

Whatever happened to urban knowledge in downtown Tehran? Effects of rural domination of urban society

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N-AERUS
XI
URBAN KNOWLEDGE
in
CITIES OF THE SOUTH

Introduction:

*"New bosses are ruling Olympus
And Zeus has a new way of running things.
He's above the law.
What once was strong, he has made weak."*

Promteus Unbound, Aeschylus, 524 B.C.

The history of urban life in Iran reaches to almost 4000 years. During this time, her cities have been invaded repeatedly, conquered, destroyed and rebuilt. Iranian city dwellers have experienced domination by three centuries of Greeks, five centuries of Arabs, and sporadically across other decades by various nomadic tribes including Mongols, Turks and Tatars.

With the exception of Greeks, who brought with them an alternative pattern of civic life and institutions, invaders were unfamiliar with the concept of city and urban life. Thus, it took them decades and sometimes centuries, to adopt their ways and gain an adequate perception of urban life. The onus was on the city-dwellers to modify their habits. For the city dwellers of Iran, this meant learning to endure hardships, to adjust to the whims and rules of the new rulers while trying to absorb them into urban society and make them city dwellers.

This repeating process of educating and re-educating the nomadic people, however, has had its own negative impacts on the social and physical development of Iranian cities. It has slowed down, and sometimes altered, their course of material progress and the attainment of civic refinement.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, the age of conquerors and invaders seemed to be at an end. Iranian cities started to flourish under a new and more favorable circumstance, in which relative political stability, and later the flow of oil revenues, helped bring about a new era of progress and modernization.

Concurrently the country's population almost doubled during first the few decades of twentieth century, from roughly ten million to twenty million. As the process of rapid urbanization gained momentum, the ratio of urban growth and the flow of rural-urban migration also increased, and it has been rising steadily ever since.

This is as the last historical invasion taking hold of Iranian urban society.

Why did it all start?

It was, in fact, from the late 1950's that the real age of rapid urbanisation in Iran started to make an impact. A massive number of people from rural areas flocked to the major cities in search of jobs and better living standards, and as a result shanty towns became the permanent features of urban suburbs. Main contributing factors included introduction of land reforms, expansion of public institutions and establishment of industrial centres around the cities, that combined, had triggered this unprecedented wave of rural-urban migration.

Statistics show that the number of urban inhabitants in major cities (doubled almost every decade). The population of the capital, Tehran, went from 210,000 in 1922, to the figure 1.5 million in 1956, and by the eve of revolution in 1978, had exceeded four

million. Greater Tehran now has a population of about 12 million.¹

Between 1950 and the late 1970, more than 11 million people, equal to 13.1% of the whole population, had migrated to various major cities like Tabriz, Shiraz, Mashhad and others.² The ratio of urban to rural population, from 30 to 70 percent, in 1956 has now reversed and now more than 70 percent of the population live in cities.³

What was the effect?

The new migrants were, of course, native inhabitants of Iran from rural areas. They had every right to share, participate in, and benefit from the country's oil boom and its progressive phase. They were nevertheless, new to city life and whatever change modernity had brought to the urban scene, particularly in that period of historical transition.

The problem was not so much about the nature of changes that were taking place in the cities, but rather the state of mind of the people from the villages who confronted them. As noted by a number of studies and monographs, until the introduction of land reforms in 1960, the rural community in Iran had been living largely within its own medieval social and economic environment, still under the land-owning nobility, under feudal rules and its related values and world view. Inadequate access to the public media, lack of a transport system and poor infrastructure had also added to their sense of isolation.⁴

Villagers, therefore, had to live by their own efforts, suffer ongoing economic hardships, and find the way of coping with various social and financial discriminations. They had to earn a living by working on land with primitive tools, while being committed to pay the agreed yearly rents. Living under these circumstances had made them not only hard working and self-reliant but also conservative in world views and mistrustful about the people who ventured temporarily to their villages for getting a bargain or spending a quiet time off.

