allow the state to control information flow.
31. For a more complete account of the Karbala Paradigm, see Fischer 1980, 1999.
32. See Paolo Virno's (2004) reconstruction of how the vox populi idea came to displace a contending political philosophy of the multitude in the 17th century, and came to be identified with the state as the voice of the people. Today communicative infrastructures make possible a different kind of social composition that, like the Internet, can be decentralized and robust, in ways that may not have been practical in the 17th or 18th centuries.
33. For international media coverage of these events, see Fathi 2009a, b; CNN 2010; Payvand Iran News 2010. For the genealogy of such groups around the world as well as a statement by the Mourning Mothers of Laleh, see <http://womennewsnetwork.net/2009/10/08/mourning-mothers-iran-stand-with-activist-mothers-worldwide/>; accessed March 30, 2010. Laleh Park, aside from being a public space, is also a cultural focus of lower north Tehran: it is where the Museum of Modern Art, the Carpet Museum, the former Intercontinental (now Laleh) Hotel, and a craft market are located.
34. These operate under an umbrella organization with representatives in Parliament who, it is said, have tried to oppose changes to the progressive labor provisions in the law, international conventions signed under President Khatami with the ILO, and the cutback in subsidies announced by President Ahmadinejad's government (to contain the spiraling costs). How progressive the labor provisions can be is open to question, given the violations in the law to international conventions signed by Iran (see Osanloo 2007), the increase in contract labor over salaried labor, and the efforts to dismantle labor rights under the Ahmadinejad regime.
35. The Tudeh was essentially nonexistent in the 1970s, and its ties with the Soviet Union had been broken. Family histories, of course, were not extinguished in the political consciousness of the progressive left, and the Tudeh occasionally is used as a boogeyman by the IRI. But the left groups of the 1970s were home-grown independent formations, drawing upon Maoist as well

- as other ideological influences. For Iranian histories narrated from a leftist perspective with stress on the importance of labor movements, including the state tactics of public confessions, see Abrahamian (1982, 1999).
36. It is said to have been founded in 1979, it was banned for the next 25 years, and is still not legal, although it is recognized by international unions.
  37. See the interview by Bill Balderston of Labor Notes with Tehran labor organizer “Homayoun Poorzad”: [enduringamerica.com/.../iran-ahmadinejad-and-the-labour-movement/](http://enduringamerica.com/.../iran-ahmadinejad-and-the-labour-movement/).
  38. See [http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Iran\\_May\\_Day\\_Statement\\_ITUC-EI-ITF-IUF\\_.pdf](http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Iran_May_Day_Statement_ITUC-EI-ITF-IUF_.pdf); accessed March 30, 2010.
  39. President Khatami was attempting to introduce legislation to curb the supervisory power over government actions by institutions controlled by hard-liners. The harshness of the sentences against the students again were to teach Khatami a lesson about who was in charge.
  40. It is associated with Khwaja Nezam ul-Mulk and the systemizations of al-Ghazali, which helped consolidate the Nezamiyya school system. Both were Persians from Tus who exercised formative influence on the Seljuk polity. Abu Ali al-Hasan al-Tusi Nizam al-Mulk as scholar, vizier, and briefly ruler of the Seljuk empire helped create the state system as well as the Nezamiyyah school system. His title Nezam ul-Mulk means “order of the state.” He wrote as well a treatise on government (*Siasatnameh*). Lotfalian (2001) has argued that the contemporary usage of nezam throughout the Islamic world arose during the *islah* or reform movement of the past century in dialogue with the secular state, and came to mean the legitimacy of Islamic government. Given that “Islamic” has come in Iran to be contested by key founders of the Islamic Republic (Montazeri, Mousavi, Karoubi, Mousavi Ardabili, Dastgeib, and others), I suspect that the meaning has again shifted a bit back toward the English usage of “system” with a pejorative nuance of authoritarianism.
  41. Thanks to Mazyar Lotfalian for the term “neural media.” On the little or minor media of the 1977–79 revolution, see Fischer and Abedi 1990, chapter 6. I am indebted as well to the analyses of a number of commentators from India at the time of the BJP campaigns in the 1980s and early 1990s to destroy the Babri Masjid and (re)build a Ram temple in its place who noted that a key medium was the placement of small Ram stickers everywhere in the visual field, saturating perception subliminally. Lotfalian suggests that the metaphor of small and minor media is from public spheres still dependent on one-way communication, no longer quite “one to many” mass dissemination, but still only “several to many.” It was Khomeini’s tapes mechanically reproduced (one to many) but also graffiti and posters (some to many). Neural media, Lotfalian suggests, is about connectors and how they combine with other sets and create new contexts [personal communication].
  42. Part of a hopeful New Years greeting I and a number of others received from a highly placed official.
  43. Mesba-Yazdi is said to have been, like Khomeini and Montazeri, a student of Allameh S. Muhammad Hossein Tabataba’i, but interpreted illuminationist or *ishraqi* philosophy in a more literalist way than any of them; indeed, in the 1980s Khomeini refused to allow Mesba-Yazdi more of a hand in the war. The illuminationist philosophy of Suhrawardi, Mullah Sadra, and Sadr ud-Din Shirazi, as interpreted by Henri Corban and Allameh Tabataba’i, derived an imagistic interworld between the divine and physical worlds that could be attained by the trained mind in analogous fashion to neo-Platonistic theories of emanation. Although Khomeini taught *irfan* (mysticism) to Montazeri and Morteza Mutahhari, and wrote interpretations of the Qur’an with a slight *irfan* understanding (delivered on television after the 1979 revolution), he hesitated to claim more than a human can by reasoning about the divine intent. Mesba-Yazdi seems to have fewer qualms and has also promoted an apocalyptic sense of the immanence of the return of the Twelfth Imam.
  44. In November 2009, the Seminary Teachers Association (under the guidance of Ayatullahs Mesbah-Yazdi, Janati, and Mohammad Yazdi) initiated a campaign to demote sitting Grand Ayatullahs and authorize their own Grand Ayatullahs who followed their politics, led by Khamene’i, and including Jafar Sobhani, Mahmoud Hashemi Sharhroudi and Ayatullah Khoshvaght (widely thought to have been among those clerics who issued a fatwa facilitating the serial murders of intellectuals in 1998–99. In December, along with Assembly of Experts

