Plenary Session 1:
Researching Contemporary Iran: Historical, Theoretical and Methodological Issues

1) Abbas MALEKI
Iran’s Islamic Revolution and its Future: Domestic Politics and Culture

Abstract
As one of the most important events of the past three decades in the Middle East and West Asia, the Islamic Revolution not only has sustained itself, but the Islamic Republic which it spawned celebrated its 30th anniversary in February 2009.

Iran has 1% of the world’s population and about 7% of global mineral resources. Yet, the country’s post-revolutionary economic performance has remained well below its actual potential, due to war and regional crises as well as internal problems such as mismanagement and other ills. Nonetheless, in recent years, Iran has witnessed a period of sustainable growth with GDP growth rates above the world average — a trend that is likely to continue.

Regime sustainability despite different internal crises and foreign threats underlines the fact that Iran enjoys a relatively rational decision-making process.

To predict the future of the country, one could look at new driving forces, rationales, plots and scenarios.

The most important and discernible trend in Iran and projections about the country’s future, is related to the interrelations of politics and culture in Iran’s society.

In terms of domestic political developments, state decision-making will become broader and more complex. Younger institutions, such as the Expediency Council and Supreme National Security Council will gain in significance. Some look at the “Chinese model” as the way forward; that is, economic reforms and cultural liberalization alongside political orthodoxy. However, differences between Chinese and Iranian culture and history will impede the application of this model. The Islamic Republic enjoys the loyalty of many ordinary people (mainly the rural population) who have benefited from the post-revolutionary improvements. However, economic problems (e.g., inflation, unemployment, brain drain, underdevelopment of non-oil sectors, etc.) overshadow the overall development. As such, the main threat against the regime is from within, especially fed by economic and social dissatisfaction. The growing urban middle class and its interdependence with socio-political stability will make a violent upheaval impossible, but the regime could theoretically collapse.

There is a lively debate among Iranian intellectuals on these very questions. This article focuses on Iran and its domestic situation in the fourth decade after Islamic Revolution.

Biography
Abbas Maleki was born in Tehran in 1957. He achieved his undergraduate and Master Studies in Mechanical Engineering and Industrial Management at the Sharif University of Technology in Tehran. He has a Ph.D. in Strategic Management.

He holds the post of Associate Professor on Energy Policy at the Sharif University of Technology and has taught in such diverse subjects as Iranian Foreign Policy, the Islamic Revolution as well as Iran and its Neighbours. Other current Activities include: Director General of the Institute for Caspian Studies (IICS), since 1997; Associate Researcher, Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School of Government since 2006, General Manager of PetroPars Institute for Oil...
and Gas (2001-2004), Member of the Editorial Board for Central Asia and The Caucasus Journal (Central Asia and the Caucasus Information and Analytical Centre, Sweden) since 2001.

Previous employment includes: Advisor to the Chairman of Islamic Republic of Iran’s Broadcasting, 1997-2000; Director of the Department of Crude Oil Pricing, National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), 1982-1985; Director General of the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) at the Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1985-1989; Deputy Foreign Minister for Research and Education, in Iran's Foreign Ministry, 1989-1997; Advisor to Iran's Foreign Minister, 1997-2002; Advisor to the Iranian Minister for Culture and Islamic Guidance, 1997-2000; Adjunct Professor at the Department of Economics, International Studies, and Public Administration at the American University of Sharjah (AUS), 2001- 2002; a Member of the Board of Trustees at the International Institute for Energy Studies (IIES), 1994-1998.

Previous activities include: Advisor to the Director of the World Bank (in Middle East and North African Affairs); Member of the Persian Language Development Council, Tehran; The Islamic Republic of Iran’s Plenipotentiary Ambassador; Editor-in-Chief for the Journal of Foreign Policy; Editor-in-Chief for The Iranian Journal of International Affairs; Editor-in-Chief for Amu Darya: The Iranian journal of Central Asian Studies; and an Honorary Member of the Payvand Association, Tajik Society of Cultural Relations, Dushanbe.

Professor Maleki has published widely on matters of strategic thinking, Economics, International Relations, Iranian Foreign Policy and Iranian gas and oil policies. He has also published and presented extensively, both in Iran and abroad, on the Caspian Sea and Region, Central Asia and the Caucasus as well as Islam and Iranian culture.

Abbas Maleki, PhD is Chairman, International Institute for Caspian Studies; Associate Professor on Energy Security, Sharif University of Technology; and Associate Researcher, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

2) Soheila SHAHSHAHANI
Claiming our Terrain in Academia

Abstract

Biography

Soheila Shahshahani is associate professor of anthropology and head of research group entitled Cultural Anthropology of Iran at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, Iran. She is editor of Anthropology of the Middle East (Berghahn publication) and Culture and Human Being (in Persian). She received her doctorate degree from the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research in New York in 1981.

She is Senior Vice-President of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, and on the editorial board of World Social Science Report of ISSC of Unesco. She is author of The Four Seasons of the Sun, an ethnography of women of Oyun, a sedentarized village of the Mamassani pastoral nomads of Iran (1987), A Pictorial history of Iranian headdresses (1995), Meymand, we were one people one territory, an ethnographic study of a grotto-village (2005), guest editor of Nomadic Peoples, Nomads and Nomadism in Post-revolutionary Iran (Vol 7, No.2, 2003)
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and editor of Body as medium of meaning (2004) and of Cities of Pilgrimage (forthcoming), author of many articles in English and Persian.

