Culture Wars And Dual Society In Iran

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In his 1845 novel *Sybil: or, The two Nations*, the English statesman Benjamin Disraeli voiced the view that British society contained "[t]wo nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws."[1] In the same years as Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, and three years before Marx and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*, Disraeli defined the "two nations" as "the rich and the poor," but in addition to economic inequality he also emphasized cultural differences. These three books were written in what historians have called the "Hungry Forties," but as the nineteenth century wore on, poverty diminished in Europe. With growing prosperity, the cultural differences between rich and poor gradually lessened, for as Norbert Elias put it: "It is one of the peculiarities of Western society that in the

[1] Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil: or, The two Nations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 65-66.

course of its development [the] contrast between the situation and code of conduct of the upper and lower strata decreases considerably. Lower-class characteristics are spreading to all classes . . . [a]nd at the same time, what used to be distinguishing features of the upper classes are likewise spreading to society at large."[2]

In Iran matters were different, as cultural differences between upper and lower strata of society *increased* beginning in the late nineteenth century. The gradual adoption of European manners, ideas, social norms, and consumption patterns by growing numbers of Iranians led to a cultural bifurcation in society that, if it did not cause the revolution of 1979, at least conditioned its outcome. The culture wars that erupted in the 1920s under the Westernizing rule of Reza Shah (r. 1925-1941) have continued to plague Iranian society, forty years of Islamist rule notwithstanding. In this study I will first discuss the origins of what the historian Nikki Keddie has called Iran's "two cultures" syndrome,[3] arguing that they lie in Iran's ambiguous position in international society.[4] I will then chronicle its genesis in the nineteenth century and examine its deepening in the twentieth century, paying

[2] Norbert Elias, *The Process of Civilization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 461.

[3] Nikki R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University, 1981), 183.

[4] As defined by Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in International Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 13-16, 24-40.

particular attention to the role of education and the dualism's reflection in the urban morphology of Tehran. In the last section, I will turn to the culture wars raging in the Islamic Republic, before concluding with a few comparative remarks.

Iran's Fragile Sovereignty in the Age of Imperialism

Iran was one of a very small group of non-Western states that was never formally colonized by Europeans, the others being the Ottoman Empire/Turkey, China, Japan, and Siam/Thailand.[5] While these states retained their nominal sovereignty in the age of imperialism, they were not accepted by Western powers as full members of international society. Their sovereignty remained fragile, and they were more vulnerable to external intervention than small European nations. They lacked the power to prevent their economies from being penetrated by Europeans who sought to incorporate them into their respective "informal empires,"[6] a condition

[5] Korea escaped European imperialism only to be colonized by Japan.

[6] Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2005), 18-21. For the case of Iran see Wilhelm Litten, *Persien von der "pénétration pacifique" zum "Protektorat" : Urkunden und Tatsachen zur Geschichte der europäischen "pénétration pacifique" in Persien 1860-1919* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1920) and Charles Issawi, "European Economic Penetration, 1872-1921," *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7, From *Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*, ed. Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, and Charles Melville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 590-607.

that led Lenin to label them "semi-colonies."[7] They were also forced to sign unequal treaties with Western powers, most notoriously the so-called capitulations, non-reciprocal agreements that exempted Europeans from local jurisdictions on the grounds that the Asians lacked "civilized" legal systems that could afford a Westerner a fair trial.[8] Western jurists routinely referred to them as "semi-civilized," assigning them a liminal space somewhere between the fully "civilized" European nations and the (presumably "uncivilized") non-European states and peoples that Europeans ruled over in their respective colonial empires. This situation was obviously deeply humiliating for these states' elites, for which reason escaping their liminal status and gaining full equality in international society were their paramount foreign policy goals; to reach it they had to reform their countries in order to attain what Westerners posited to be the "standard of civilization."[9]

In the case of the Ottoman Empire, the transition from a situation where relations with the European powers were marked by equality to one

[7] V. I. Lenin, "On the Slogan for the United States of Europe," *Collected Works*, vol. 21 (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 339-343.

[8] Turan Kayaoğlu, *Legal Imperialism: Sovereignty and Extraterritoriality in Japan, the Ottoman Empire, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For an older study that has the advantage of incorporating the cases of Iran and Thailand in the analysis see Yaotong Tchen, *De la disparition de la juridiction consulaire dans certains pays d'Orient* (Paris: Les presses modernes, 1931).

[9] Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of "Civilization" in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

where they were perceived as being humiliatingly unequal by the Ottomans took centuries, but in Iran the realization was relatively sudden. In the early nineteenth century, as the new Qajar dynasty (1786-1925) sought to reestablish the borders of the Safavid empire (1501-1722) at a time when the Russian empire was expanding southwards, the two states came into conflict in the Caucasus. After two wars, both of which ended in Russian victories, the Czarist empire imposed draconian peace conditions on Iran in the Treaty of Turkmenchay (1828), most notably the loss of major northwestern territories, the establishment of a capitulations regime granting extraterritorial right to Russian subjects in Iran, and the payment of 20 million silver rubles in reparations.[10]

The military defeat and subsequent humiliation of Iranians, the scope of which was broadened when other European powers demanded and had to be granted – in application of the most-favored-nation principle – privileges similar to those Russia had extracted, were a wake-up call for politically aware Iranians.[11] At first, inadequate military prowess was deemed to be the cause of the defeat, and to remedy the situation Crown Prince Abbās

[10] Muriel Atkin, *Russia and Iran, 1780-1828* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

[11] Iran's experience foreshadowed China's defeat in the First Opium War (1839-1842) and Japan's inability to refuse Commodore Matthew Perry's demand in 1853 that the country end its international seclusion, both of which led to the imposition of capitulations on the two East Asian powers and subsequent attempts by Chinese and Japanese leaders to gain equal status with European powers.

Mirza began a military reform along European lines. While this reform project ultimately petered out and did not lead to the creation of a strong army,[12] it did lead to the introduction of novel European practices that some tradition-minded Iranians found distasteful.[13]

Iranians gradually came to think of their country as having fallen behind the "West,"[14] which made rejoining the "caravan of civilization" in its march forward their paramount aim. The result was what has been called "defensive developmentalism," a set of policies aimed at strengthening the state militarily, economically, and administratively so as to enable it to withstand European domination.[15] The achievements of these policies were ultimately disappointing, and if Iran retained its formal sovereignty it was more because of its position as a buffer state

[12] Jean Calmard, "Les réformes militaires sous les Qâjâr (1794-1925)," in *Entre l'Iran et l'Occident*, ed. Yann Richard (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1989), 17-42.

[13] The boots that came with the new uniforms, for instance, were deemed undesirable because, unlike traditional slippers, they were cumbersome to take off, making it more difficult to wash one's feet as part of the obligatory ablutions preceding Muslim prayers. A few decades later, the establishment of military bands introduced European music into the public realm, contravening the very restrictive rules governing musical performance under the Twelver Shiite sharia.

[14] Taking a global perspective, it would be more accurately to say that it was Europe that had forged ahead, not the rest of the world that lagged behind.

[15] James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 73-87.

between the Russian and the British empires. But the increased interaction with Europe and with Europeans led an increasing number of Iranians to adopt cultural practices that they associated with the successful nations and therefore deemed to be conducive to progress. Some of these acts of imitation stated at Court: Mohammad Shah's (r. 1834-1848) 1839 decree on the adoption of European-style clothing by men is one of the first examples I know of, but under his son Nāser al-Din Shah (r. 1848-1896) this Westernization of Court life continued. Moreover, as the nineteenth century progressed, more and more Iranians traveled to Europe and upon their return some of them brought European customs with them.[16] Many members of the elite spent part of the summer in Tbilisi, where they came into sustained contact with Russian culture. Inside Iran, European residents such as diplomats, missionaries, educators, physicians, etc., transmitted European cultural practices to Iranians, and some Iranian merchants became acquainted with European ways during their prolonged stays in the Ottoman Empire and in India.

