30 Years On: The Social and Cultural Impacts of the Iranian Revolution
5-6 June 2009
School of Oriental and African Studies

Breakout Session:
Tehran Cultural Change

1) Oliver LEAMAN
The cultural counter-revolution: how the clerical state responded and why it worked

Abstract
Since 1979 a variety of arts have developed in Iran that seemed to contravene some of the main principles of the Islamic Revolution. For example, some films concentrated on the seedy side of urban life, and challenged the reality of life in a “religious” and “Islamic” state. Much music copies Western traditions and embody inappropriate lyrics, not to mention entirely foreign musical forms. Many works of art and literature dealt with topics unpleasing to the establishment in the state, and did not appear to be based on Islamic principles at all.

What is interesting is how the state responded to what might seem to be a challenge and a threat, especially when we consider the high proportion of the population of Iran that is young and particularly susceptible to these kinds of cultural product. The official reactions to what might called cultural opposition has been varied, but on the whole effective. The religious authorities often seem very distant from the aspirations and interests of the increasingly young population of Iran, yet have managed to characterize this opposition as excessively alien, socially exclusive and without real roots in the local culture. The ways in which this strategy of resisting cultural opposition has been pursued needs to be understood if the climate of ideas in Iran since 1979 is to be assessed. Examples will be taken from a variety of different art forms, ranging from contemporary art, literature, music and fashion. The official reaction will be described, and some analysis will suggest why it has been appropriate and generally successful in upholding a general understanding of what culture ought to be in an Islamic state, notwithstanding the occasional deviation that merely cements the idea of an aesthetic consensus.

Biography
Oliver Leaman is currently teaching at the University of Kentucky, USA. He previously taught in England and the Middle East. He writes mainly in the area of Islamic and Jewish philosophy, and his most recent publications are Islamic Aesthetics: an Introduction (Edinburgh University Press), Islam: the Key Facts, co-written with Kecia Ali, and Jewish Thought: an Introduction., both published by Routledge. He has just finished working on the second edition of Ninian Smart's World Philosophies, which appeared in 2008 and the second edition of his Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy, to be published by Polity in 2009.

2) Narciss M. SOHRABI
An Investigation of the Bases of the Cultural Development of Tehran City during the Recent Two Hundred Years with an Emphasis on the Period after the Islamic Republic

Abstract
‘Culture’ is one of the most often used terms in the social life of human beings and covers a wide conceptual domain. Thus, its structural manifestation in the urban spaces can include a variety of functions and activities in a cultural space framework. Cultural space within the framework of a public space is a sphere where citizens cooperate to have social and cultural exchanges and form a group activity. This space is one of the bases of the civilized society and introduces different individuals and groups to each other in order to make them familiar with the images of both themselves and others. By going through specific thought schools and investigations in the course of time, and influenced by
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Technological developments, these activities and spaces take a new shape. But, is Tehran a cultural city? Can Tehran play a role in the globalization process? How have the cultural spaces of Tehran evolved in the past two hundred years? Has the formation of cultural spaces of Tehran since its emergence as a city up until today been affected by the transition from tradition to modernity? This paper seeks to investigate the change trend of the cultural spaces of Tehran and their status after 1997 revolution. This study is a result of the comprehensive plan of the cultural spaces of Tehran.

**Biography**

Ms Narciss M. Sohrabi is candidate for studying urban planning at the "L’Ecole nationale supérieure d’architecture Paris-Malaquais" in Paris, she has worked as an Adviser to Yazd Mayor and experience of urban planning Yazd province authority for nearly two years. Moreover; she has worked in several consultant positions in urban study and as an editorial board of International Road @ Structure Monthly journal. She has also written several articles about Iran cities texture and effect of culture, social and revolution in historical texture of Tehran. She worked in the master plan of Tehran culture plan and at present, she is working as Head of research in urban study of neighborhoods identity in Tehran.

3) Roya RAD

**Where is the party tonight?**

**Abstract**

GHARBZADEGI and fight against it were at the core of Islamic revolution’s cultural slogans. To combat westernization soon was to be equated with a move away from liberal democracy through religious and Islamic moral values. In fact article 3 of the constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran (formulated during the first year after the Islamic revolution) specifies (State goals 1&2) “…to support good moral value based on faith, and fight all forms of vice and corruption…” From then on executive and judicial bodies have legislated and implemented all sorts of policies and guidelines based on various interpretations of the same morality: what the public at large is to do or not to do. The intensity of these edicts which appease the fundamentalist in upholding “Amre beh maroof va NAhyeh az monker” have varied in accordance with contemporary tensions and agendas.

These moral redlines in cultural activities had shifted occasionally but had never been able to accommodate popular demand. (From a population which is young and in touch with the world, consisting mostly of children of revolution). This gap between demand and censorship, had naturally resulted in a complex web of networks and behaviours which are hidden, exclusive or illegal and yet often at the fringes of or beneficiary of formally sanctioned activities.

At least in the urban context it could be said that the population which had access to a diversity of cultural choices from picnic on Fridays to Shiraz Arts Festival, from Abgooshti cinema to Cabaret Shokoofehno, suddenly had very little choice in entertainment. The urban intellectuals who would be critical of the Shah’s regime through their choice of film, theatre or book (limited and dangerous as it was even then), now have to see their younger generations hide their ordinary desires such as socializing, dancing, choice of dress or leisure activity.

When ever ordinary choices are driven behind closed doors, abuse and over dose become prominent and socially fragile groups such as youth and women stand to suffer most. These precarious circumstances may lead to sparkles of creativity, but in terms of official governmental moral values, the opposite can be observed.
This paper attempts to catalogue the contradictions and confrontations that two young persons (one boy and one girl) encounter within their community and society through the reconstruction of their diaries of social engagements over a few months in and around Tehran.