Land reforms and the momentous process of industrialisation changed all this. It helped to empty the villages and confronted the time honoured and traditional values of rural population with that of the ever changing modern city.

The Iranian revolution, in this perspective, not only confronted two economic systems but it also was a clash of classes, ideas and world views; a showdown of power between the rural and urban societies.

How did it happen?

The international climate during 1970s, in which the cold war was still high on the agenda, required that the notion of "open political space" was advocated by the West among its allies in the third world. The idea aimed to encourage free press, open political debates and fair election within the concerned societies. In Iran, however, it created an apt context in which the voices of dissidents and the under class could be heard after decades of political suppression. To achieve their own aims and objectives, various social groups reacted accordingly and new alliances were formed.

Among these allegiances, was the historical marriage of convenience between three social groups- three urban traditions: the traditions of Mullah, Bazaar and Pahlavan; i.e. the clergy, the Bazaar merchants and the hoodlums.⁵

The common ideological ground in this alliance was their common language of shared ideas, ideals and values. They were all directly in touch with the village lifestyle and traditions one way or the other, and still preferred to adhere to their own pre-modern

1 Farrokh HESAMIAN et al., *Urbanisation in Iran* (Agah Press, 2008) Ch. Two, also see: Aftab Organisation, "Urban growth in city of Tehran", September 14, 2010, http://www.aftab.ir/social/sociology/groups/town/develop_rate.php-in Persian, [accessed October 4, 2010].

2 Iranian Office of Statistics, July 14, 2010, <http://www.kaleme.com/1389/04/23/klm-25659> - in Persian, [accessed October 4 June 2010].

3 Iscanews, Rate of urban growth in Iran, October 22, 2010, <http://iscanews.ir/fa/ShowNewsItem.aspx?newsitemid=332153> -in Persian, [accessed October 4 June 2010].

4 HESAMIAN, *ibid*, pp. 59-60

5 This is similar but not exactly as the Marxist notion of lumpen-proletariat; it mostly refers to urban thugs and bullies that had their own historical background and codes of practice in traditional Iranian cities.

roots.

The intellectual leadership in this alliance was with *ulama*, or the clergy, since the religious establishment in Iran had a historical claim to power and a good deal of experience in leading the masses in political protests⁶. They had been active in the previous revolution of 1906, in which demands were made for constitution, parliament and the rule of law.

Referring to the Islamic ideals and model of government established by the prophet of Islam, in 662 CE, they argued that an "Islamic republic" could uphold social justice and equality.⁷

Major cities of Iran in the late 70s were suitable sites on which the clergy could test its ideas and flex its muscles in a new bid for power. Unlike in previous eras, where the religious followers were limited among city dwellers, the new wave of rural emigrants, now being transformed into the urban poor, labourers, and neighbourhood thugs, provided them with an army of believers, keen to fight for their share of wealth and material progress.

Therefore, the catalyst that combined and brought these three actors together, was the massive and ongoing influx of a rural populous to the big cities, where the rural migrants found a practical role, filled a social gap, and enabled the potential power of this alliance to be brought to bear.

How did it develop?

From the moment of its victory to the present time, the Iranian revolution has passed four distinct periods. In every stage, it has consolidated its roots and, ironically, moved further away from its declared universalistic religious messages towards manifestation of its own rural roots and ideals.

The period from 1978 to 2010 can, thus, be divided into four distinct periods:

1978-1985: Rule of ideology (illusions and war)

After the fall of the monarchy, the principle motto of the new government was "independence" and "freedom" under an "Islamic Republic". It was envisaged that the new regime would operate through a free election, free press and an independent parliament. The popular ideals and aspirations upheld by ordinary citizens for the past ninety years, since the Constitutional Revolution of 1906. The new regime, also, claimed that these could all be extracted from the Islamic law, *Shari 'a*, and its related ethics and values, by the *fogha-ha*, or the religious scholars.

