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The Emerging Non-Violent Character of the Iranian Protest Movement

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Abstract: In assessing the aftermath of the fraudulent presidential election of 2009 in Iran, one question has received less critical analysis than other complexities of this event: What can explain the remarkable non-violent character of the Green Movement in Iran? I propose that the answer, inter alia, lies with the following three learning experiences: 1) The experience of loss brought about by the Iran/Iraq war; 2) the experience of relative opening during Khatami's presidency; and 3) the experience of modernization of faith in the work of the post-Islamist thinkers that aimed to make political Islam compatible with democracy. Together, these learning processes fostered a new mode of thinking that is civil and non-violent in character.

Key words: Democracy, Iranian Politics, Non-violence, Green Movement, Tolerance.

Introduction

The last presidential election in Iran marked the birth of a protest movement—known as the Green movement—that was characterized by a peaceful and civic ethos. Since then a growing literature has reflected upon and analyzed various aspects of the movement. A quick survey of this literature shows that much has been said about the Green Movement's strength, composition, boundary and future (Ansari 2010; Dabashi 2011; Hashemi & Postel 2010), while an account of its non-violent character is yet to be developed. In this paper I intend to fill this gap by proposing that, inter alia, three learning experiences in post-revolutionary Iran could contribute to our understanding of the non-violent character of the Green Movement. In the first section, I show how the experience of loss brought about by the Iran/Iraq war made most people more disinclined to engage in any forms of violence as a means of achieving political goals. In the second section, I argue how this aversion to violence fostered and cultivated a civic attitude during the relative opening of the civil society during Khatami's presidency. In the third section, I contend that the work of the post-Islamist thinkers—aimed at making political Islam compatible with democracy—provided a theoretical underpinning for the experiences of civic and peaceful engagement. Finally, in the last section of the paper I demonstrate how the claims of the first three sections of the paper converge in their elucidation of the non-violent character of the Green Movement.

I. The Iran/Iraq War: Its Human Cost and the Experience of Loss

Shortly after the Iranian Revolution in September of 1980, Saddam Hussein, encouraged and supported by the United States and other western and regional powers, began a costly adventure with a full-scale ground, air and sea assault on Iranian territory. He had calculated that the revolutionary chaos in Iran had given him a golden opportunity to replace Iran as the dominant power in the region, taking full control of the Shatt al-Arab river and annexing the oil-rich province of Khuzestan. Initially, the Iraqi forces managed to make some gains in Iranian territory, but these gains were limited and by 1983 Iran began to regain the lost territories and took the offensive. The war lasted for eight years, until August of 1988, when the United Nations Security Council Resolution 598 to cease hostilities was accepted by both sides.

The war was the longest conventional war of the twentieth century. Surprised by the undeclared attack, Iran resorted to the full mobilization of its population (*Basij*).[1] The Iranians engaged in trench warfare, deploying multiple waves of soldiers, bayonet-charging across barbed wire and minefields, incurring in high casualties. To combat this tactic, Iraqi forces resorted to widespread use of chemical weapons like mustard gas, against both military and civilian Iranian targets (Abrahamian, 2008:, 171-172; Wright 2008: 438; Rajaee 1993; Katouzian 2009: 344). The duration and the intensity of the war dramatically increased the number of casualties, particularly during the last three years of the conflict. According to the Islamic government of Iran, the number of Iranians killed by the end of the war was 160,000. While high estimates put this number as high as 1,000,000 (Hiro, 1989: 1-5), more sober estimates put the number at 300,000-500,000. Moreover, *circa* 100,000 Iranians, both military and civilian, were victims of the Iraqi's chemical weapons (Fassihi 2002; Sciolino 2003, Hughes 2003). The general mood of the country was disconsolate due in large part to the human cost of the war and the lack of civil liberties. To appreciate this atmosphere, consider that after the fall of every Iranian soldier, his picture was printed in different sizes and plastered all over his hometown (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2009). A few years into the war, the walls of every city, large and small, throughout the country were covered with these posters, which served as a continual reeminder of the human cost of the war. The psychological burden of this feeling of loss was augmented by the necessities of taking care of more than 500,000 wounded soldiers during the war (Iran Chamber Society, p.3). Adding