The way to safeguard Iran's sovereignty was to gain the respect of Europeans, to ensure that Europeans would not look down on Iranians but in fact regard them as equals. Since the West,

[16] Farideh Jeddi, *Politische und kulturelle Auswirkungen des Auslandsstudiums auf die iranische Gesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert. Unter Berücksichtigung der iranischen Stipendiaten in Westeuropa* (1812-1857) (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992).

and therefore its culture, ruled supreme in the nineteenth century, imitating European cultural forms, for instance dressing like Europeans, sitting on chairs rather than on the floor, eating with forks and knives, were a very rational attempt to signify to the Europeans that Iranians were not a backward people. Iranian elites were hardly unique in making this calculation, to wit a little poem by the Meiji Emperor (r. 1868-1912) that is prominently displayed at the entrance to the Meiji Shrine in Tokyo:

> By gaining the good and rejecting
> what is wrong
> It is our desire that we'll compare favourably
> With other lands abroad.[17]

The desire to adopt what is good about Western culture while rejecting what is bad about it and retaining that which is good about one's own culture is of course common to most non-Western modernizers. Where they differed among each other was on what exactly was "good" and what was "wrong." And in this context it is significant that the Meiji Emperor also started wearing European clothes, sheared his topknot, and began eating European food, which he liked to accompany with French wine. The state visits by non-European rulers, where they insisted that

[17] Stefan Chiarantano, "The Shrines of General Nogi and the Emperor Meiji and his consort, Empress Shokan," http://thingsasian.com/story/shrines-general-nogi-and-emperor-meiji-and-his-consort-empress-shokan. Accessed 24 September 2018.

the protocol attending such visits by European monarchs govern their visits as well, far from being an expression of childlike vanity on the part of rulers like Nāser al-Din Shah, had the same function: to assert their vulnerable nations' sovereignty, for if the two sovereign were equals, surely their nations would be too.[18] Or so they hoped. By the same token, rulers like Nāser al-Din Shah and his entourage had to master European etiquette and manners, which they did.

The end of the *ancien régime* in the wake of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909 and the concomitant weakening of clerical influence provided a fillip to the Westernization of mores among the upper strata of Iranian society. The gap between cosmopolitan Iranians and the rest of society widened, and there was the beginning of a backlash. Fashionable dandies were derided as *fokkoli*, from French *faux col*, false collar – the Iranian analogue of the Ottoman *şapkalılar* (hat-wearers) –, and accused of being *farangima'āb*, imitators of Europe. To discredit them further, their manhood was questioned.[19] On the other side, modernists began attacking veiling, a

[18] See, for instance, David Motadel, "Qajar Shahs in Imperial Germany," *Past and Present* 213:1 (November 2011): 191-235.

[19] Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Re-membering *Amrads* and *Amradnumās*: Re-inventing the (Sedgwickian) Wheel," in *The Necklace of the Pleiades: Studies in Persian Literature Presented to Heshmat Moayyad on his 80th Birthday: 24 Essays on Persian Literature, Culture and Religion*, ed. F.D. Lewis and S. Sharma (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2010), 295-307.

corner-stone of traditional morality for the traditionalists.[20]

The turmoil caused by the Constitutional Revolution was soon followed by the onset of World War I, which was a watershed for Iran.[21] Roughly a century after the treaties of Golestan and Turkmenchay had driven home the necessity to catch up with the West, Iran was still so weak that foreign powers occupied parts of it, blithely ignored its neutrality, and battled each other on its soil, causing immense hardship. In the aftermath of the war, the country almost broke apart as the weakness of the central government in Tehran allowed centrifugal forces to assert themselves in the country's periphery. As if political turmoil was not enough, an influenza epidemic killed perhaps a tenth of the population.[22] It was almost a miracle that a sovereign Iran survived with its prewar borders intact.[23]

Building a modern and effective state in Iran now became a matter of life or death. Many

[20] See for instance Paul Sprachman, "The Poetics of Hijāb in the Satire of Īraj Mīrzā," in *Iran and Iranian Studies*, ed. Kambiz Eslami (Princeton: Zagros Press, 1998), 341-357.

[21] Bert Fragner, "World War I as a turning point in Iranian history," in *La Perse et la Grande Guerre*, ed. Oliver Bast (Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran; Paris: Peeters, 2002), 443-447.

[22] Amir Arsalan Afkhami, "Compromised Constitutions: The Iranian Experience with the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 77:2 (Summer 2003): 367-392.

[23] Oliver Bast, "La mission persane à la Conférence de Paix en 1919: une nouvelle interprétation," in *La Perse et la Grande Guerr*e, ed. Bast, 375-426.

educated Iranians despaired of Iran's culture and advocated wholesale Westernization as the only way out. They discussed their ideas in such publications as *Irānshahr, Kāveh*,[24] and *Farangestān*, all published in Europe. Of course many disagreed with such a radical break with the past, and the contrast between the Westernized Iranians who were somewhat alienated from their native culture and conservative Iranians whose minds were closed to the wider world, both in fact caricatures, became the subject of two of the best-known literary works in modern Persian prose, both published in 1921.[25] In Mohammad Ali Jamālzādeh's short story *Fārsi shekar ast* (Persian is Sugar) a simple man finds himself in a room with a hyper-Westernized Iranian who has just returned from Europe and laces his speech with incessant Gallicisms, and a Muslim cleric who unnecessarily uses learned Arabic words all the time.[26] The juxtaposition of these two figures

[24] On which see Tim Epkenhans, *Die iranische Moderne im Exil: Bibliographie der Zeitschrift Kave, Berlin 1916-1922* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2000).

[25] This paralleled earlier literary trends in the Ottoman Empire. Most Ottoman novels of the late nineteenth century deal with two issues: the place of women in society, and that of Westernization of upper-class men. See Şerif Mardin, "Super Westernization in Urban Life in the Ottoman Empire in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century," in *Turkey: Geographic and Social Perspectives*, ed. Peter Benedict, Erol Tümertekin, and Fatma Mansur (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 403.

[26] This short story is available in a masterful English translation as "Persian is Sugar," in Mohammad Ali Jamalzada, *Once Upon a Time (Yeki Bud Yeki Nabud)*, transl. Heshmat Moayyad and Paul Sprachman (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1985), 31-43.

allows the author to plead for a simple Persian that all can understand, a register he used himself in his short stories, thereby becoming one of the founders of modern Persian prose. In Hasan Moqaddam's play *Ja'far Khān az Farang āmadeh* (Master Ja'far has returned from Europe) a young man who has just come home from Europe shocks his family with his newfangled habits, including a little pet dog, an animal that Muslim Iranians deem ritually impure (*najes*). The title of the play has become a byword for a ridiculously over-Westernized man, but what is often forgotten is that in the play Ja'far Khān is actually a sympathetic and well-educated character who wants to serve his country but is thwarted by the dominant traditional ways.

Many educated Iranians despaired of their country ever developing into a modern nation as long as the policies of a progressive elite could be sabotaged by the conservative majority, and thus began advocating for a strong state that could overcome societal resistance. The coup d'état of 1921 brought to power a leader who would build such a state: Reza Khan Pahlavi.

Authoritarian Europeanization under Reza Shah

Under the Qajars, the adoption of Western cultural forms had been partial and selective. The process was gradual and affected only a small minority of Iranians. Most importantly, it was for the most part voluntary. This changed under

Reza Khan, whose political ascent culminated in the toppling of the Qajar dynasty in 1925, whereupon he founded the new Pahlavi dynasty as Reza Shah (r. 1925-1941).

In the two decades between 1921 and 1941 a new and more efficient state was built in Iran. First, a modern army was created, allowing the reestablishment of the central government's authority throughout the country.[27] A new system of territorial administration allowed the state to make its existence felt down to the smallest village.[28] A national registry was set up in which citizens had to record births, names, marriages, divorces, and deaths; the main motivation being conscription, which was introduced a few days later.[29] Legal reforms begun after the Constitutional Revolution were completed.[30] Infrastructural projects were started to connect the different parts of the country to the capital and to each other.[31]

[27] Stephanie Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of Pahlavi State in Iran, 1910-1926* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997).

[28] Jāvid Shirāzi et al, *Taqsimāt-e keshvari dar Irān: Pārādoks-e olguhā-ye sonnati va modern* (Territorial Divisions in Iran: The Paradox of Traditional and Modern Patterns) (Tehran: Persmān, 1382/2003).

[29] H.E. Chehabi, "The Reform of Iranian Nomenclature and Titulature in the Fifth Majles," in *Convergent Zones: Persian Literary Tradition and the Writing of History: Studies in Honor of Amin Banani*, ed. Wali Ahmadi (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2012), 84-116.

[30] Hadi Enayat, *Law, State, and Society in Modern Iran: Constitutionalism, Autocracy, and Legal Reform, 1906-1941* (New York: PalgraveMacmillan, 2013).

[31] Patrick Clawson, "Knitting Iran Together: The Land Transport Revolution, 1920-1941," *Iranian Studies* 26 (1993): 235-250.

Some of these state-building measures met with opposition, for instance conscription, which deprived villagers of young men needed at harvest time.[32] But this opposition was nothing compared to the hostility generated by the cultural engineering that aimed at Europeanizing everyday life. Iranians were told to adopt Europeans table manners,[33] dress like Europeans,[34] listen to European music,[35] and play European team sports.[36] The state's intrusion into people's private lives became intolerable for most Iranians when in January 1936 women were told to unveil from one day to the other.[37] Religious practices were not spared: the popular *Āshurā* rituals accompanying the annual celebration of the martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali, the third Shiite Imam, were severely circumscribed, some of them, such as the *ta'zia* passion plays,[38] forbidden. As if to add insult

[32] Stephanie Cronin, "Conscription and Popular Resistance in Iran, 1925-1941," *International Review of Social History* 43:3 (1998): 451-471.