In practice, however, the process proved to be more difficult than envisaged. Problematic issues arose in the formation of power-sharing arrangements between various political factions, in ideological precedents, and the direction of the economy. This in turn led to increasing tension between intellectuals, the middle classes and the religious establishment.

Externally, the revolutionary rhetoric, produced hostility from the conservative regimes of the region, and from Western powers, in particular the United States. The eight year long war with Iraq started, which brought about huge loss of life and widespread destruction.

Emergency situations, however, helped the new religious elite to establish dominant control over other rival groups aiming to engage in political activities. Leftist and nationalist groups, liberal-minded intellectuals and other such individuals were driven out, and various opportunities/privileges were offered to those who supported and directly participated in the war front.

Among the majority of these were young people from villages, the urban poor, and volunteers from small towns. They were gradually organised into a new military force, called Sepah, along side the conventional army. Members of Sepah, later known as revolutionary guards, were religiously motivated and their main aim was to defend the supreme leader. Thus, one important by-product of the war was an unwarranted increase of the role and volume of military and security forces in urban affairs.

6 W. M. WATT, *Islamic political thought* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007) Chapters 7&10

7 R. KHOMEINI, *Islamic government: governance of the Jurist*, Trans. Hamid Algar (The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works- International Affairs Department, 1990).

At the end of the war, with nearly one million casualties from both sides, many Iranian cities and villages had been physically devastated and their overall infrastructure damaged. The illusion of revolutionary expansion and the rejuvenation of the *umma*, the universal community of believers, was also shattered. Activists and religious authorities were forced now to look inwards, and to focus on their own problems. The urban population needed to recover from nearly a decade of chaos and destruction, till the citizens find time to ask for the freedom they had demanded in 1978.

1988- 1997: The Rule of pragmatists (reconstruction and sanctioned capitalism)

In an effort to rebuild the country, a group of religious figures and bureaucrats who came to power after war, resumed oil exports and increased imports of consumer goods in a bid to boost the economy and encourage development.

Cities started to grow rapidly, with many sky scrapers, new neighbourhoods and “new towns” being built during this period. While the population in Tehran exceeded more than 10 million, the gap between the rich and poor widened and the rate of rural to urban migration continued to increase.

Critics argued that these were evident signs of social inequality, and far from the ideals of a just and equal Islamic society. It was argued that cities had become the showcases of capitalist goods, and too much attention had been paid to wealth and luxurious living. Cultural values were undermined and no ethical progress had been made, and this was attributed to an alliance of few materialistic clergymen and those liberal-minded merchants of Bazaar who were in the government. The stage was now set for those who advocated social reforms alongside economic progress.

1997- 2005: Reformists and power struggle: the rise and fall of a civil society

Support for reforms was at its highest in urban areas. Since their population had increased, city dwellers were in a clear majority and elected a president to carry out the social reforms. President Khatami, a religious intellectual and politically moderate man, was elected, much to the surprise of the traditional clergy and military wing of the system.

It was during this period that the concepts of “civil society”, “public participation” and “rule of law” were widely discussed in the moderately free press, whose daily circulation amounted to an unprecedented number of 3.5 million readers in two years⁸.

With the President’s approval, the legal foundation for the establishment of NGO’s was laid⁹ and despite their partial closures and falling numbers, there are still over 2000 working NGO’s in Iran today. Their activities range from cooperatives, charities, minority and family support clubs to cultural and scientific affiliations.¹⁰

A new breed of public buildings, called *Farhang-Sara*, or houses of culture, were built in different city neighbourhoods with the aim of promoting public debates and free education for all ages and gender. Among other achievements of this period, was establishment of legislation and elections for the first overall city councils, in order to voice citizen’s concerns in urban affair.¹¹

The reformists attempted to bridge the political gaps with the West, and the paradigm of “Dialogue of Civilisations” was proposed by the president. To complement his idea that internal affairs needed be based on opening a dialogue between opposing factions. But this was not to the taste of supreme leader and his powerful allies in the military, who saw the concepts proposed, legislations passed and institutions established, to be taking the wrong direction!