- Member Ali Akbar Qarebaghi, the Seminary Teachers Association began a campaign to discredit Grand Ayatullah Yousef Sane'i, asserting he was not qualified for his position. Sane'i is considered by many the leading ayatullah in the country. To attempt to appoint Grand Ayatullahs is to make a travesty of the office (on how ayatullahs achieve their positions, see Fischer 1980, 1999). Ayatullah Ali Mohmmad Dastgheib, an early critic of the June elections along with Montazeri, was ushered by state officials off a plane on his way home to Shiraz (Ali Farokhi, November 20, 2009, "Regime Seeks to Appoint New Grand Ayatullahs." Roozonline. <http://www.irannewsnow.com/tag/ayatollah-dastgheib>); on Khostvagh, see Hossein Bastani, December 3, 2006, "Remember This Name." Roozonline. <http://www.roozonline.com/english/new/newsitem/article/////remember-this-name.html>. For an analysis of the divisions among the Ayatullahs, see Muhammad Sahimi (2009, "The Widening Divide among Iran's Clerics" Tehran Bureau, July 2, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/07/the-widening-divide-among-irans-clerics.html>).
45. With thanks to James Spencer, I draw on the following analyses in the following paragraphs: Iran and the Internet: "Uneasy Standoff," June 16, 2009, <http://www.renesys.com/blog/2009/06/iran-and-the-internet-uneasy-s.shtml>, accessed March 30, 2010; "Iranian Traffic Engineering," June 17, 2009, <http://asert.arbornetworks.com/2009/06/iranian-traffic-engineering/>, accessed March 30, 2010; "A Deeper Look at the Iranian Firewall," June 18, 2009, <http://asert.arbornetworks.com/2009/06/a-deeper-look-at-the-iranian-firewall/>, accessed March 30, 2010; "Iran DDoS Activity: Chatter, Tools and Traffic Rates," June 19, 2009, <http://asert.arbornetworks.com/2009/06/iran-ddos-activity-chatter-tools-and-traffic-rates/0>, accessed March 30, 2010; "The Proxy Fight for Iranian Democracy," June 22, 2009, <http://www.renesys.com/blog/2009/06/the-proxy-fight-for-iranian-de.shtml>, accessed March 30, 2010; "First round in Internet war goes to Iranian intelligence," June 28, 2009, <http://www.debka.com/article.php?aid=1396>, accessed March 30, 2010; and note in particular the discussion over TOR, and Orion's reference to the emotively titled [www.nednet.org](http://www.nednet.org), an account created on July 23, 2009, in the United States; see <http://www.whois.net/whois/nednet.org>, accessed March 30, 2010.
  46. See Qui 2009 for an account of how China has been turning cybercafés more and more into entertainment terminals, with little or no possibility for surfing the web, as a means of control.
  47. See <http://www.debka.com/article/8268/>; accessed March 30, 2010.
  48. Ushadi (Swahili, "testimony") was used in the crisis of violence in Kenya and then was used for locating victims of the Haiti and Chile earthquakes in 2009, gathering reports by short messaging on cell phone, e-mail or the web; see <http://blog.ushahidi.com/>, accessed March 30, 2010; <http://www.tadias.com/01/19/2010/crisis-mapping-and-collaboration-between-western-and-african-ict-developers-for-haiti-quake-response/>, accessed March 30, 2010. On Haystack, see <http://www.haystacknetwork.com/>, accessed March 30, 2010. On Freigate, <http://www.dit-inc.us/http://www.dit-inc.us/freigate>, accessed March 30, 2010. Psiphon and Citizen Lab, see <http://citizenlab.org/> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psiphon>, accessed March 30, 2010. On MIT's Center for Future Civic Media: <http://civic.mit.edu/>, accessed March 30, 2010.
  49. One line of speculation is that Khamene'i's alliance with the Pasdaran is in fact with an eye to foreclosing succession by another cleric in favor of rule by the Pasdaran in exchange for protecting his family during any regime change, especially by a execution happy cleric who decides to make an example by "religious" purging. Against this must be balanced the influence of Mesba-Yazdi within the Pasdaran. The chess games being played are intense and multiple.
  50. Ali Motahhari, a Majlis Representative for Tehran, has even suggested that the reformists have made it more difficult to outmaneuver Ahmadinejad and Mesba-Yazdi, that without their interference, Khamene'i might have been able to institute reforms sidelining them. See <http://tabnak.ir/fa/pages?cid=84968>, accessed March 30, 2010.