[33] H. E. Chehabi, "The Westernization of Iranian Culinary Culture," in *Iranian Studies* 36:1 (2003): 43-61.

[34] Houchang E. Chehabi, "Staging the Emperor's New Clothes: Dress Codes and Nation-Building under Reza Shah," *Iranian Studies* 26 (Summer-Fall 1993): 209-229.

[35] H. E. Chehabi, "From Revolutionary *tasnīf* to Patriotic *surūd*. Music and Nation-Building in Early Twentieth-Century Iran," *Iran* 37 (Summer 1999): 143-154.

[36] H. E. Chehabi, "A Political History of Football in Iran," *Iranian Studies* 35:4 (Fall 2002): 371-402.

[37] H.E. Chehabi, "The Banning of the Veil and its Consequences," in *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921-1941*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (London: Curzon, 2003), 193-210.

[38] On which see Peter Chelkowski, ed., *Ta'zieh: Ritual and* ▸

to injury, a carnival procession, called *kārvān-e shādi* (caravan of joy), was introduced to celebrate Reza Shah's birthday on the 24th of Esfand with processions of thematic floats. Although these did not take place during the mourning month of Muharram, they were interpreted at the time as an attempt to replace sad processions with joyous ones.

What explains such obstinacy in introducing foreign ways? I would argue that much of it is due to the felt need to be taken seriously and respected by Europeans. Institutionally, considerable progress had been made: In 1920, Iran was the only Muslim-majority founding member of the League of Nations; in 1928, judicial reforms having been completed, Iran unilaterally ended the hated capitulations;[39] and in 1929 slavery was finally abolished.[40] This meant that Iran now unambiguously met the "standard of civilization" in terms of international diplomacy, and to reap the benefit of its emancipation fully, its leaders believed that it was incumbent on its people to meet international (= European) standards of behavior as well: full legal equality in international society meant little if people in the powerful nations had reason to make fun of Iranians' backwardness. Reza Shah admitted

Drama in Iran (New York: New York University Press, 1979).

[39] Ahmad Matine-Daftary, *La suppression des capitulations en Perse* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1930).

[40] Slavery had already been abolished by decree in the nineteenth century, but it had persisted in southern Iran. In 1929 legislation was passed to render it illegal.

as much to his daughter, Princess Ashraf, in private.[41] He himself was a simple man with simple habits to the end: when in exile on the island of Mauritius, he refused an Empire-style bed the wife of the governor had taken out of the Port Louis Museum for him, preferring to sleep on a mattress on the floor.[42] But he wanted his children (and the nation he led) to be culturally more sophisticated, which in practice meant Westernized. And many Western observers gave him credit for this effort: commenting on the limitations placed on *Āshurā* celebrations, an American diplomat in Iran reported in 1931 that "particular emphasis was laid on the enlightened efforts of the central government and police authorities to rid [the celebration of *Āshurā*] of the more barbarous and fanatical practices [i.e., the bloody self-flagellations known as *qameh-zani*] with which it has been traditionally observed."[43]

Measures like the imposition of European headgear on men in 1935, which were motivated by a desire to appear "civilized" in the eyes of Europeans, were hardly unique to Iran. In Russia, Peter the Great had also abolished Russian costume

[41] Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, *Faces in a Mirror: Memoirs from Exile* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980), 13. (for table manners) and 24-25 (for unveiling).

[42] Sir Bede Clifford, *Proconsul: Being incidents in the life and career of The Honourable Sir Bede Clifford* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1964), 256-257.

[43] US State Department, letter dated 30 June, 1931, quoted in Monica M. Ringer, *Pious Citizens: Reforming Zoroastrianism in India and Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 179.

and taxed beards as part of his reform program,[44] and in West Asia, Kemal Atatürk's cultural modernization in Turkey and King Amanullah's policies in Afghanistan were similar in nature, although not in effect. Nor were such cultural policies limited to the Muslim world: in the late 1930s Prime Minister Phibun of Thailand decreed that men had to wear Western hats and suits, that the Thai had to eat with forks and spoons, and that husbands had to kiss their wives before leaving home:[45] all of this to prove to the world that the Thai were "civilized."[46] In sum, the penchant for cultural imitation that is often ridiculed by historians of the Pahlavi era and criticized by nativist ideologues was by no means unique to Iranians. We may find some of the Iranian modernists' obsessions with behaving like Europeans puerile with the benefit of hindsight, but let us not forget that hindsight was a benefit they did not have. The tasks they faced were enormous, and they were desperate and few in number, hence the sense of urgency that motivated them to take radical measures.

Although the authoritarian Europeanization from above was not unique to Iran, it generated more hostility than in Thailand and Japan, more even than in Turkey. One might speculate that this was so because Islam is a religion of ethical

[44] Vasili Klyuchevsky, *Peter the Grea*t, transl. Liliana Archibald (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 162.

[45] Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 133.

[46] Thongchai Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai': A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59:3 (August 2000): 528-549.

prophecy, while Eastern religions are religions of exemplary prophecy, to use Max Weber's distinction.[47] The former simply contains more rules governing everyday life whose enforcement is demanded or recommended by religion, as a result of which imported cultural practices transgressed sacred norms more often. I am not aware, for instance, of any injunctions within Theravada Buddhism or within the complex religious tradition of Japan that *forbids* dressing like Westerners. This is not to imply that there was no resistance against Westernization or that such a resistance could not be whipped up for political reasons,[48] but it does mean, I think, that accommodating Western foreign cultural influence is less fraught. In the Iranian case, even imported European practices that did not contravene (as alcohol consumption or unveiling did, for instance) widely accepted religious injunctions, were suspect because of the prohibition of what is known in Arabic as *tashabbuh bi'l-kuffār*, imitating the infidels.[49] It did not help that very little attempt was made

[47] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 477.

[48] Let us not forget that the first government with a religiously fundamentalist and culturally nativist agenda came into office in Buddhist Sri Lanka.

[49] For a discussion of this concept see Muhammad Khalid Masud, "Cosmopolitanism and Authenticity: The Doctrine of *Tashabbuh Bi'l-Kuffar* (Imitating the Infidel) in Modern South Asian Fatwas," in *Cosmopolitanisms in Muslim Contexts: Perspectives from the Past*, ed. Derryl N. MacLean and Sikeena Karmali Ahmed (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 160-167.

to justify the propagation of the imported cultural practices in Islamic terms, perhaps by invoking alternative interpretations that were rooted in marginal strands of Islamic traditions. This approach had defused hostility to earlier state-building measures such as the creation of a national registry and conscription, which were legitimized by adducing evidence that the early Islamic state had also kept records of believers and mobilized young men to fight in war.[50]

The distaste that many aspects of the cultural engineering of the early Pahlavi era engendered in wide strata of society should not lead us to conclude that Reza Shah's autocratic rule pitted the "state" against "society": the state, after all, was staffed by Iranians. What is more, many educated Iranians approved wholeheartedly of the attempt to acculturate their country to the dominant West, an effort in which they saw a necessary component of progress and development. They tried to familiarize their less sophisticated compatriots with the customs of "civilized" life by writing newspaper articles, and they thought of themselves as pioneers whose example would be followed sooner or later by everybody. Far from being traitors to their native culture, they were glowing patriots who espoused a nationalism that propagated pride in Iran's glorious past and that, while not hostile to religion *per se*, wished to shear it of its ritualistic aspects and confine it to the private realm. The American diplomat

[50] For one such episode, see Mansoureh Ettehadieh, *The Lion of Persia: a Political Biography of Prince Farmān-Farmā* (Cambridge, MA: Tŷ Aur Press, 2012), 110–111.

quoted above saw this clearly: "Among modern, European-educated Persians the observance of these many religious holidays is looked upon as but one more example of their undesired heritage from a mulla ridden past. 'We got rid of seven of them a year ago,' one official of the Persian Foreign Service said as he firmly helped himself to a supper of sliced ham, 'and the sooner we do away with most others, the better it will be for everyone.'" The diplomat then noted his astonishment at the confidence with which official circles thought they can impose modernization on the "still primitive people."[51] History tells us that they could not, but in the suggested opposition between "modern European-educated" Iranians and the "still primitive people" we see the beginning of the dual society syndrome. But who were the "modern" Iranians? And were they all "European-educated"? A modern education is in fact the key element that defined them.