2005- 2010: Domination of the rural alliance: military/clergy/ bazaaries

The reformist’s views and scope of action, particularly in regard to freedom of the press, were seen by those whose basis of power and conservative views had come

8 Isa SAHARKHIZ, Reforms: the period of public trust in the press, in Aftab newspaper, April 4, 2009 -in Persian.

9 H.MASOUDNIA, Civil Society and Non-Governmental Institutions in Iran: challenges and Solutions, in Journal of the Faculty of Admin. Science & Economy, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2005), pp. 120-136 -in Persian.

10 M. VAEZI, About Non Governmental Institutions (Sharghian Electronic Publications) No. 12, Jan. (2005) -in Persian.

11 FARS NEWS, History of Islamic Councils of City and Country, no. 8802070991, Sep. (2010) -in Persian.

under threat as a direct attack on the original ideas of revolution and the long-held values and traditions of an Islamic society. Negative reactions had already started in President Khatami's second term but conservative elements of the system made sure that no other reformists were elected either as president or as the members of parliament.

It was during this period that, major reformist newspapers were banned from publication and their licences revoked.

Believing to be under constant and eminent attacks by liberal and non-conformist activists, the religious hierarchy moved further away from trusting the urban masses and relied more heavily on the military and security forces. Some in the ranks of revolutionary guards saw this as an opportunity to claim their own unrewarded sacrifices during the war that. They wanted a prosperous life and a share of oil revenues.

Therefore, the combination of fear of losing political supremacy, desire to be rewarded while kept in power, and determination to be in control of the country's economy, were the roots of the formation of this pragmatic alliance.

As the opponents of reforms got united, their ideas were crystallised and their advocated system of ruling the society came into force. What emerged as the dominant power of control, and the ideological force that claimed to uphold "traditions" against the "ravages" of modernity, was an alliance of three groups, namely conservative clergymen, bazaris and hoodlums. Ordinary citizens and urban community in general reacted first with discontent and later with open protests. The rest is the current news.

Who were they?

On the eve of revolution, the streets of major Iranian cities were crowded with protestors who demanded equality, social justice and freedom. Among these were activists from the left-leaning activists, university students and liberal intellectuals all aiming to establish their own ideal society.

For the Leftist, revolution of 1978 was a short distance from the establishment of a socialist republic. Some of their poets called it "sharing the sacred robe of the prophet of justice and equality".¹² For liberals and Western-educated intellectuals it was going to be a free society, free from the tyranny and hereditary rule of the old aristocracy; and for students it was a leap towards the ideal fair and just society. All of these groups came together, under the version of Islam that promised to fulfil it all.

The dominant religious intellectual figure of the time, Ali Shariati, himself a sociologist graduated from Sorbonne, bridged the gap between liberal intellectuals, university students and the religious middle class with his novel interpretations of Islam. He was an Islamist ideologue and a self confessed "villager", who admired the innocence and integrity of village life, and looked with disgust and disapproval at city and urban life.¹³

In his writings and heated public lectures, he managed to merge the Marxist notion of class struggle with that of his contemporary French existentialist philosophers; superimposing it onto a framework of selected moral and mystical teachings of Islam.

The result was a temporary, but unprecedented, unity of ideals between different, hitherto opposing, social factions, all believing in the possibility of a just and modern society on the basis of these new interpretations of religious principles.

This unity was just what the restless army of new migrants needed, a surprising and somewhat unintentional blessing from other sectors of urban society that otherwise might not have had anything in common with such of them.

On this basis, the rural alliance, spearheaded by the clergy aimed to set the revolts in motion and each of its factions posed to play their role.

Clergy:

There is no provision of a clerical sector in Islam *per-se*, rather it has been developed

12 Siavosh KASRAII, "Mohammad" in Selected Poems (Morvarid Press, 1974)

13 Ali Shariati, Kavir (Ein-ollahi Press, 1957) p. 3

out of social and historical necessities based on pre-existing local traditions. The main characteristic of the clergy in Iran has been its role as a mediator and power broker, with ties both to the state and community. In this way, it has been able to understand popular aspirations and be aware of their needs, and to relay these to the state authorities, and *vice-versa*.