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[1] Basij grew into a vast paramilitary army, which played an important role in the war. After the war, however, its role changed as it came more and more to be used for internal operations against civilians. In 2010 it was incorporated into the Revolutionary Corps and deployed against the Green Movement, showing zeal in repressing the demonstrations.

to this burden, there were more than 80,000 people affected by exposure to chemical gases who became long-term victims of the war. Moreover, the economic loss on both sides was estimated at more than a trillion dollars (Encyclopedia Iranica; Hiro 1989; Askari 2009: 118; Amirahmadi 1990; Mofid 1990). The cost of the war entailed economic hardship and decline in the standard of living during the post-war period (Hakimian & Karshenas 2000, Keddei 2003: 264).[2] Agreeing to the settlement of the UN 598 Resolution, which returned the warring parties to the pre-war border as determined by the 1975 Algiers Accord, the radical and revolutionary aspirations gave way to skepticism and despair. By the end of war, there was a widespread drop in morale; most people seemed to have lost their revolutionary appetite for more violence, hoping for the normalization of the economy, society and relations with Iran's neighbors (Dabashi 2010: 45). During the war, the great loss of life and the need for greater sacrifice had been justified by appealing to nationalist sentiments and the Shiite cult of martyrdom. After the war, however, such appeals lost a great deal of their justificatory and motivational power.

II. The Relative Opening of the Civil Society during Khatami's Presidency

The experience of war radically transformed some of the most influential revolutionary figures of the 1980s. After the war, the former hostage takers, the veterans of the Iran-Iraq war and the founding and early members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps got a chance to get away from their militarized consciousness, go to university, and become journalists, academics, politicians and writers. Old revolutionaries like Mahdi Karroubi, Behzad Nabavi, Saeed Hajjarian and Mohamad Mousavi Kho'ini-ha became liberal-minded reformists who championed the candidacy of a little known figure at that time, Mohammad Khatami, for presidency (Ansari 2000: 94). At that point the only offices that Khatami had held were of director of the National Library and Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance for two years during Rafsanjani's tenure as the President (Dhaeissari & Naser 2006:130; Ansari 2000: 111-140).

While a few months prior to the May election in 1997, reformists had been written off as not having any real chance of winning the election, Khatami's campaign energized the general population, particularly women and the youth, engendering in them a sense of hope (Katouzian 2009: 365; Gheisari & Nasr 2006: 133-136; Sediqi 2005). This was largely due to Khatami's emphasis on the importance of the rights of citizens, especially those of women and minorities,

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[2] Some of the hardship was due to the embargo on Iranian oil and the economic sanctions imposed on Iran by the US and other western powers after the revolution.

freedom of expression in general and cultural freedom in particular, the rule of law and the need to develop the civil society. He proposed a "dialogue of civilizations" instead of the "clash of civilizations."[3] The 2nd of Khordad 1376 in the Iranian calendar—May 23, 1997—was the day of the seventh presidential election, which gave the presidency, by a landslide (more than 70% of the 80% participants), to Khatami. The date marked what came to be known as the "Hemaseh-ye Dovvom-e Khordad" or the "Epic of 23 May," the emergence of the *Reform Movement* in Iran.