*Editors Note:* *Cultural Anthropology* has published a number of essays on democracy, voting, and elections. See, for example, Amahl Bishara's "Watching U.S. Television from the Palestinian Streets: The Media, the State, and Representational Interventions" (2008), Paul Manning's

“Rose-Colored Glasses? Color Revolutions and Cartoon Chaos in Postsocialist Georgia” (2007), and Julia Paley’s “Making Democracy Count: Opinion Polls and Market Surveys in the Chilean Political Transition” (2001).

*Cultural Anthropology* has also published essays on politics and contemporary Islam, including Kenneth George’s “Ethics, Iconoclasm, and Qur’anic Art in Indonesia” (2009) and Anne Menely’s “Fashions and Fundamentalisms in Fin-de-Siècle Yemen: Chador Barbie and Islamic Socks” (2007).

## REFERENCES CITED

- Abrahamian, Ervand  
 1982 Iran between Two Revolutions. Princeton: Princeton University Press.  
 1999 Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Alfoneh, Ali  
 2007 Iran’s Suicide Brigades: Terrorism Resurgent. *Middle East Quarterly* 14(1):37–44. <http://www.meforum.org/1059/irans-suicide-brigades>, accessed March 30, 2010.
- Bishara, Amahl  
 2008 Watching U.S. Television from the Palestinian Streets: The Media, the State, and Representational Interventions. *Cultural Anthropology* 23(3):488–530.
- Cable News Network (CNN)  
 2010 Detention of 33 Iranian Mothers Sparks Protest, Group Says. January 10. <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/01/10/iran.mourning.mothers/index.html>, accessed March 30, 2010.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari  
 1980 *Mille Plateaux*. Paris: Minuit.
- Dreyfus, Robert  
 2010 Iraq’s New Sectarian Storm Clouds. *The Nation*, March 8: 20–22.
- Fathi, Nazila  
 2009a Mothers Arrested before Opposition Rally in Tehran. *New York Times*, December 7. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/07/world/middleeast/07iran.html>, accessed March 30, 2010.  
 2009b In Tehran, Thousands Rally to Back Government. *New York Times*, December 31: A10. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/31/world/middleeast/31iran.html>, accessed March 30, 2010.
- Fischer, Michael M. J.  
 1980 Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 2nd edition (1999) Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.  
 1982 “Islam and the Revolt of the Petit Bourgeoisie.” *Daedalus*. 111(1): 101–125.  
 1983 Imam Khomeini: Four Ways of Understanding. In *Voices of Islamic Resurgence*. John Esposito, ed. Pp. 150–174. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
 1987 Repetitions in the Revolution. In *Shi’ism, Resistance, Revolution*. Martin Kramer, ed. Pp. 117–134. Boulder, CO: Westwood Press.  
 1993a Five Frames for Understanding the Iranian Revolution. In *Critical Moments in Religious History*. Kenneth Keulman, ed. Pp. 173–192. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.  