As in medieval Europe, membership to a religious establishment requires no particular condition except devotion to the faith and a following of its concerned subjects matters. It is not surprising to discover that the clergy is comprised of individuals from diverse backgrounds. It is interesting to note, however, that they are predominantly from rural areas, and originally of little or no financial means. A group of people, for whom, the only way to personal fulfilment and progress is the attendance of religious schools.¹⁴ They tend to remain in contact with their origins throughout their lives, even after becoming high-ranking religious figures, and are usually unaware of the complexities inherent in and critical of modern urban life, both in their trainings and approach towards it.

The dawn of modernity produced two opposite reactions among the members of clergy in Iran, vividly demonstrated by the events taking place during the 1906 constitutional revolution. Here, while one group sided with reformists and advocated the rights of people to establish a parliament and enjoy the rule of law, others argued against these were un-Islamic inventions that contradicted religious principles. This was apparently related on their social and economic status, particular interpretation of Islam, and their own personal views on maintaining the interests of the religious establishment in long term.

The Clergy has historically maintained its position by playing the role of a power broker between state and society, threatening the government by encouraging the masses to revolt, and warning the masses of the consequences if they threatened to change the status quo.¹⁵

This mediatory role was made possible by their pragmatic relationship with the urban nobility, common citizens and neighbourhood hoodlums. Every neighbourhood had its own mosque, similar to a parish, in which a clergyman, or *mullah*, would provide religious and sometimes educational services for the locals -performing religious rituals and advising people on issues of birth, life and death. Their source of income was collecting endowments and alms, provided by the wealthy citizens, mainly Bazaaries and well-established feudal land-owning families residing in cities.

In some cases, the clergy needed the protection of the neighbourhood's thugs against the ravages of greedy officials. They exchanged blessings of salvation and bestowed social respectability to their local protectors, hence establishing the basis of a precarious relationship between the two groups- this will be explained further below.

Merchants of Bazaar

The urban economy in Iran has traditionally been controlled by the Bazaar, a bastion of ancient commercial activities and an undisputed centre for trade between rural producers and urban consumers. Therefore, the effects of economic modernisation after the 1950s in Iran were felt hard at the heart of Bazaar, in two major ways.

First, the flow of oil income made many young urban entrepreneurs enter into trade, to become importers or representatives of foreign companies, importing an ever-increasing number of goods, often directly from abroad, to meet the demands of growing cities. Central government and its various departments also signed huge contracts with international producers of goods and services, thus helping to diminish the influence of the Bazaar in economic arena.

Secondly, rural migration depleted the rural areas of the work force needed to maintain the traditional rate of production, thus destroying an age old and well-established network of supplies that the people of bazaar had worked for centuries to maintain.

For bazaaries, this was the end of an era, and a new dawn of impoverishment. The

¹⁴ The rural origins of a large number of current religious leaders of Iran can be easily observed in their biographies. Many official authorities and high ranking politicians are also of the same origin and relation to rural migrant families.

¹⁵ A. KASRAVI, History of Constitutional Revolution of Iran, (Amir Kabir Press, 1977) -in Persian) pp. 247 & 288.

world seemed to be turned upside down. All that was sacred and honourable had been violated. They were now opposed to modernity, or at least in the way it was organised and aimed to eradicate their way of life.

Hoodlums

Within the hierarchy of the rural alliance, hoodlums and urban thugs come last but their role and presence can not be underestimated. These are individuals of physical strength and courage with a reputation of taking risks with the law, and are often unafraid of employing aggressive methods when dealing with their opponents. What makes them a recognised group in Iran is an ancient urban tradition of neighbourhood champions, *Pahlavan* or *Ayyar*.¹⁶ According to this, a just and strong local hero would emerge to assume the mantle of a protector, a Robin Hood-like figure, who cares about the weak and the needy in his territory.