Immediately after his election, the policies on which Khatami had campaigned were pursued for implementation (Ansari 2000: 114-116). He appointed Ataollah Mohajerani, a reform-minded intellectual, as Islamic Culture and Guidance Minister. Mohajerani relaxed the constraints on the press, encouraging many reformists to found new newspapers. Thus, in the first year of Khatami's presidency, 226 new publication houses received licenses. Khatami also appointed a woman, Ma'someh Ebtekar, as his vice-president and instructed his ministries to actively promote women's causes. There was a sudden surge in the number of newspapers, journals, NGOs, political parties, social movements and associations in the areas of the environment, women's rights, youth issues, and education. "The number of journals rose from 778 to 1,375" and the number of book titles from 3,800 in 1986 to 23,300 in 2000 (Abrahamian 2008:191; Azimi 2008:385). The number of NGOs grew by several thousand. Khatami himself established two NGOs[4] and financed a dozen more NGOs specializing in women's issues (Keddei 2003: 280). Among the new NGOs, there were "3,000 youth NGOs, 600 environmental NGOs, 500 women's NGOs, 60 NGOs engaged in human rights issues, and many other NGOs working for children and other vulnerable groups" (Namazi 2005). Towards the end of Khatami's first term, there were 95 new political parties, 110 employers' guilds and 120 workers' guilds registered (Bayat 2007: 109). In a move to further democratize political decision-making processes, Khatami enacted article 7 of the Constitution concerning the election of local councils by holding the first ever of such elections in February of 1999. The reform candidates won 90% of 200,000 seats in provincial, municipal and village councils. The move was seen as a step forward in the reformers' strategy of social mobilization and democratization.

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[3] During his tenure in charge of the Hamburg Islamic Institute Kahtami learned German and studied Western philosophy, particularly German philosophy and more specifically Habermasian theories of discourse ethics and communicative action, hence, Khatami's stress on "dialogue," "civil society," "rationality," and "discourse ethics" [akhlagh-e ertebati] as could be seen for example in his interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour in January 1998, which can be found here http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html (retrieved on 18/06/2011)

[4] These are the International Institute for Dialogue among Cultures Civilizations and the Baran Foundation, which was a NGO. They can be found at http://www.dialoguefoundation.org/ and http://www.baran.org.ir/ (retrieved on 02/05/2011).

Gradually, the oppressed civil society began to reemerge with new institutions and organizations engendering an open social and political space, where new ideas such as tolerance, human rights, democracy and the rule of law were publically discussed. Thus, Khatami's main domestic achievements were a relatively open society, a freer press, the emergence of a large number of NGOs, cultural development, more social rights for women and the popularization of the idea of democracy (Katouzian 2009: 374; Keddei 2003: 280).[5]

The impact of these changes was both immediate and lasting. They fostered a new culture of dialogue, programs of rights and a generally more open society. While NGOs normalized the discourse of rights, the reform newspapers changed the whole tenor of public discussion. This change could be observed in the way public discourse improved. The public discourse up to Khatami's time had been centered around such terms as "imperialism," "mostazafeen" (downtrodden), "jahad" (crusade), "shahid" (martyr), "gharbzadegi" (westernization), "enghlab" (revolution) and so on. Now, however, the focus of public discourse began to change, with the institution of such terms as "democracy," "pluralism," "modernity," "jam'eh madani" (civil society), "hoqoq-e bashar" (human rights), "mosharekat-e siyasi" (political participation), "goftego" (dialogue), "shahrvandi" (citizenship) and the like (Abrahamian 2008: 186). As a result, the general attitude began to transform from an illiberal and radical revolutionary mode of thought to a humanist Islam that was more sensitive to rights and democracy. During Khatami's second term (2001-2005), the sixth Parliament, which was dominated by reformist representatives, passed more than a hundred reform bills, including a ban on all forms of torture (Abrahamian 2008: 190).[6]

At around the same time, Iranian cinema thrived with Iranian film makers like Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Bahman Ghobadi Jafar Panahi, and Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, to name just a few, wining critical acclaim at major film festivals around the world. Similarly in music, the largest number of licenses was granted for traditional and pop albums to singers like Benyamin[7] and groups like the Arian band.[8] Thus, alongside the institutional changes that allowed an opening for the creative arts, the mood of the cities began to change: warm colors,

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[5] Khatami also managed to improve Iran's international standing by adopting a "détente policy" that helped Iran emerge from its self-imposed isolation. He was the first Iranian President to make official trips to various countries (Japan, France, Italy, Germany, Cuba Russia and China) and he also invited and received foreign leaders (Ansari 2000: 139).

[6] Most of these bills, of course, were rejected by the hardline conservative Guardian Council, a body that is constitutionally empowered to ensure that laws enacted by the Parliament are in line with Islamic law.

