

The production and the reclaiming of the common space of politics in Iran: from the Islamic revolution to the Green movement

The 1979 Iranian Revolution due to its non-classical form, its entanglement with Islam and the actual fate of the Islamic Republic has been subjected to many misinterpretations and mystifications.

This paper attempts to interpret '79, despite its adjective 'Islamic', as an emancipatory event which succeeded in the production of the 'common' space of politics in Iran's history (hence, its subject being called 'the people'). Beyond mere theoretical contentions, the last thirty years have functioned as an open historical process of interpretation by and for this people. This process has been intensified since the protests at the results of the presidential election in June 2009. This recent mobilization, known as the Green Movement, appears as an attempt to extract the potentialities of '79 which were perverted and obscured by the brutal battle of hegemony and its following process of nation-state building. 'The people', previously appropriated as the orchestrated agents of the state, has re-emerged through self-differentiation and self-organization and is reclaiming this common space. Religion has also been reclaimed from its theocratization and monopolization in the hands of the state, as an open matrix of Iranian culture with political significance.

A minimal understanding of the nature of these events requires an analysis of the historical matrix out of which they have arisen.

First, all major political movements in Iran, since the 1906 Constitutional Revolution have succeeded through a coalition of seemingly contradictory forces – religious, socialist and nationalist – with a variety of demands – anti-colonialism, anti-authoritarianism, anti-forced-modernization or pro-modernism. These factors constitute the transcendental space of radical politics in Iran – prior to '79 mainly occupied by political elites and vanguards.

Second, the messianic and juridical aspects of Shi'ite theology have to be differentiated. The former ideally allows a radical political space in dialectical relation to the state without exhaustion by it. The latter, has partially been incorporated into the process of state building since the sixteenth century. Notwithstanding all the reactionary elements of the latter, the difference between these aspects has so far provided enough gaps to be occupied by different projects of radical politics.

Finally, a short history of the development of capital in Iran will indicate that the state still directly and indirectly owns two thirds of the economy, as it did before '79. The state is heavily dependent on oil revenues which permits it to mediate the relations of capital and formation of classes. Seemingly liberal efforts as in the Green Movement to limit the so-called statist rule over the economy, or the priority of popular politics over class-based struggle as in '79, actually open a space for deterring that unbridled capitalism that tends to totalize every social and economic sphere. This political priority, however, is not ontological *a la* eventual miracles and is the product of a history in which economy, colonial interventions, religion and social stratifications have been intermingled.