In pre-modern Iranian cities, they played sheriff and upheld of the social order, enjoying the support of wealthy and respectable citizens in their own neighbourhoods, as long as they stayed within the moral boundaries and codes of religious ethics.¹⁷

As was often the case, however, these ethical codes were easily broken once the *Pahlavan* enjoyed unrivalled power over the neighbourhood, and gradually turned into bullies, threatening the public safety and becoming a menace to the orderly affairs of respectable citizens. In such cases, they were named “*o’bash*”, “*lat-o-loots*” or thugs and hooligans, and desperate citizens would try to find a way to oppose them, or appeal to the government agencies to get rid of them.

Among the saints and religious figures that they allegedly sought to copy in attributes and moral codes, local thugs had a patron saint.¹⁸ For urban Shiites this was Imam Ali, the fourth caliph and son-in-law of the prophet, a historical paragon of justice and virtue.

To this end, and as a matter of honour and self-justification, urban thugs were always present in annual public religious ceremonies and parades, commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Ali’s son, Husain. They would work hard to celebrate these events in all its absurd details, often carrying heavy religious icons and flags at the front row of crowds of mourners.

This would also bring hoodlums in contact with the clergy, whose approval and sanctions they sought, hence, forming another alliance between these two urban groups. In a traditional environment, the combination of physical strength and the blessings of a religious authority was a pragmatic measure, and a winning formula, for a successful urban thug. It added to his personal aura, influence and level of social respectability.

Urban thugs were not necessarily of an immediate rural background, they could in fact be living in cities for more than one generation, but their social standing would put them in contact with labourers, the urban poor, and especially after the 1950s, with unemployed youth migrating from villages. Well-known thugs used to gather a number of apprentices and protégés from this crowd and form their own gangs, controlling certain activities in and around the Bazaar.

Ironically, while one group of urban thugs were used by CIA in their *coup-d’etat* against the nationalist prime minister of Iran, Mohammed Mossadegh, in 1952, it was the assassination of Mansur, Shah’s appointed prime minister, in 1964 that brought the hoodlums of bazaar to fame. This assassination was carried out by an unknown young worker recruited by a religious group connected to both clerical circles and the well-known gangs of the bazaar.

A traditional way of living for urban hoodlums, apart from collecting rewards or protection money from ordinary citizens, was to carry out manual jobs or provide safeguarding duties for merchants and people of the Bazaar, who had contact with or lived in their

16 Hugh KENNEDY, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (Longman, 1986) p.177.

17 This has been immortalised in, *Dash Ackol*, a famous novel by Iranian writer, Sadiq Hidayat, in which the main hero is an urban hoodlum who adopts a self-destructive path, and gets killed in a personal struggle choosing between his forbidden love or his code of honour.

18 For details of urban groupings and their religious ties see for example: *A history of Islamic Societies*, I.M. LAPIDUS, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 214-215, and *Middle Eastern Cities*, I.M. LAPIDUS, Harvard University Press, 1967, chapter 5.

neighbourhood. There was therefore, some level of historical ties and areas of mutual interests between these two social groups, prior to the events of 1978.

What were the impacts?

The first and most important impact of the 1978 revolution was the almost entire nullification of the old ruling families and members of the aristocracy. This was in total contrast to that of the 1906 revolution where the old-established feudal and landowning class, people of nobility and high-ranking military commanders survived with their influence and wealth; a majority had even managed to transform themselves into constitutionalists, and gain top governmental posts, from the Qajar dynasty (1794-1925) to Pahlavi (1925-1978).

In fact, the Shah and his relatives were more than happy to be incorporated into the old elite and rely on their loyalty. A famous example was Mossadeq, the ill-fated nationalist prime minister of Shah, who was a member of the Qajar royal family.

But under the Islamic revolution, they were all dispossessed, forced into exile and disappeared from the political scene. This was an unprecedented historical event in modern Iranian history.