3) Abdolmohammad KAZEMIPUR
A Generation in Flux: An Empirical Profile of Youth in Post-revolutionary Iran

Abstract
The 1997 presidential election in Iran loudly declared the arrival of a new generation of youth in the country, resulting in a new wave of studies on the Iranian youth both inside and outside the country. Despite their success in drawing attention to the issue of the Iranian youth, those studies fall short of providing a badly needed broad perspective that could act as the background for many other smaller-scale studies. Generally speaking, those studies suffer from heavy reliance on anecdotal information, their narrow focuses, as well as their static nature. The study proposed here is an attempt in addressing these problems by examining various aspects of the social lives of the Iranian youth, through the use of a variety of data sources. Specifically, three major sources of data have been utilized: 1) a series of locally-conducted surveys covering the period 1975-2003; 2) the data on the Iranian youth as well as the youth in five other countries – US, UK, Canada, Egypt, and Turkey – obtained through the World Values Survey; and, 3) the contents of several in-depth interviews and focus group studies conducted in Iran. This extremely rich combination of information has allowed us to observe some of the emerging trends among the Iranian youth, the areas of similarity and difference between the youth in Iran and in the five other countries mentioned above, and some possible reasons behind the observed trends. Some of the main findings include: a) among the six countries compared, Iranian youth show the lowest levels of general happiness, life satisfaction, sense of freedom; b) likewise, they show the lowest levels of engagement in civic activities, and spending time with their friends and co-workers, although the latter is fast changing in favor of a network of friends and distant family members; c) contrary to the above, the Iranian youth report the highest levels of sensitivity and engagement in politics, as well as concern about economic issues; d) this higher engagement is combined with a declining confidence in public institutions and government agencies; e) the views of the Iranian youth towards religion shows a duality: a relatively high level of belief in the abstract elements of faith, combined with a significantly lower level of commitment to behavioral, social, and political implications of religion; f) the support for gender-equality or gender-neutral policies is much more pronounced in the three Western countries, even among the males; such support is much weaker in the three Muslim societies, even among the females; g) despite the latter, the support for gender-neutral policies seems to be higher in Iran, compared to the two other Muslim nations; h) a stronger presence of a feminist view among the Iranian women is reinforced by a demographic phenomenon known as ‘marriage squeeze’, which is currently underway in Iran. These findings suggest major implications, both theoretical and practical, some of which are discussed in the paper.

Biography
Abdolmohammad Kazemipur is an Associate-Professor of sociology at the University of Lethbridge, Canada. He conducts research on two broad issues: the integration of ethnic minorities and immigrants in Canada, and the socio-cultural trends in Iran. His most recent books include: Social Capital and Diversity: Some Lessons from Canada (2009); The Generation X: a Sociological Account of the Iranian Youth (2008); Social Capital in Iran (2005); and An Economic Sociology of Immigrant Life in Canada (2004). He is currently doing a comparative study of Muslim minorities in various immigrant-receiving countries.
4) Pardis MAHDAVI  
Sex, Drugs, and Rock n’ Roll in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Abstract  
Perhaps there is no place in the world where the stakes of “having fun” are higher than in present-day Iran. Drinking (alcohol) and dancing can lead to arrest by the morality police accompanied by up to 70 lashings. Consequences for sex outside of marriage can be even more severe – up to 84 lashes. But even under the threat of such harsh punishment, a sexual revolution is taking place. Sex and sexuality has become both a source of freedom and an act of political rebellion for urban young Iranians who are frustrated with a theocratic regime that restricts their sociality. Young people, who are now turning away from an Islam that has been interpreted for them as repressive, seek to organize public and private spheres in alternative ways as a symbol of protest. This paper will explore the spatiality of sexual encounters amongst urban youth in the Islamic Republic of Iran, from public locations such as parks and mosques where young people and sex workers congregate, to natural outdoor spaces such as the jungles in the north of the country and the mountain areas just outside of Tehran which play host to large parties and raves, to the dating scene at religious gatherings during the months of Moharram and Ramadan to underground dance parties in private homes. Qualitative, triangulated fieldwork conducted between 2000 and 2007 will map the spatiality of sexuality with particular attention to questions of heteronormativity, sigheh (temporary marriage), sex work, heterosociality and the construction of alternative sexual identities.

Biography  
Pardis Mahdavi, PhD is currently at Pomona College as Assistant Professor of anthropology after pursuing her doctorate at Columbia University in the departments of Sociomedical Sciences and Anthropology. She received her BA in Diplomacy and World Affairs from Occidental College, and an MA (in Anthropology) and a Masters of International Affairs (MIA) from Columbia University. Her research interests include sexuality, human rights, youth culture, transnational feminism and public health in the context of changing global and political structures. Her first book project was on the intersection between sexuality and politics in post-revolutionary Iran, while her current work looks at female migration to the Gulf states.

Pardis has published in the Encyclopedia of Women in Islamic Cultures, Culture, Health and Sexuality, Anthropology News, and the Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World Review. Pardis has received outstanding research awards from the American Public Health Association, the Society for Medical Anthropology and the Society for Applied Anthropology. She is currently an editor for Culture, Health and Sexuality as well as Rahavard Quarterly, a journal devoted to contemporary social issues in Iran and amongst the Iranian diaspora. Her book, Passionate Uprisings: Iran’s Sexual Revolution has recently been published with Stanford University Press.

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