 2000 “If Derrida Is the Gomez-Peña of Philosophy, What Are the Genres of Social Science? Just Gaming: The Y2K Computer Bug and Other Uncertainties—A Critical Simulation Game.” In *Para-Sites (Late Editions 7)*, G. Marcus, ed. Pp. 395–429. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- 2004 Mute Dreams, Blind Owls, and Dispersed Knowledge: Persian Poesis in the Transnational Circuitry. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- 2005 Persian Minatures: I. Bahs (Debate) in Qum; II. Simulation in Tehran. *New Initiative for Middle East Peace (NIMEP) Insights* 1:14–24.
- 2009 Iran and the Boomeranging Cartoon Wars: Can Public Spheres at Risk Ally with Public Spheres Yet to Be Achieved? *Cultural Politics* 5(1):27–62.
- 2010 Building Scenarios for Iran. Tehran Bureau. January 6. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/01/scenario-building-for-iran.html>, accessed May 7, 2010.
- Fischer, Michael M. J., and Mehdi Abedi  
1990 *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues between Postmodernity and Tradition*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Fischer, Michael M. J., and Mehdi Abedi  
1993 Thinking a Public Sphere in Arabic and Persian. *Public Culture* 6(1):219–230.
- George, Kenneth  
2009 Ethics, Iconoclasm, and Qur'anic Art in Indonesia. *Cultural Anthropology* 24(4):589–621.
- Khosravi, Sharam  
2007 *Young and Defiant in Tehran*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude  
1964 *Le cru et le cuit* [The Raw and the Cooked]. Paris: Plon.  
1971 *Le homme nu* [The Naked Man]. Paris: Plon.
- Lotfalian, Mazyar  
2001 Knowledge Systems and Islamic Discourses: A Genealogy of Keywords on the Development of Science and Technology in Transcultural Context. *Cultural Dynamics* 13:231–243.
- Manning, Paul  
2007 Rose-Colored Glasses? Color Revolutions and Cartoon Chaos in Post-socialist Georgia. *Cultural Anthropology* 22(2):171–213.
- Meneley, Anne  
2007 Fashions and Fundamentalisms in Fin-de-Siècle Yemen: Chador Barbie and Islamic Socks. *Cultural Anthropology* 22(2):214–243.
- Osanloo, Mansour  
2007 The Current Labor Class Situation and the Labor Movement in Iran. February 22. AFL-CIO Solidarity Center. [http://www.solidaritycenter.org/files/iran\\_blueprint\\_022207.pdf](http://www.solidaritycenter.org/files/iran_blueprint_022207.pdf), accessed March 30, 2010.
- Paley, Julia  
2001 Making Democracy Count: Opinion Polls and Market Surveys in the Chilean Political Transition. *Cultural Anthropology* 16(2):135–164.
- Payvand Iran News  
2010 Iran: 30 Members of Mourning Mothers Detained in Tehran. January 10. <http://www.payvand.com/news/10/jan/1089.html>, accessed March 30, 2010.
- Qui, Jack Linchuan  
2009 *Working-Class Network Society: Communication Technology and the Information Have-Less in Urban China*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Virno, Paolo  
2004 *A Grammar of the Multitude*. Cambridge: Semiotexte.
- Worth, Robert, and Nazila Fathi  
2009 Police Are Said to Have Killed 10 in Iran Protests. *New York Times*, December 28: A1. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/28/world/middleeast/28iran.html>, accessed March 30, 2010.