Education and the "Modern Middle Class"

In Iran (as in the Ottoman Empire), the educational system is usually credited (or blamed) for spreading Western culture to the rest of the population. As Roy Mottahedeh has noted, whereas in Europe the modern secular educational system developed out of religious establishments, in the Muslim world, the ancient *maktabs* and madrasas were not modernized; instead, new schools were established alongside

[51] US State Department, letter dated 3 February, 1931, quoted in Ringer, *Pious Citizens*, 179.

the old schools, whose offerings became thus confined to religious subjects only, narrowing their students' horizons at a time when the modern schools tried to expand the horizons of their students. In these new schools, the teaching of modern sciences became disembedded from the religious context of society, and religious instruction became one subject out of many.[52]

The first modern school was founded in Iran in 1851 and named Dār al-Fonun,[53] a school by the name of Darülfünûn having been established five years earlier in Istanbul. European teachers were hired to teach at this school, whose curriculum introduced elite Iranian youngsters not only to modern sciences but also to European languages, music, and European physical education. Christian missionaries opened schools for Iran's Armenians and Assyrians, who became intermediaries between European culture and Muslim Iranians. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Alliance Israélite Universelle opened school of Jews,[54] and Indian Parsis for Iranian Zoroastrians. Baha'is set up Tarbiyat schools.[55] These schools also accepted Muslim pupils,

[52] Roy P. Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).

[53] Maryam Ekhtiar, "Nasir al-Din Shah and the Dar al-Funun: The Evolution of an Institution," *Iranian Studies* 34:1-4 (2001): 153-162.

[54] Avraham Cohen, "Iranian Jewry and the Educational Endeavors of the Alliance Israélite Universelle," *Jewish Social Studies* 48 (1986): 15-44.

[55] Soli Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools: The Baha'is and Modern Education in Iran*, 1899-1934 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

hoping that the presence of elite youngsters of the Muslim majority would deter attacks against them. Muslims also started establishing private schools, including schools for girls,[56] but violent mobs instigated by Shiite clerics often attacked these schools and on occasion destroyed their facilities.[57]

After the Constitutional Revolution the state took greater interest in education and public schools were established throughout Iran, a development that accelerated under Reza Shah.[58] The graduates of the modern schools that proliferated beginning in the 1900s then staffed the new bureaucracy that came into being in the early 1920s. In addition, the state also sent students to study at European universities, and when these returned to Iran, they staffed the upper echelons of the state.[59] This bureaucracy, plus teachers, military officers, and members of the liberal professions are usually referred to as the "modern middle class."[60] I find all three components of this expression

[56] Ringer, *Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform in Qajar Iran.*

[57] See, for instance, Badr ol-Moluk Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light: Women's Emancipation in Iran*, ed. and trans. F.R.C. Bagley (New York: Exposition Press 1977), passim.

[58] David Menashri, *Education and the Making of Modern Iran* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 91-154.

[59] Reza Arasteh, "The Education of Iranian Leaders in Europe and America," *International Review of Education* 8:3-4 (1963): 444-450.

[60] See Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi, "vi. Classes in the Pahlavi Period," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica.* See also Azadeh Kian-Thiébaut, Secularization of *Iran: A Doomed Failure?: The New Middle Class and the Making of Modern Iran* (Paris: Peeters, 1998).

problematic if they be taken to denote all Iranians with a Western-inspired outlook on life. First, it is not at all clear that all members of this group had internalized "modernity," whatever that might be, beyond the acquisition of a secular education and adoption of a few European mannerisms. Second, not all belonged to the middle stratum of society. Let us not forget that the upper classes had been the first to assimilate European ways, and while they lost their monopoly on power, they remained influential and did not disappear as a clearly bounded class until the mid-1960s, when the last Shah's land reforms deprived them of their traditional source of income.[61] In addition, many sons of traditional merchants acquired a modern education and became modern businessmen with lifestyles very different from those of their kith and kin in the bazaar.[62] At the other end, poorly paid school teachers were certainly among the most Westernized Iranians, but their financial situation had little in common with that of big land-owners who had been educated in Swiss boarding schools. This brings us to the third term: class. If we take "class" to signify a social aggregate of human beings who are subject to similar conditions of existence and, as a result, are

[61] Ahmad Ashraf, "From the White Revolution to the Islamic Revolution," in *Iran after the Revolution: Crisis of an Islamic State*, ed. Saeed Rahnema and Sohrab Behdad (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 21-44.

[62] See, for instance, Ali Gheissari, "Merchants without borders: Trade, Travel and a Revolution in Late Qajar Iran (the Memoirs of Hajj Mohammad-Taqi Jourabchi, 1907–1911)," in *War and Peace in Qajar Persia: Implications Past and Present*, ed. Roxane Farmanfarmaian (London: Routledge, 2008), 183-212.

endowed with similar dispositions and practices and who are conscious of their common interests,[63] Iranians with a disposition to adopt aspects of a Western lifestyle have certainly not been a "class." Throughout the twentieth century some allied with the autocratic monarchy and others with the Shiite clergy, while some advocated more or less secular constitutionalism and still others espoused Marxism or even fascism. I therefore propose to use the word "cosmopolitan segment" for all these Iranians, as it implies no subjective sense of belonging together but draws attention to the relevance of cultural references that go beyond Iran, without having the pejorative connotation of inauthenticity that the word "Westernized" conjures up. The other segment of society I call "local," in the sense that its cultural references tend to originate within Iran or the Muslim world. I prefer this term to "traditional," which connotes stability and continuity where in fact the practices of these Iranians changed as well as a result of both internal dynamics and the systemic pressures mentioned earlier.[64] In fact, the argument that Western ways were superior because they were rational often begot attempts to prove that the old ways were equally, if not more, rational, i.e., conducive to the desired ends of independence

[63] Pierre Bourdieu, "What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review* 32 (1987): 6, 15.

[64] I borrow the terms "cosmopolitan" and "local" from Robert Merton, who uses them in a different meaning, however. See Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 447. Merton himself took the paired terms from Carle C. Zimmermann.

and prosperity for the nation, or could be made so if properly reinterpreted. This "local segment," too, included rich and poor people, ranging from wealthy bazaar merchants to the urban and rural lower class. So, unlike the English situation described by Disraeli, class distinctions and cultural differences did not fully coincide, although the average wealth of members of the cosmopolitan segment was obviously greater than that of the local segment. What distinguished the two segments was above all lifestyle, as shown in sartorial and culinary habits and in patterns of social interaction.

The state that pursued these Westernization policies in the interwar years was a dictatorial state. When Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in the wake of the Anglo-Soviet invasion of 1941,[65] the cosmopolitan segment had grown in size sufficiently to constitute no longer a coterie of regime officials but a significant – if still largely minoritarian – section of Iranian society.

The Deepening of Dual Society under Mohammad Reza Shah

When Reza Shah left Iran in the aftermath of the Allied invasion, many Iranians heaved a sigh of relief. Religion made a comeback in public life, welcomed by some elements of the Pahlavi state that were fearful of growing Communist

[65] For a detailed account containing much new information see Shaul Bakhash, "Britain and the abdication of Reza Shah," *Middle Eastern Studies* 52:2 (2016): 318-334.

influence, an influence that was unchecked while the country had to contend with Soviet occupiers. But the cosmopolitan segment was now numerous enough to dominate cultural life on its own: at the University of Tehran, for instance religious students were a tiny minority who had trouble finding a room for their daily prayers.[66] Most active on campus were members or sympathizers of the Communist Tudeh party, people who had internalized Western cultural patterns most, as can be seen, for instance, in their promotion of women in their organization and their welcoming attitude to non-Muslim Iranians.[67]

Some observers noticed the socio-cultural divide opening up in Iranian society. In 1944 Ahmad Kasravi, the maverick intellectual who would be assassinated by religious fanatics a few years later, wrote in his book *Khāharān va dokhtarān-e mā* (Our sisters and daughters): "In a mass [of people] thoughts and lifestyles must be cohesive. One of Iran's great problems is the un-evenness of thoughts and the incompatibility of life-styles. For example, while a large group of women cling to the chador and the face mask ...,

[66] For the beginnings of the Islamist presence on the campus of the university see H.E. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: The Liberation Movement of Iran under the Shah and Khomeini* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 121-123.

[67] On the Tudeh see Asghar Schirazi, *Modernität und gestörte Wahrnehmung: Eine Fallstudie über die Tudeh-Partei des Iran und ihr Verhältnis zur Demokratie* (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 2003) and Sepehr Zabih, *The Communist Movement in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

and while the mullas threaten unveiled women with the fire of hell, another group [of women] thinks of membership in parliament."[68] Women's attire did indeed become the most readily visible marker of membership in one or the other segment of Iran's nascent dual society.

