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What exactly happened in Iran in June 2009? Why, when Ahmadinejad's election in 2005 failed to spark any protests, did the Iranian people take to the streets after his re-election four years later? What are the precise characteristics of the protest movement that emerged following the disputed 12 June 2009 election? Who were the young people who chanted, "Where is my vote Moussavi?", dressed in green in reference to Mir Hossein Moussavi, the defeated candidate who advocated a rational, tolerant and democratic form of Islam, open to the world? Elections have always been rigged in Iran, so why did the June 2009 results spark such a profound institutional crisis, taking the political arena into the street? The demonstrations between 13 and 18 June 2009[1] attracted between 2 and 3 million Iranians in Teheran and the country's main cities,[2] making them an unprecedented phenomenon in the Islamic Republic's 30-year history: does this hold out the promise of the emergence the rule of law, incompatible with the dominant religious oligarchy? What is the socioeconomic profile of the youth movement that defied the ultra-conservatism reinforced by Ahmadinejad's populism and nationalism? Do the June 2009 protests signal the end of the sacred aura enshrining Islamic power?

1. The demonstrations actually spanned two weeks: between 13 and 18 June, the regime more or less tolerated the protests; between 20 and 26 June, however, following the Supreme Leader's 19 June address, protestors were severely sanctioned by the government.

2. It is very difficult to obtain a reliable estimate of the number of demonstrators in regimes under which the media are not free. Our estimates are based on reports published in three French dailies (*Libération*, *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*) and one weekly, *Courrier International*. These four titles spoke of big demonstrations, particularly on Monday 15 June, when the protests peaked. The front page of *Libération* on 16 June 2009 was headlined "Le jour où Téhéran s'est mis en marche" (The day Teheran took to the streets). On page 2, reporter Hélène Despic-Popovic cites police figures putting the number of protestors are "more than a million". In *Le Figaro* on 16 June, Georges Malbrunot says that "thousands of opponents stood up to Ahmadinejad"; on page 8, the paper mentions "hundreds of thousands of people". A front-page article in *Le Monde* dated 17 June 2009, with no by-line, talks of "massive protests against Ahmadinejad in Teheran". On page 8, the story continues: "How many protestors were present? Six hundred thousand? A million? More? It was impossible to count the insurgent crowd...". Issue number 973 of *Courrier International*, dated 25 June to 1 July 2009, carries a translated version of an article by Ebrahim Raha, initially published in Iranian daily *Kalemeh*, "Silence le jour, Allah Akbar la nuit" (Silence by day, Takbir by night), citing, on page 15, the number of "three and a half million" demonstrators. On the basis of police figures of one million, which are probably underestimated, and factoring in the major provincial centres, we can settle on between one and a half and two million protestors.

Should we fear a confrontation with religious institutions claming divine right?

Our first aim will be to answer these questions, first by putting the issues at stake in the 12 June 2009 election back into context, then by positioning the incumbent regime in relation to change in Iranian society, particularly with respect to the country's youth, which carries the seeds of a democratic Iran. We will close by outlining the structural obstacles that are hindering Iran's youth in this respect.

I – THE ISSUES IN THE 12 JUNE 2009 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

In Iran, candidates' electoral initiatives are dependent first of all on the Guardian Council of the Constitution, a fundamental institution placed under the authority of the Supreme Leader.[3] Between 5 and 9 May 2009, candidates registered with the Interior Ministry. A few days later, after examining the various candidatures, Guardian Council published its final list. Of the 475 candidates – including 42 women – the Guardian Council approved only four on 20 May 2009:

– Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, 52, incumbent President, supported by the Supreme Leader and the ultra-conservative faction, a civil engineer from a modest family;

– Mir Hossein Moussavi, 67, a pro-reform challenger, Prime Minister between 1981 and 1988;[4]

– Mehdi Karroubi, 72, Speaker of Parliament on two occasions, most recently from 2000 to 2005, the most liberal candidate and the only cleric of the four;

– Mohsen Rezaee, 54, a pragmatic conservative and the historic leader of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution when that institution was exported to the Arab-Muslim world, between 1981 and 1987.[5]

Officially launched on 25 May 2009, the relatively free campaign began calmly (part of the population took part, debates were televised live, candidates' wives graced the stage with them), but only included four candidates – all of them hailing from Islamic ranks and supporting the Islamic Republic. Candidates from opposition or non-Islamic parties were not allowed to stand, so while the four candidates who were allowed to conduct a campaign each brought their own personality, history and interests to the campaign, the fact that they all were all Islamic candidates effectively precluded any exchange with other schools of thought.