New elite emerged after the victory of Islamic revolution, comprised of people with no royal or noble lineage. They were the true representative of the new dominant classes, made up of people who had little share of political power or experience in running the affairs of state prior to this time, but now constituted various factions of the ruling class planning on taking up the task according to their own choices and capacities.

Therefore, the major and sole impact of revolution in cities came from a historic shift of power and money from one long-standing group of elites to a group of new-comers to urban affluence. As Marx noted, this was where the culture of a dominant class is displayed as the culture of the whole society.

One could observe these changes coming into being, and the physical face of the well-established upper class neighbourhoods in cities were transformed in three decades. The old-style mansions were confiscated, either to be repaired in a different taste, or demolished all together and built with new architecture of perceived wealth and grandeur.

Here, the architecture seem to be of an open vulgarity, with deliberate emphasis on display of the wealth and power of their new owners, as opposed to the shrewdly modest appearance of the old ruling class, who tended to live with little pretence and had their money working for them somewhere else.

In addition to these consequences, the other overall impacts of the past thirty years, produced by each particular faction of "the rural alliance", can be observed on cities and in the urban community. Each concerned group saw the city from their own perspective and tried to replace what did not suit their respective interests, views and values, thus impacting the shape and level of the urban knowledge in Iran.

Clergy: city as a ritual space

In the eyes of the clergy, the city is an arena in which a vast religious ceremony is underway and the citizens are the spectators. Its environment, thus, needs to be equipped with adequate constructions and props to facilitate the perfect running of this ceremony. No spectator is allowed to ruin the show.

The role of citizens is to participate where and when required, led by their Imam, or leader. Their task is thus marginal, since they are envisaged to have no relevant knowledge of the religious complexities, in need of guidance and reminders. But they are essential ingredients for a successful ceremony; that is as far as they follow the rules. For this reason, they are being constantly advised, on the city walls and through the media, and reminded of their "duties" and "responsibilities", rather than their "rights" or "aspirations".

In urban relations, the visible effects of clergy, who represent the official face of the religion, is the application of the religious Law or *Shari' a*. This manifests itself in decrees about social and legal affairs, which affect various sectors of the urban

population in every detail of their public life.

In cities, the youth and women bear the blunt of such interventions and, hence, are among the harshly affected. Religious interpretations of how social relations have to be conducted and which type of make up or style of dress has to be observed are among the top issues of daily urban confrontations. Men are not allowed to wear short sleeve shirts in public or leave their upper shirt buttons open. Very recently, the government issued a poster in which the "approved" official hair-styles for men were displayed.

The same types of rules even apply to physical aspects of the cities concerned. The main football stadium in the Tehran University campus is still being used as a place for Friday prayers, despite a massive allocation of land in the centre of affluent neighbourhoods of north Tehran. This is where a huge Friday mosque, surrounded by a multifunctional religious complex has ironically been under construction for the past two decades.

Previous urban function for the plot in question, as designed by the pre-revolution planners, was to be a cultural complex, named Shahistan, comprising of an extensive public square, with parks, cinemas, and shopping centres.

Elsewhere, a large number of local mosques have also been built in various Iranian cities, often well exceeding the number of actual worshippers in the neighbourhood. A practical side to the mushrooming of these types of developments is the fact that the inclusion of a mosque in an urban development plan makes the permission process more likely to succeed. Religious buildings and charities are exempt from tax, and their inclusion in a project facilitates buildings of other commercial function around them.

Bazaar: City as the seat of wealth

On the eve of revolution, control of the Iranian economy was handed over to the long established and powerful merchants of bazaar. Not only did they maintain their traditional bastion of the Bazaar, but also took hold of the chamber of commerce, ministries of finance, trade and other hitherto related state run institutions.

Having a free hand in economic decision making, they resorted to what they knew best: expansion of import and straight trade rather than investment in production. During the Iran-Iraq war, a huge amount of capital was moved abroad and thousands of Iranian owned companies were opened in Dubai and other Emirates in the Persian Gulf. Here they traded with various countries and supplied the Iranian market with their imported goods and financial services.