Around the same time, of course, Ruhollah Khomeini published his *Kashf-e asrār* (The Discovery of Secrets), which included harsh attacks on the cultural policies of the Reza Shah period – including, to give but two examples, the teaching of music in schools and, unsurprisingly, the unveiling of women. In 1950, the Fadā'iyan-e Eslām, a small Islamist organization prone to assassinating figures of whom they did not approve, published a program that was in fact a blueprint for Islamic governance. It devoted many pages to lifestyle issues, and stated, for instance, that "flames of passion rise from the naked bodies of immoral women and burn humanity into ashes. . . Cinemas, theatres, novels, and songs teach crime and arouse passion," and must therefore be banned.[69] The fact that such writings also criticized corruption and political oppression lent them of a certain plausibility and poignancy. This declaration of 1950 foreshadows the cultural policies pursued

[68] Ahmad Kasravi, *Khāharān va dokhtarān-e mā* (Our Sisters and Daughters) (Bethesda, MD: Iranbooks, 1992), 38.

[69] Cited in Said Amir Arjomand, "Traditionalism in Twentieth-Century Iran," in *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 209.

in Iran after 1980, although in the immediate aftermath of it the Fadā'iyan-e Eslām did not get very far.[70]

After the 1953 coup d'état, Iran was again ruled by a dictatorship, and cultural engineering resumed, but not nearly as intrusively as under Reza Shah. But it was clear that social power lay in hands of the growing but still minoritarian segment of the population. Resentment against it grew. When Richard Frye visited the leader of Tehran's Friday prayers in 1960, one of the clerics present remarked that "everyone living north of Takht-e Jamshid Street (now Tāleqāni) should have their throats slit."[71]

In 1944 Kasravi had still urged educated Iranians to fight the mullas;[72] two decades later a sizable portion of the former were beginning to assess the latter in a new light. At the intellectual level this reconsideration began with a polemic work by Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad, an ex-Communist writer and essayist who had rediscovered his spiritual roots and turned anti-Western, although not in matters of personal lifestyle. In his book *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxication) published in 1961, he rendered Western influence responsible for much that

[70] On this group see Farhad Kazemi, "The Fada'iyan-e Islam: Fanaticism, Politics, and Terror," in *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*, ed. Amir Arjomand, 157-176.

[71] Richard N. Frye, *Greater Iran: A 20th-Century Odyssey* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2005), 128.

[72] Kasravi, *Khāharān va dokhtarān-e mā*, 38.

was wrong with Iranian society.[73] His ideas caught on among many educated Iranians who were unhappy with widespread inequality and corruption on the one hand, and with what they perceived to be the Shah's subservience to the United States and the West in general, on the other.[74] The anti-*gharbzadegi* discourse was enthusiastically embraced by religious figures, both clerical and lay.[75] By the 1970s a critical attitude towards Western culture was even adopted by pro-regime intellectuals, who liked to contrast Eastern "spirituality" favorably with Western "materialism."[76] Such an attitude, it was hoped, would depoliticize the critique of *gharbzadegi*, but also provide ideological underpinnings for the Shah's decidedly non-Western style of rule when he established a

[73] Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi (Weststruckness)*, transl. John Green and Ahmad Alizadeh (Lexington, KY: Mazda, 1982). See also Michael C. Hillmann, *Iranian Society: An Anthology of Writings by Jalal Al-e Ahmad* (Lexington, KY: Mazda, 1982).

[74] Recent scholarship, based on newly opened archives, has produced a more nuanced picture of the Shah's relationship with the United States. See Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: the United States and Iran in the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[75] Brad Hanson, "The Westoxication of Iran: Depiction, and Reaction of Behrangi, Al-e Ahmad, and Shariati," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15:1 (February 1983): 1-23. See also Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), passim.

[76] Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

one-party system and dropped any pretense to be a democrat in the mid-1970s.[77]

The Pahlavi state's belated discovery of Eastern spirituality did not win it any sympathy among the local segment of the population – if anything, it weakened the resolve of the cosmopolitan segment to stand up for itself. Moreover, by the 1960s pious non-elite Iranians were seeking to attain the same educational goals as more secular Iranians and no longer needed guidance from more educated Iranians. All over the country private schools were founded in which the mandatory state curriculum was complemented by religious instruction and accompanied by a strict moral code. The most important of these schools was the Alavi High School in Tehran founded in 1956, whose graduates were by the mid-1970s as successful in passing the *konkur* (the competitive entrance examination for Iranian universities) as the graduates of Nurbakhsh, Āzar, Khārazmi, Hadaf, and Alborz who had dominated until now. As these first-generation and often provincial university students entered university in larger numbers, more and more secular Iranians sent their children abroad, an option made widely available by the overvaluation of the Rial caused by the oil income. The Islamist presence on university campuses grew, and members of Islamist Student Associations in places like

[77] Zhand Shakibi, "The Rastakhiz Party and Pahlavism: the beginnings of state anti-Westernism in Iran", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45:2 (2018): 251-268.

Āryāmehr University (now Sharif) were now numerous enough to feel empowered to harass those students of whose insufficiently Islamic demeanor they disapproved: here and there culture wars erupted on campuses, not between students and the university administration, but among students themselves. Male Islamist students harassed women students, who were said to have been placed at the universities by the government so as to distract the male students. In dormitories television sets were thrown out of the common room windows; audio equipment and musical instruments were occasionally vandalized.[78] This angry puritanism had a class basis, and the violent actions of the Islamist students were motivated not only by moral indignation but also, subconsciously perhaps, by envy. This mix produces *ressentiment*, about which Max Weber wrote:

> Resentment is a concomitant of that particular religious ethic of the disprivileged which ... teaches that the unequal distribution of mundane goods is caused by the sinfulness and the illegality of the privileged, and that sooner or later God's wrath will overtake them. In this theodicy of the disprivileged, the moralistic quest serves as a device for compensating a conscious or unconscious desire for vengeance.[79]

[78] Personal communications from friends who were students at Āryāmehr (now Sharif) and Melli (now Shahid Beheshti) universities in the 1970s.

[79] Weber, *Economy and Society*, 494.

It is worth noting that the Islamists' antithalian attitudes to life were shared by quite a few leftists, whose idea of having a good time was to go hiking in the mountains north of Tehran where they could sing revolutionary songs without being overheard by the Shah's secret police. A deep commitment to a cause precludes spending too much thought on enjoyable activities that would consume energies that should better be spent on the struggle, an attitude to life shared by both Islamists and leftists in the 1970s.[80] (This asceticism of the left is not limited to Iran:[81] Cubans quip, for instance, that Fidel Castro was the only Cuban who could not dance.) These commonalities allowed for common action against the Shah in the 1970s, when Islamist and leftist students cooperated on university campuses to disrupt classes and exams, to the dismay of those students who were eager to graduate in order to get on with their lives.

This history of cooperation between Islamists and leftists facilitated the coalescence of the Iranian opposition in the revolution of 1978-79, when, among opponents of the Shah, only Shāpur Bakhtyār had the courage to denounce clerical obscurantism openly. His unpopularity at the time shows the extent to which anti-Shah Iranians of the cosmopolitan segments were

[80] Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 248-250.
[81] For a brilliant analysis see Bruce Mazlish, *The Revolutionary Ascetic: Evolution of a Political Type* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).

willing to give the leaders of the local segment the benefit of the doubt. Another factor that allowed for this coming together of Iranians across segmental distinctions was the fact that the borderline between cosmopolitans and locals was, and continues to be, a fluid one. It happened occasionally that in the same family one sister was at home in the conservative world of traditional society, whereas another sister had adopted a more cosmopolitan outlook; one would cover her head, the other would enjoy a drink. Extended families, in particular, played a major role here. If part of a large extended family had moved to Tehran, they were more likely to be open to outside influences than those who had remained behind in a provincial town. This would normally not impinge on the cordiality existing between them.

But before we discuss the revolution, it is fruitful to undertake an excursus to the urban geography of Tehran, in which Iran's dual society syndrome is deeply inscribed.

Excursus: The Two Tehrans

The reference to a transportation axis in the angry outburst of the Tehran cleric quoted earlier points to the geographic dimension of the dual society, for obviously a street with an east-westerly layout, such as then Takht-e Jamshid Street (incidentally, the location of the US embassy) bifurcates and sets apart neighborhoods to its north from neighborhoods to its south.

This refers to the well-known division of Tehran into a *Shomāl Shahr* and a *Jonub Shahr*, which I translate as "North End" and "South End" by analogy with London's (affluent) West End and (formerly poor) East End.

Old Tehran was a labyrinth of narrow alleys, many of them cul-de-sacs, that criss-crossed a number of quarters grouped around the grand bazaar and the Friday mosque. The alleys were boarded by blind walls behind which lay individual houses most of which were constructed around an interior courtyard.[82] Rich and poor lived in the same neighborhoods and shared cultural practices. The rich did not flaunt their wealth, but legitimized it by sponsoring collective Muslims rituals. Jews lived in a separate neighborhood, the *mahalleh*.