[7] http://www.benyaminmusic.com/ (accessed on 03/06/20110)

[8] http://www.arianmusic.com/ (accessed on 03/06/20110)

particularly in young people's clothing, gradually replaced the grey and black; the posters and murals of the martyrs came increasingly to be posted over by commercial posters. The youth were resisting and rejecting the ethics of continuous mourning and its depressing religious music in favor of a happier spirit and more allegro rhapsodies.[9]

The reformist newspapers, in their running battle with such hardline institutions as the judiciary, gave currency to such terms as "dialogue," "tolerance" and "moderation," condemning the conservative interpretations of Shi'ite jurisprudence and ethics that "promoted sorrow or celebrated violence" (Shahidi 2007: 60-65). A vibrant public forum emerged where the participants got a chance to experience their communicative power and civil rights and to learn about democracy. These changes marked a learning experience that began after the war and took root during Khatami's time, growing into a new attitude and mode of thinking that aspired to open society, political pluralism and human rights. Iranian political theorist, Nader Hashmi,[10] assesses the period in the following way:

Iranian society during the two-term presidency of Muhammad Khatami (1997-2005) was engaged in full-scale internal debate about the relationships between tradition and modernity, democracy and theocracy, civil law and religious law, human rights and religious duties. The key axis of controversy around which this debate unfolded was the normative relationship between religion and government in Iranian society (Hashemi 2009: 91).

This debate characterizes the project of renovation in which some religious intellectuals engaged and I will turn to it in the next section of this paper. To sum up this section, we can say that perhaps the foremost achievement of this period was showing that presenting alternative ideas to the revolutionary and conservatives programs could be done in a non-violent manner.

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[9] Also at this time a parallel underground music scene was flourishing, showcasing the work of Iranian rap artists like Shahin Najafi (http://www.shahin-najafi.com/ accessed on 03/06/20110), and Amir Tataloo (http://www.amir-tataloo.com/#/biography accessed on 03/06/20110) and rock bands like Kiosk (http://www.kiosktheband.com/ accessed on 03/06/20110) and O-Hum (http://www.o-hum.com/about.htm accessed on 03/06/20110).

[10] In his book, *Islam, Liberalism and Liberal Democracy*, he argues that the relation between Islam, secularism and democracy is a complex one that needs to be approached by contextualizing the history of secularism and democracy in the West, which reveals a close tie to religious reformation. To put it in his own words, "…religion is a key and often ignored variable in the long and tortuous struggle for liberal democracy that social scientists ignore at their own analytical peril." (Hashemi 2009: 177)

III. Modernization of Faith: Post-Islamists Work towards Making Islam Compatible with Democracy

In Europe, the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther in the 16th century marked the beginning of the modernization of faith. I would like to argue that the work of 'post-Islamist' thinkers has initiated similar modernization and change in mentality concerning the Islamic tenets that recognizes pluralism of faiths and rejects violence. Iranian sociologist, Asef Bayat, employed the term 'post-Islamist' to refer to Muslim intellectuals, who took on the task of modernizing Islam, particularly with respect to ideals of human rights and democracy from the late 1980s onward (Bayat 2007: 84-90; Ansari 2000: 73-81; Gheisari & Nasr 2006: 116-118). The context within which the post-Islamist theorists began to emerge was after the end of war and the death of Khomeini, when the postwar reconstruction provided space for reflection on the feasibility of the initial radical ideals of the revolution—like exporting the Islamic revolution. While the orthodox revolutionaries (Islamists) held on to a socially conservative, politically undemocratic, militarized mode of thinking, post-Islamists adopted modernity, embracing its ideals of rationality, freedom, human rights, and scientific knowledge. This Islamic *aggiornamento*[11] aimed to modernize Islam by rejecting any monopolistic claims to Islam. Clergy like Mohsen Kadivar (1999, 2007, 2009, 2010), Mojtahed Shabastri (2000), Ahmad Ghabel (2009), Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari (2006, 2000) and religious intellectuals like Mostafa Malkian (2009), Saeed Hajarian (1997, 1999), Hossein Bashiriyeh (2006, 2001), and Abdolkarim Soroush (2000), just to name a few, began articulating the canons of a progressive and tolerant Islam that was compatible with principles of human rights and democracy (Dallmayer 2011: 444-45).[12] For example, by drawing on the work of such philosophers as Quine and Lakatos, Soroush developed a religious epistemology—the theory of contraction and expansion of religious knowledge—that separated religion from religious knowledge, allowing for multiple interpretations, thereby justifying religious and political pluralism (Soroush 2000: 18, 30-34). "The acknowledgement of such varieties of understanding and interpretation will, in turn, introduce flexibility and tolerance to the