After the war, and during the period of reconstruction, bazaaris enjoyed an even greater degree of profitability in their trading activities. This new wealth was displayed through the cities in various forms; from luxury cars, apartments, jewellery, to investments in land speculations and the construction of high rise buildings in and around major cities.

The city itself had to be expanded, with new luxury apartment buildings, a new network of highways, tunnels and bridges to display the new wealth at best, while the rate of improvements in its public transport, water and electricity supply and other amenities remained inadequate and largely poor.

The taste for luxury expanded well beyond the city borders. Private villas and summer mansions filled in the northern mountainside and valleys, and modern holiday resources of various shapes and sizes grew in the forests and rice fields of the Caspian Sea region.

Inevitably the gap between rich and poor became more apparent in urban areas and this strengthened the hands of hard liners and non-bazaari factions in the bid for power, which include plans of a direct hand-over of cash to the poor and construction of mass scale apartment blocks for people called "housing of love", *Maskan mehr*.

Hoodlum: City as arena of confrontation

Urban hoodlums, who participated in street fights and the lootings of military bases

in the last days of the old regime, never put neither their arms nor the new sense of power and control down. They were sanctioned and funded under the new rule, and began to occupy central roles in the military, militia and security forces. Socially, they have also remained aware of their own humble roots and have not forgotten their own views and attitudes towards the realities of everyday life, i.e. fighting for survival and punishment of the rival gangs. Hoodlums were particularly distrustful of intellectuals, students and the mass of middle class citizens, who might raise questions or arrange public protests. The difference in class, views and ideals, in their eyes, would effectively make them rival gangs, potentially threatening and, hence, pertinent to making plots to topple their control. The creation of various agencies of security control, among them night patrols, plain clothes vigilantes, and rapid reaction motorbike squads, are the visible signs of urban presence by these groups, and their activities include confronting student protestors, controlling of private gatherings and parties, enforcement of hair and dress codes, as well as eating and drinking rules!

Concluding Remarks:

The physical appearance of Iranian cities continues to be marked by the arrival of new rural migrants. Their presence is visible in the ever expanding low-income neighbourhoods in the suburbs and the number of workers committed to various petty commodity jobs.

Public parks, streets and access ways are being systematically gated, fenced and barricaded in order to control the irregular movements of men and motor cars who are not sure how exactly to drive or cross the road safely.

Statues of public places are stolen from their pedestals for their metal; traffic still remains chaotic and a major cause of urban casualties featured in the pages of newspapers everyday. The process of shaping new citizens continues unabated, in all its painful and joyous stages.

As the earlier generation of rural migrants have found employment in ever expanding public sector or security services, rural-urban migration continues. Many of these new citizen and their families now enjoy special rights and privileges helping their children attend schools and universities with ease. The urban poor of the 70's are now city dwellers and their children now form part of the new civil service and other relevant urban authorities, as well as some forming a new generation of protestors!

The recent unrests and occurring post election political events may be taken as a sign that the resistance of urban community to the domination of rural dogmas has now taken a new impetus.

It seems like a conscious reaction by the urban population, to show their determination to resist the planned eradication of their legacy of urban knowledge, accumulated during a century long struggle, to safeguard the elements of modernity, the notions of personal freedom, civic rights, rule of law, and equality of ethnic and gender groups—all implanted in their collective memories since 1906.

It is this shared desire, strengthened and matured sense of civic culture that brings hundreds of thousands of protesting people out into the streets.

It is this widespread and deep understanding of the balance between rights and responsibilities, this overall belief in the power of democratic values versus the poverty of ideological dogmas that keeps motivating the current urban movements in Iran.

In the words of Milani, a contemporary Iranian writer, it is "this century-old coalition for democracy" that "still awaits the realisation of its dream".¹⁹

19 Abbas MILANI, Iran's Islamic revolution: three paradoxes , in The Iranian Revolution at 30 (Middle East Institute, February 2009).