Tehran started extending beyond its old core during the long reign of Nāser al-Din Shah. In the 1860s it was expanded, with three straight tree-lined paved avenues to the north of the old core enabling both foreign residents and members of the Iranian elite to use carriages.[83] In the early decades of the twentieth century, the city further expanded northwards. The new streets were straight, wide (in comparison with the lanes of

[82] Masoud Kheirabadi, *Iranian Cities: Formation and Development* (Austin: Texas University Press, 1991).

[83] John D. Gurney, "The Transformation of Tehran in the Later Nineteenth Century," in *Téhéran: Capitale bicentenaire*, ed. Chahryar Adle and Bernard Hourcade (Paris and Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1992), 67-71.

old Tehran), tree-lined, and had sidewalks. They were overlooked by buildings that were no longer constructed around a courtyard, but had façades with windows open to the street. Modern shops catering to the new consumption patterns, cafés, restaurants, theaters, and cinemas opened up in this part of town, as did foreign embassies. Many non-Muslims moved there from their old traditional neighborhoods, giving the area a more secular and cosmopolitan feel. But this modern city, whose attractions were often incompatible with traditional Muslim piety, was adjacent to the old city; the transition between the old commercial center around the bazaar and the new shopping areas was thus a fluid one.

Prosperous Tehranis tended to summer north of the city in the foothills of the Alborz Mountains, in villages collectively known as Shemirān. A vast expanse of gently sloping empty land separated Tehran from Shemirān. This land was gradually built up beginning in the 1950s and after a few years Tehran and Shemirān became connected in one continuous urban tissue. Improved communications allowed upper-middle class Tehranis to take up permanent residence in Shemirān, where they built single-family villas surrounded by a garden. This part of the city was now called *Shomāl[-e] Shahr*, what I call North End. Except in the old village cores (such as Tajrish), communal ties were much weaker in the new neighborhoods, which made it easier to ignore the strictures of tradition. Back

in the South End, rural migrants moved into the former residences of the wealthier citizens, which were subdivided to allow occupation by different families.[84] The government and the municipal authorities of Tehran paid more attention to the North End, while the South End was neglected and became more uniformly poor, although some rich bazaar merchants remained.

The arrival of many provincials in the older parts of Tehran and the departure of most middle and upper-middle class Tehranis accentuated the geographic segregation between rich and poor, which increasingly aligned with a cultural divide. Quality of life also differed: many polluting industries being located on the southern fringes of Tehran, the air was cleaner in the North End, and in the summer temperatures were lower, due to the prevalence of gardens and the higher altitude. By the same token, occasional floods affected the South End more than the North End.

By the end of the 1960s Iran's ruling elites lived in the North End. In 1965, after an assassination attempt, the Shah moved from the palaces in the center of Tehran to Niyāvarān, formerly a village in Shemirān and now a leafy suburb, completing the identification of power with the North End. As time went on, the socio-cultural divide between the poorer South End and the richer North End deepened. The degree of acculturation to Western lifestyles, as

[84] These living arrangements can be observed in the award-filling film "The White Balloon" (1995).

indicated by outward appearance and patterns of consumption, became a social indicator in Tehran. Far more women veiled in the South End than in the North End. Among the inhabitants of the North End, the traditional reticence about showing one's good fortunes diminished, increasing resentment among the less fortunate in the South End.

The contrast in lifestyles does not mean that people in the South End were uniformly pious and people in the North End irreligious: very few North Enders would have called themselves irreligious, and most thought of themselves as believers whose religiosity was a private one, shorn of its superstitious accretions, an attitude adopted by many non-Muslims as well. At the same time, drinking, gambling, and prostitution were not exactly unknown in the South End: the difference was that no one argued that such transgressions were all right, for which reason they were carried out in private or in well-circumscribed spaces: Shahr-e Now, Tehran's Red Light District, and the legendary Shekufeh Now cabaret were both in the South End. At the same time Hoseynieh-ye Ershād, one of the centers of the religious revival in the 1970s,[85] was established in the North End, its founders having found the atmosphere of the North End more

[85] Nouchine Yavari-d'Hellencourt, "L'hosseynieh Ershad: un coin islamiste enfoncé au cœur de la capitale," in Chahryar Adle and Bernard Hourcade, eds., *Téhéran: Capitale bicentenaire* (Paris and Teheran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1992), 329-345.

open to innovation and debate than the stifling conservatism of the traditional neighborhoods in the South End.[86]

Nor did the two Tehrans live in total isolation one from the other. For one thing, the central parts of Tehran (the modern Tehran of the 1930s and 1940s mentioned above) were a kind of buffer zone frequented by people from both the South End and the North End. Moreover, although what was then called Shāhrezā Avenue, named after the Eighth Twelver Shiite Imam but still renamed Enqelāb (Revolution) Avenue after the revolution, can be seen as the symbolic border between the two halves of the city, the transition was in fact gradual. South of that thoroughfare, Amiriyeh was a more prosperous neighborhood that Salsabil, and north of it, Niyāvarān was far more elegant than Abbāsābād. Finally, the steep population growth of Tehran necessitated the construction of new neighborhoods, and since the city was bounded in the north by mountains and in the south by a mountain range in the east and by the desert in the west, the expansion had to take place in an easterly and westerly direction. Neighborhoods such as Gishā, Shahrārā, and Nārmak cannot be easily fitted into the North End – South End dichotomy.

These caveats notwithstanding, by the 1970s and 1980s, numerous studies confirmed the existence of a socio-cultural dualism in the

[86] Chehabi, *Religious Modernism*, 203.

capital.[87] To a limited extent it appeared even in provincial cities. Most importantly, Abadan was home to cosmopolitan Iranians who held managerial positions in the petroleum industry and who had inherited the quasi-colonial enclave the British had left behind when the oil industry was nationalized in 1951, and to menial workers who lived under much more modest conditions.[88] When television was introduced in Iran, the only place outside Tehran to get a station was Abadan, which also had the only international airport outside Tehran. The contribution of Abadan to Iranian modernity has yet to be studied in depth. Other cities and towns had enclaves of citizens whose lifestyles reflected European influences: administrators, military personnel, physicians, sometimes what was left of the landowners, and of course their families.[89] But the vast majority of the members of Iran's cosmopolitan segment lived in Tehran.

[87] Mahvash Alemi, "The 1981 Map of Tehran: two cities, two cores, two cultures," *A.A.R.P. Environmental Design* 1 (1985): 74-84; Martin Seger, "Zum Dualismus der Struktur orientalischer Städte: das Beispiel Teheran," *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft* 121:1 (1979): 129-159; Martin Seger, "Segregation of retail facilities and the bipolar city centre of Tehran," in *Téhéran: Capitale bicentenaire*, ed. Chahryar Adle and Bernard Hourcade (Paris and Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1992), 281-299.

[88] Paul Vieille, Zafardokht Ardalan, and Abol-Hassan Banissadre, "Abadan: tissu urbain, attitudes et valeurs," *Revue Géographique de l'Est* 9 (1969): 361-378.

[89] On a visit to Bam, in southeastern Iran, in 1970, I asked my aunt, who had driven herself to the bus terminal to meet me, how many unveiled women there were in the town of then 20,000. She counted about 30.

The Revolution as a Reversal of Hierarchy

The socio-cultural divide that has been discussed so far did not coincide with attitudes towards the Shah's regime. Plenty of cosmopolitan Iranians opposed the Shah because he seemed to like all things Western except a free press and representative government, or, if they were leftists, because they associated him with American imperialism and economic inequality. That was why when the movement that would become the revolution began in mid-1977, it did not pit the poor and pious from the South End against the rich and secular of the North End, as many among the latter made common cause with the former. After many months of strife, the hitherto biggest demonstration was organized on 10 December 1978 in cooperation between Islamist and secular opponents of the Shah. The regime feared an attack on the northern neighborhoods originating in the South End, but the religious and the secular opposition agreed to march together from east to west on Shāhrezā Avenue, rendering the North-South divide irrelevant. This search for common ground had a temporal dimension as well, as that year the 10th of December, which is International Human Rights Day, coincided with *Tāsu'ā*, the day before Imam Husayn's martyrdom on the 10th of Muharram in the lunar calendar, making it an emotionally charged day for Shiite believers.