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[11] This is a reference to the Vatican *aggiornament.* During the Second Vatican Council in 1960, the Catholic Church modernized itself by accepting the discourse of universal human rights, including freedom of religion and conscience.

[12] See the special issue of the *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* (Vol. 15, No. 2, Winter 2001) on the condition and prospects of political and religious intellectuals in post-revolutionary Iran, where the evolution of the thought of Soroush, Kadivar, Mjtahd Shabstri and Yousefi Eshkevari is discussed; also see Farzin Vahdat's "Post-revolutionary Discourse of Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari and Mohsen Kadivar: Reconciling the Terms of Mediated Subjectivity" Parts I and II in *Critique* (No. 16, Spring 2000, pp. 31-54 and No. 17, Fall 2000, pp. 135-157); and Farhad Khosrokhavar, "The New Intellectuals in Iran," *Social Compass June 2004 51: 191-202*.

relationship of the ruling and the ruled, confirm rights for the subjects, and introduce restraints on the behavior of the rulers. As a result, the society will become more democratic, humane, reasonable, and fair." (Soroush 2000: 133)

The work of the post-Islamists was also characterized by an opposition to the absolute supremacy of the religious jurist or *vali-e faqih* (Bayat 2007: 90, 95; Khosrokhavar 2004: 194; Sadri 2001: 265). One of the main venues[13] for the post-Islamist debate was the monthly journal *Kiyan*, which obtained its license in 1991 during Khatami's short tenure as the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance.[14] In addition to its publication, in its Tehran office, *Kiyan* held lectures, workshops, seminars and discussions that were popular with students, laypersons and intellectuals alike. In its reading groups, along with the work of Muslim writers such as Mohammad Iqbal and Ali Shari'ati, the work of Renaissance and modern writers, like Weber and Hegel, were read and discussed. The thinkers who were active in this circle not only evolved to reject the notion of sacredness and totalitarianism in politics and to accept the challenge of religious pluralism and the rule of law in the Iranian context, but they also disseminated these insights, enabling their readership to change the quality of debate in the public sphere (Mirsepassi 2010: 132-145). In the early 1990s, a docile public sphere became energized by the questions and challenges that post-Islamists were putting to the advocates of revolutionary and traditionalist Islam. The public was given access to a productive debate on the relationship between religion and modernity resulting in an opening up of their religiosity (Ibid.: 139).

In this sense, the work done by post-Islamist thinkers had a significant impact because it broke the hegemony of the fundamentalist Islamist theory. According to the post-Islamist *aggiornamento,* religion should relinquish its hold on power for the sake of democracy. Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, a liberal-minded Islamist declares, "I defend the theory of 'Islamic democratic government,'" because, he argues, "without following a democratic system, Islamic government is neither possible nor desirable" (Eshkevari 2006: pp75-77). Along similar lines Soroush declares that "it is the religious understanding that will have to adjust itself to democracy not the other way around; justice as a value, cannot be religious." (Soroush 2000: 131) Or more radically, Mojtahed Shabestari argues that "The necessity of democratic government cannot be derived from the meaning of faith or the religious texts." (Shabestari 1997: 67) Still, Mohsen

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[13] Another one was the President's Center for Strategic Studies created by Sa'id Hajjariyan during Mr. Rafsanjani's last tenure as the president in 1989-1995, when the idea of "political development" was formulated and pursued.
[14] Yousefi Eshkevari traces back the source of the post-Islamist thoughts to Kayhan Publishing Institute in early 1990s and the writers who gathered around two of its publications, *Kayhan Farhangi* and *Zan-e Ruz* (Eshkevari 2006:26-27).