Together, leftists, Islamists, and constitutionalists managed to drive out the Shah a few weeks later, paving the way for Ayatollah Khomeini's return from exile and the establishment of an Islamic Republic. The revolutionaries lost no time demonizing the old elite. The word *tāghuti* was applied to them and their habits and lifestyle, and in time came to connote all refinement and aesthetic distinction.[90] Marxist debates about whether the revolution of 1978-79 was a genuine revolution or not (since capitalism was not abolished) obscured a much more momentous social change: the inversion of the hierarchy between the two segments of Iran's dual society. Administrations and state agencies were purged, none more thoroughly than the ministry of foreign affairs, official Iran's conduit to the outside world. A recent analysis of the post-revolutionary political elite shows that out of the 2332 individuals only two had briefly held political office before the revolution.[91] The new power-holders hailed mostly from the provinces, which has led to the suggestion that this was a revolt of the periphery against the capital.[92]

[90] The word *tāghut* means an idol, a demon, or any object worshipped (excepting God), particularly an ancient idol in Mecca. Two etymologies have been proposed for this word. One would derive it from the root t-gh-y, of which the derivatives *tughyān* (rebellion, sedition) and *tāghi* (rebel, tyrant) are used in Persian. The other etymology derives the word from the Egyptian god Thot.

[91] Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Kourosh Rahimkhani, *Postrevolutionary Iran: A Political Handbook* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2018).

[92] Kaveh Ehsani, "The Urban Provincial Periphery in ▸

As the Islamists consolidated their hold on power by gradually ousting their erstwhile constitutionalist and leftist allies, a task they had accomplished by the summer of 1981, they began imposing a puritanical lifestyle on Iranians. The outbreak of the war with Iraq in 1980 allowed them to depict any public display of joy as an insult to the soldiers fighting Saddam Hussein's troops. The lifestyle of cosmopolitan Iranians came under attack, the harassment of insufficiently veiled women being the most notorious instance of the attempt to remake Iranian society and undo decades of acculturation to Western practices. But young men were harassed as well in the early years of the Islamic Republic: if they were neatly dressed, they were accused of being *tāghuti*, if not, of being hippies. Ties were outlawed, officially because they were what Westerners wear (an echo of the principle of *tashabbuh bi'l-kuffār* discussed earlier), but perhaps also because they looked soigné at a time when ascetic scruffiness was the order of the day. Private homes were invaded to search for alcoholic beverages or to apprehend guests whose behavior was deemed un-Islamic.[93] Some of these measures owed more to Che Guevara than to Islamic traditions. For instance, in a book titled "The Adornment of the Faithful" by

Iran: Revolution and War in Ramhormoz," in *Contemporary Iran: Economy, Society, Politics*, ed. Ali Gheissari (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38-76.

[93] As suggestively depicted in the chapter "The Wine" of the graphic novel by Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003).

the 17th century Iranian Shi'ite clerical leader Mohammad-Bāqer Majlesi (arguably the most powerful member of the Twelver Shi'ite ulema before Ayatollah Khomeini), beautiful clothes are recommended as an outward sign of gratitude for God's favors.[94] Also, the Koran (49:12) explicitly enjoins believers not to violate other people's privacy: "O you who believe, avoid most suspicions: Some suspicions are indeed sins. So do not pry into others' secrets and do not backbite." In the novel forms of religiosity practiced by the Islamic Republicans one can discern the anti-elite resentment described by Max Weber.

In sum, while the revolution had temporarily united most of Iranian society, it did not take long for culture wars to erupt again. Education became a main battleground.

The Culture Wars Continue

Before the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini had nothing good to say about Iran's educational system, especially its universities. It was probably not an accident that when he returned, he established his headquarters not in a government building, not in a religious establishment, but in the Refāh Girls' School in Tehran, one of the Islamic schools mentioned earlier. The

[94] Ālem-e rabbāni marhum mollā Mohammad Bāqer Majlesi, *Heliat al-Mottaqin* (The Adornment of the Pious) (Tehran: Qā'em, n.d.). For a summary of the book see Henri Massé, "Le savoirvivre selon les traditions chiites," *Mélanges Asiatique*s 232 (194041): 59-84.

revolutionary council met there, as did the revolutionary tribunal that condemned officials of the ancien régime to death. Two of the first figures to be executed were Amir Abbās Hoveydā, a highly educated polyglot who was the epitome of cosmopolitanism,[95] and Farrokhru Pārsā, minister of education and one of the first female cabinet members.

When the practice of holding politicized congregational prayers on Fridays began, these were held not at the Masjed-e Shāh (Royal Mosque), now renamed Masjed-e Emām (Imam's Mosque), nor at the Masjed-e Sepahsālār. If these had been deemed too small, the Friday prayers could have been held at the Amjadieh Stadium, a choice that could have been presented as a blow against American imperialism, since the US embassy is located nearby. Instead they were held on the campus of the University of Tehran, signifying a symbolic conquest of the intellectual heart of Iranian secularism. The symbolic conquest of Tehran's public space was also signified by writing revolutionary slogans on walls of houses and later painting large murals depicting revolutionary leaders and martyrs of the Iran-Iraq War on the blind walls of multi-story buildings. Almost all of these were located in the North End.[96]

[95] See H. E. Chehabi, "A Cosmopolitan Dandy: Amir Abbas Hoveyda," *The Age of Aryamehr: Late Pahlavi Iran and its Global Entanglements*, ed. Roham Alvandi (London: Gingko Library, 2018), 147-167.

[96] H. E. Chehabi and Fotini Christia, "The Art of State Persuasion: Iran's Post-Revolutionary Murals," ▸

The educational system had been a channel through which Western cultural patterns had gained a mass audience in Iran; that system had to be Islamized. Soon a cultural revolution followed the political one. Universities were closed down for a while and purged of leftist and secularist professors and students. To pass the *konkur* it was no longer enough to excel in the traditional disciplines, one had to master Shiite religious knowledge as well. To break the domination of secularists in the cultural and educational elites, an affirmative action program was instituted for people deemed to be loyal to the ideals of the Islamic Republic, such as members of the militias, basij, and relatives of men killed in the war.[97]

After Khomeini's death in 1989, under the two reformist presidencies of Ali Akbar Hāshemi Rafsanjāni (1989-1997) and Mohammad Khātami (1997-2005) efforts were made to defuse the social tensions in Iranian society and heal some of the rifts over lifestyles. In line with this attitude, Gholām-Hoseyn Karbāschi, Tehran's mayor from 1990 to 1998, attempted to narrow the urbanistic chasm between the North End and the South End. Modern apartment blocks were built in

Persica 22 (2008): 1-13.

[97] Nader Habibi, "Allocation of Educational and Occupational Opportunities in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Case Study in the Political Screening of Human Capital in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Iranian Studies* 22:4 (1989): 19-46; and Keiko Sakurai, "University Entrance Examination and the Making of an Islamic Society in Iran: A Study of the Post-Revolutionary Approach to '*Konkur*'," in *Iranian Studies* 37:3 (September 2004): 385-406.

the South End,[98] parks were created all through the city, commercial advertisement panels were erected on large avenues to generate revenue for the municipality, even some revolutionary graffiti was removed from walls. Tehran's abattoir, in the seediest part of the South End, was turned into a cultural center that included a theater, gymnasiums for men and women, a cinema, and a café. In the hope of luring denizens of the North End to visit the terra incognita that was the deep south, jazz concerts and film festivals were organized at this center, which was named Farhangsarā-ye Bahman (Bahman House of Culture, named after the month of the Iranian calendar in which the revolution had triumphed). Conservatives within the regime looked askance at Karbāschi's initiatives, however. His cultural center was derided as Farangdarā-ye Bahman (Bahman House of Europe). Karbāschi was accused of corruption, arrested, and jailed in 1998.[99] President Mahmud Ahmadinezhād (2005-2013), who was mayor of Tehran for two years before acceding to the presidency, had his power base among the disprivileged youth of the South End, and so under his watch they were given a freer rein to enforce the values of the revolution.[100]

[98] H. Bahrainy and B. Aminzadeh, "Evaluation of Navab Regeneration Project in Central Tehran, Iran," *International Journal of Environmental Research* 1:2 (2007): 114-127.

[99] For further detail see Hootan Shambayati, "A Tale of Two Mayors: Courts and Politics in Iran and Turkey," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36:2 (May 2004): 253-275.

[100] For an excellent analysis of the state of mind of those young Iranian who were opposed to the opening of the Rafsanjāni-Khātami years see Farideh Farhi, "The Antinomies of Iran's War Generation," in *Iran, Iraq and* ▸

One basiji told an anthropologist studying youth culture in Iran:

> It was just to have fun to tease a rich [*susul*] [effeminate] kid of north Tehran. With some of my other basiji friends we jumped in a car and drove to Sharak-e Gharb or [Meydān-e] Mohseni, we put a "Stop, Check Point" sign up and annoyed "rich kids" in their [*khāreji*] [foreign] cars. If one had a beautiful girl in his car, we teased him even more. Sometimes, if we did not like one, we cut his hair to belittle him before the girls.[101]

That there is nothing particularly Iranian or Islamic about the basiji's attitude can be seen in H.L. Mencken's ironic remark, made more than a century ago, that "At the bottom of Puritanism one finds envy of the fellow who is having a better time in the world, and hence hatred of him."[102]

Forty years after the revolution, the local segment had not managed to assimilate the cosmopolitan segment, in spite of holding all levers of power. In the years after the Shah's ouster, many cosmopolitan Iranians emigrated, including many who had been hostile to the Shah.

the Legacies of War, ed. Lawrence C. Potter and Gary G. Sick, 121-140. New York: PalgraveMacmillan, 2004.

[101] Shahram Khosravi, *Young and Defiant in Tehran* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 39.

[102] H.L. Mencken, *A Little Book in C Major* (New York: John Lane Company, 1916), 76.

The Muslim-identified among them integrated much more easily in Europe, North America, and Australia than Muslims from other countries precisely because they were educated and had a lifestyle that did not make them stand out amidst their host populations: they had the cultural capital to do as the Romans do while in Rome, an expression whose Persian equivalent is *Khāhi nashavi rosvā, hamrang-e jamā'at show!* (If you wish not to be disgraced, behave like everybody else). The previous generation's insistence on adopting European manners paid off magnificently as Iranian immigrants integrated for the most part effortlessly and prospered among the *farangi*.[103] Iranians have clustered much less in certain neighborhoods than other non-Western immigrants have done; there are no Iranian "ghettos," with the possible exception of Beverly Hills.

But not all cosmopolitan Iranians emigrated. One of the most puzzling aspects of the evolution of Iranian society is the persistence of a cosmopolitan segment that has been constantly replenished. To some extent this is an unanticipated consequence of state policies. The electrification of villages has brought television and home appliances to rural homes,

[103] In Australia, for instance, Iranian immigrants have been shown to face less discrimination than immigrants from other Muslim countries. See Tiffany Amber Tenty and Christopher Houston, "The Iranian Diaspora in Sydney: Migration Experience of Recent Iranian Immigrants," *Iranian Studies* 46:4 (July 2013): 625-640.

while new roads have connected them to the cities, opening rural folks' minds to the wider world and rendering their lifestyle more urban. The expansion of education resulted in millions of young people attending university. The Islamic Azad University with its over 400 campuses brought academic aspirations to small towns. Since students are not guaranteed places in their home towns, millions of young women and men have found themselves far from home studying in another corner of the country where they are disembedded from their family milieu. They share apartments and houses and have far greater freedom to craft their own lifestyles than even the most progressive members of their parents' generation had. Also, almost every Iranian has relatives outside Iran, and modern technology allows diasporic Iranians to be in closer touch with their relatives than previous immigrants could ever dream of.

Objectively, I would argue, the phenomenal growth of the middle class in post-revolutionary Iran and the modest prosperity in the countryside that growing demand for food in the cities has occasioned, have narrowed the cultural gap between the two segments in the last decades. Consumption patterns have become similar, as "modern" Iranians have discovered the joys of "traditional (*sonnati*)" restaurants and people in even small towns routinely munch on pizza. The geographic divide in Tehran, while still noticeable in the core area of the city, has been somewhat

relativized by the expansion of the city to the east and the west: arguably the capital is now the core of a conurbation reaching from Qazvin in the west to Damāvand in the east. Neighborhoods like Ekbātān in the west and Tehrān Pārs in the east do not fit into the traditional North-South divide.

And yet – the divide is still there. It is astounding to behold how the new political elites have failed to achieve cultural hegemony. The political domination of the upholders of authenticity notwithstanding, upward mobility in Iran still often entails adopting a more cosmopolitan lifestyle, especially among the children of the new elites, whose family background may be in the local segment but who aspire to lifestyles more akin to those of the cosmopolitans. They appeared on the scene in large numbers in the 1990s and 2000s, when thanks to more liberal economic policies and high oil prices many previously non-elite Iranians grew prosperous. The *political* rise of the war generation and the grab for power of the Revolutionary Guards can be seen to some extent as a reaction against this revival of cosmopolitanism as practiced by those who benefitted from the new dispensation and were seen as betraying the puritanical ideals of the revolution. Nothing represents this more than the burial of war dead on the campuses of Iranian universities, which can be seen as a symbolic repossession of secular space by people who uphold the original values of the revolution.

The division in Iranian society thus persists and is increasingly analyzed by social scientists.[104] Cosmopolitans have been the political underdogs since the revolution, giving their aspirations and political demands an emancipatory tinge. Two books illustrate this. In Fattāneh Hājj-Seyyed-Javādi's *Bāmdād-e Khomār* (The Morning After) the author thematizes the tensions between a well-born woman and her carpenter husband, which are class-based but manifest themselves in cultural differences, there being a lack of *kofu* (equality of birth) between them. As Afsaneh Najmabadi writes, "The impassible divide of 'origins and roots' is constructed line after line, page after page, through the different gestures of the young people, the words and intonations of languages they use, the manners they display, the differences in their aesthetic sensibilities, their different food tastes, their different tastes in clothes – through countless little and big daily performances of difference."[105]

The other book is a dictionary of the slang of young Tehranis titled *Farhang-e loghāt-e zabān-e makhfi* (A dictionary of the secret language). This book records the language of a youth repressed by the state, and it took some effort to get it past censorship. But if one looks carefully at the lemmata, one notices that a considerable portion of them comprises

[104] For a recent study see Saeid Golkar, "Cultural Heterogeneity in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Policy Notes, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* 50 (2018).
[105] Afsaneh Najmabadi, "*The Morning After*: Travail of Sexuality and Love in Modern Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36:3 (August 2004): 371.

derogatory terms for culturally unsophisticated lower-class people from the provinces, the best known of which is *javād*, meaning something close to the British "chav." These words designate people who aspire to look sophisticated but fail in the eyes of the cool boys and girls of Tehran. It is, in effect, an extremely classist document and illustrates the continuation of Iran's culture wars.[106]

Conclusion: Iran is not Alone

Iran is hardly unique, of course. In Israel, a cultural divide has appeared between Tel Aviv, a self-consciously cosmopolitan city where gay couples eat trefa seafood on the beachfront, and Jerusalem, where some ultra-Orthodox Jewish women are discovering the joys of the burka.[107] And when it came to the 2013 Gezi Park demonstrations in Istanbul, one look at the demonstrators was enough to see how different the way they carried themselves was from that of the core voters of the ruling AKP. As then Prime Minister Erdoğan had parliament pass a law restricting the availability of alcohol, on Taksim Square young people demonstrated with a can of beer in their hands.

The recent surge of nativist and xenophobic populism in the Western world seems to

[106] Seyyed Mehdi Samā'i, *Farhang-e loghāt-e zabān-e makhfi (bā moqaddameh'i darbāreh-ye jāme'ehshenāsi-ye zabān)* (Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz, 1382/2003), passim.
[107] This opposition is the subject of Uri Ram, *The globalization of Israel: McWorld in Tel Aviv, jihad in Jerusalem* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

indicate that the culture wars and concomitant dual culture syndrome have spread beyond the Middle East. The Brexit vote in the United Kingdom revealed a socio-cultural cleavage in British society that seems to indicate that Disraeli's "Two Nations" are back. One writer has analyzed it in terms of pitting "Anywheres" against "Somewheres," words that cover the very same semantic ground as the segments I called, following Merton, "cosmopolitan" and "local."[108]

Where Israel, Turkey, and the United Kingdom differ from Iran is that in the first three the cultural duality is mediated by party competition and elections, which ultimately conduce to some kind of compromise. Iran seemed to be going that route under President Mohammad Khātami, who espoused something that, again borrowing from Disraeli, one might call a "one-nation" concept of Islamism. This was followed, however, by a government that defiantly divided the citizenry into *khodi* and *ghey-re khodi*, insiders and outsiders, favoring the former and viewing the latter with distrust if not outright hostility. That model has been difficult to sustain, however, because the boundaries of the *khodi* have kept shrinking, so that in the end the *gheyr-e khodi* comprised much more than the affluent cosmopolitan youth of Tehran's North End. It is a supreme irony of history that in the December 2017 disturbances, largely carried by

[108] David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017).

lower-class people who have trouble making ends meet, slogans have been chanted extolling Reza Shah. In Mashhad, where dozens were killed in 1935 for protesting against the imposition of the European hat on Iranian men, the ruler who imposed that headgear was saluted with the invocation "*Rezā Shāh, ruhat shad*," (Reza Shah rest in peace) in early 2018.[109] Whether this augurs a greater prominence of socio-economic cleavages over socio-cultural ones in the future is too early to tell.

[109] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEIG1fq4_5w . Accessed on 14 October 2018.

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