Kadivar goes so far as to declare, "My ideal model of political system is a democratic secular government" (Kadivar 2011).

In addition to post-Islamist arguments for the compatibility of Islam and democracy, some of the most influential political philosophers of our time, including John Rawls, Amartya Sen and Jürgen Habermas, have confirmed the Islamic *aggiornamento*. John Rawls draws on the work of Abdullahi Ahmad An-na'im[15] to make the point that the main principles of liberal democracy can find support from inside comprehensive worldviews like Islam (Rawls 1997: 782). In the same spirit Amartya Sen argues that there is no reason why the Islamic Culture in the Middle East cannot be hospitable to democracy. In *The Idea of Justice* he writes, "The Illusion of an inescapably non-democratic destiny of the Middle East is both confused and very seriously misleading—perniciously so—as a way of thinking about either world politics or global justice today" (Sen 2009: 335). For his part Habermas has been a mentor to many post-Islamist thinkers—Shabestri, Kadivar, and Ganji among others—supporting their efforts to articulate a reading of Islam that is receptive to democracy and human rights (Paya & Amin Ghaneirad 2007).[16]

It is through the work of post-Islamist thinkers that democracy becomes a legitimate ideal for an Islamic state to pursue. Thus, post-Islamists provide a viable alternative to the traditionalist reading of Islam, which is inhospitable to democracy and human rights. In doing so, they have severely criticized the totalitarian tendencies of the Islamic regime in Iran, making the case for a more humanist Islam in line with modern ideals of an open society and freedom. As Nader Hashmi writes,

By situating their moral arguments with one foot in tradition and the other in modernity, they act as a critical bridge in the transition from authoritarianism to liberal democracy. This is particularly true when it comes to introducing new philosophical and theological innovations in societies with nonexistent or weak liberal-democratic tradition (Hashmei 2009:101).

By contrast, the hardliners in power are still engaged in a "pre-modern mode of thought" (Habermas 2002, 132–133, 151) characterized by dogmatism and the use of violence. According to Habermas, this quality is what characterizes fundamentalist or unreasonable religion and

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[15] See his *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse University Press, 1996).

[16] Habermas made a trip to Iran in 2002 on the invitation of Khatami's Minister of Culture, Ataollah Mohajerani. He met and talked with most reformist thinkers and since then has remained in contact with some of them. See here for his interview with *Franfurter Allgemine Zeitung* after his return, http://www.pubtheo.com/page.asp?pid=1073 (Retrieved on 05/08/2011).

distinguishes it from reasonable religion that has comes to terms with religious pluralism, the authority of scientific knowledge and refraining from violence (Habermas 2003: 104). This means that one camp has crossed over the threshold into democratic politics while the other camp is lagging behind. The difference illuminates the change in the religious consciousness of Iranian Islam from the traditional to a more reflective mode of thought (Payrow Shabani 2010: 143; Payrow Shabani 2011:342).

IV. The Green Movement and Non-violence

In the context of post-war Iran three groups of political actors were particularly affected by the above mentioned learning experiences, giving the Green Movement its peaceful character:

a) By the end of the war, the composition of the Iranian population began to change with the majority of the people being under thirty. By the year 2000, the youth made up two-thirds of the population. Among the youth one million were university students during the 1990s in Iran. Over the next two decades, this number increased almost fourfold to 3,800,000.[17] The student population was a faction of the reform movement that backed Khatami. The Iranian youth consist mostly of an urban, well-educated and technologically savvy,[18] a population that favors democratization and has a propensity for such modern ideals as individual freedom and a peaceful and open society.

b) During the same period an increasing number of women were attending university—more than 63 % in recent years (Bashi 2010: 37; Abrahamian 2008: 189; Dabashi 2011: 106). They were progressively exhibiting greater social and political awareness, focusing their activities on greater civil rights and protesting regressive family law. This struggle was crystalized in the Campaign for One Million Signatures to the Repeal of Discriminatory Laws, which began in 2006 and quickly gained momentum and gained international recognition. From the very start—the June 12th rally that initiated the Campaign—the Iranian regime began brutally suppressing the Campaign, harassing, beating, and imprisoning women activists, charging them with

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[17] According to Sa'aid Ghadimi of the ministry of Sciences, Iran currently has 3, 800,000 university students. Reported on BBC Farsi, Friday, 29/04/2011:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/rolling_news/2011/04/110429_l03_iran_university_students.shtml
[18] According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Post, Telegraph and Telecommunication, Iran has 25 million registered internet users and *circa* 50 million people have mobile phones (ILNA, 15 December, 2009).

"propaganda against the regime." [19] The regime expanded its crackdown by prosecuting the lawyers of the activists in order to dissuade others from joining the Campaign, but it enjoyed such a broad appeal that it managed to attract people from a wide range of sentiments, from Marxist and leftist activists to Muslim feminists and liberal nationalists. Another example of women's social and political awareness and their activism happened two months before the presidential election in April 2009, when forty-two women's groups and several hundred individual women activists from various backgrounds formed the Women's Convergence Coalition. Their goal was to bring to the forefront of the election debates the issue of gender discrimination. They approached all the candidates and put two questions to them: would the candidate ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women? And second, would the candidate revise articles 19, 20, 21, 115 of the constitution that institutionalize gender discrimination? Women's struggle for equality thus became a central issue during the presidential campaign.

c) The third group consisted of the members of the Jonbesh Eslahat or Reform Movement—gathered around such political parties as Jebhyeh Moshrekat Islami or Islamic Participation Front and Sazeman Mojahedin Enghlab Islami or the Organization of Mojahidin of the Islamic Revolution—who constituted the popular base of Khatami's Reform Movement. With the suppression of the reform agenda, political apathy grew among the members of this group, but with the subsequent election of Ahmadinejad the reformers relearned the lesson that the communicative power of the people must be supplemented with political power if it is to be able to institutionalize and enact laws that engender change.

For the purpose of illuminating the peaceful character of the Green Movement, two other important features of this political context should be noted: (1) an *urbanization trend*: This trend had started in 1962 with the Shah's White Revolution, accelerated after the war to the point that by the time of Khatami's presidency 70 percent of Iran's population was urban (Mirsepassi 2010: 109; Bayat 2010: 45). (2) *Literacy rate*: also, at this time, 97 percent of people between six and twenty nine years of age were literate (Abrahamian 2008: 189).

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[19] See http://we-change.org/english/ retrieved on June 29, 2011.

IV. Conclusion

The developmental experiences that have been discussed in the first three sections of this paper impacted the aforementioned groups—youth, women and reformists—among the population at large. It was within this constellation that the Green Movement emerged in 2009. Kadivar describes the main characteristics of the Green Movement as follows:

First of all, this movement is peaceful and against violence. Second, it is democratic and wants to uphold human rights. … Third, it is independent and not planned by a foreign government. … Fourth, this movement is not after a revolution. … Fifth, the leaders of the movement and its supporters have chosen green as its color. …Sixth, this movement is absolutely against using religion as a tool. … Seventh, it is an ethical movement. (Kadivar 2010:113)

The regime's response to the Movement's legitimate demands for civil rights, however, has been most violent. In fact, in one of the prisons called Kahrizak, the extent of brutalities was such that the Supreme Leader, Khamenei, had to order its closure. Indeed, Kahrizak became the catalyst for the regime's deepening legitimacy crisis since no one, not even its supporters, could defend raping young men and women protesters in this prison.[20] Yet, in the face of this overt violence the Greens remained non-violent. The contrast between the regime's violence and the Green Movement's peaceful ethos helped score a moral victory for the latter.

Now, to be clear about the convergent causes I see leading to this peaceful mode of dissent, consider that among those Iranians who were looking for a change, nobody advocated another bloody revolution. This was largely due to the experiences of the 1979 revolution and the war with Iraq that had exhausted the endurance of most Iranians for violence and blood. The concrete lesson they drew from the past bloody experiences was that no political cause could justify violence and drawing of blood. In Mir-Hossein Mousavi's—one of the Movement's leaders— words, "Non-violent resistance is an uncompromising value of this movement" (Mousavi 2010). In my view, this lesson was the foremost achievement of the Iranian opposition. What buttressed the insight of this lesson was the opportunity provided by the opening during Khatami's two

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[20] The regime's violence against demonstrators and activists was savage. The protesters were arrested in large numbers, beaten, imprisoned, tortured, raped and killed. The violence did not stop there but was expanded to include the families of victims, their lawyers and their entire support network as a way of exerting pressure on them all, first, not to protest and reveal the violence, and secondly, to repent and write confessions and give TV interviews. These are not wild allegations made by opposition or foreign journalists but documented and testified to by some of the regime's own children, like Mehdi Karroubi, former speaker of the House of Representatives, as evidenced in his letter to former president Ali Akber Hashemi Rafsanjani released on 8 August 2009: www.etemademelli.ir/published/0/00/65/6571 (accessed on 8 August 2009), a translation of this letter can be found at http://www.enduringamerica.com/august-2009/2009/8/10/iran-the-karroubi-letter-to-rafsanjani-on-abuse-of-detainees.html (accessed on 3 June 2011).

terms in a newly formed public sphere to learn peaceful political civil action.[21] And what energized the public sphere was the active participation of the public intellectuals, religious and secular thinkers alike, who engaged in and fostered a culture of dialogue that valued communicative rationality. The public sphere in turn offered a real social space for active citizens to practice democracy as a peaceful alternative to fundamentalist modes of political action.[22]

Today, more than two years after the stolen election, the non-violent character of the Green Movement remains one of its defining features. Already in 2009, Mir-Hossein Mousavi—one of the two reformist candidates who are currently under house arrest—decleared, "The non-violent character of our movement makes our victory such that it does not require anyone's defeat."(Mousavi 2009) Ramin Jahanbegloo—a social theorist, who was imprisoned and forced to give a TV confession—has looked to India and Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance to draw relevant lessons for Iran (Jahanbegloo 2007; 2009).[23] Akbar Ganji— essayist and political activist—has written about the need for articulating the tenets of national reconciliation along the lines of abolishing capital punishment, establishing truth commissions and adopting a policy of forgiveness (Ganji 2000, 2009).

After the first energetic phase of demonstrations by the Green Movement in 2009, and partly as a consequence of the regime's heavy-handed response, the movement, now, has settled into a slow but strong mode of resistance that externally finds new ways of protest while it internally engages its various members in the practice of dialogue, tolerance and democracy, with the aim of being more inclusive and the hope of putting an end to the cycle of violence in the long history of Iranian politics. This dialectic has introduced certain nuances into the discourse of non-violence, which warns that non-violence should not become an absolute value (Bayat 2011) where the difference between legitimate and illegitimate violence is blurred (Naraghi 2011), or citizens are robbed of the right to self-defense (Orfani 2011).

I hope to have shown that the aversion to violence resulting from a bloody revolution and the war with Iraq, coupled with the opportunity to exercise democracy provided by Khatami's two terms, and the realization that Islam need not be incompatible with the rule of law and human rights—thanks to the works of post-Islamists—have provided learning experiences that

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[21] To put it in his words, "the modernization of religious culture was the aim of the reform movement" (Mohammad Khatami, "Nameh-I bara-ye Farda," www.president.ir (May 2004))

[22] It is true that after Khatami's last term and the coming to power of Ahmadinejad the public sphere was suppressed by closing the newspapers, disbanding political parties, and imprisoning journalists and civil right activists, but the short time during Khatami's two terms was sufficient as a learning experience of a freer, more open society.

[23] More recently he has been exploring indigenous sources of peaceful ethos in the Iranian culture and history.

transformed some Iranians' mode of thinking and acting. This developmental growth was then marked by a move away from a dogmatic religious thinking and toward a more tolerant mode of consciousness crystalized in the Green Hope Movement. As such, the Green Movement represents a significant evolutionary step in the history of Iranian politics.

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