Despite this lack of electoral pluralism, the campaign opposed two points of view. On the one hand, the fundamentalist President proposed a conservative view, with populist and nationalistic and nationalistic overtones, determined not to let anything slip by, defending the use of all available means to maintain this view of the world, including repression and the toughening of the regime. On the other hand, the coalition of liberals and moderate conservatives, backed by a middle class exasperated by the incumbent's economic policies, called for differing degrees of change in political behaviour, a certain modernisation of the country's institutions and, most important, caps on the Supreme Leader's immense power, greater openness on the world and a search for new allies internationally.

3. The Guardian Council, the equivalent of France's Constitutional Council, comprises 12 members appointed for six-year terms: six religious members designated by the Supreme Leader and six lawyers elected by Parliament on the proposal of the judicial power; its head is appointed by the Supreme Leader. Apart from approving candidatures for elections to Parliament, the Presidency and the Assembly of Experts, the Council's main role is to review laws so as to ensure that they are consistent with Islam and the Constitution. It is also responsible for running elections, and as such plays an important role in the country's political life. In fact, it consistently backs the Supreme Leader, whose political initiatives it approves. M.-R. Djalili, *Géopolitique de l'Iran* (Geopolitics of Iran), Paris, Éditions Complexe, 2005, p. 83-86. See also Y. Richard, *L'Iran. Naissance d'une république islamique* (Iran: birth of an Islamic Republic), Paris, Éditions de La Martinière, 2006, p. 320-336.

4. B. Daraghahi, R. Mostaghim and K. Murphy, "Qui est vraiment Moussavi ?" (Who is Moussavi really?), *Courrier International*, n° 973, 25 June-1 July 2009, p. 16 [initially printed by the *Los Angeles Times* under the headline "Mir-Hossein Mousavi's unusual career arc"].

5. Mohsen Rezaee is one of seven men wanted by Interpol in its investigation into the bombing of a Jewish cultural centre in Buenos Aires in 1994, which killed 85 people. See D. Minoui, *Le Figaro*, 12 June 2009, "Mohsen Rezaee, the *Pasdaran*-come-pragmatic, Medi Karroubi, the only cleric in the running, Mir Hossein Moussavi, the pro-reform challenger, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the populist president", p. 6. For the biographies of the four candidates, see also J.-P. Perrin, "Les candidatures homologues" (The approved candidates), *Libération*, 10 June 2009, p. 10.

In this unprecedented climate of openness and debate, political observers expected a run-off to be necessary. Thus, the aftermath of the 12 June poll is attributable to the discontent of the large numbers of young people who actively participated in the election and who were pinning such high hopes on its outcome.

Two hours after the polls closed on 12 June, 10 million votes had been counted, and 63% of them had been attributed to the incumbent. The following day, the Interior Ministry accordingly issued a statement announcing the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, re-elected for four years with Soviet-like support.

The official results credited Mahmoud Ahmadinejad 62.63% of the vote, vs 33.75% for Mir Hossein Moussavi, his main rival, with turnout of 85%.[6]

Quickly grasping the situation, Mir Hossein Moussavi called a press conference late on 12 June, during which he denounced massive fraud, citing the lack of voting slips in major cities including Shiraz, Isfahan and Teheran, the early closure of a number of polling stations, despite announcements to the effect that they would in fact close later, and the impossibility for his representatives to attend the count, contrary to a government pledge. On these grounds, he declared himself the winner of the poll. The following day, he immediately contested the official estimates and opposed their proclamation.

What really happened? According to Interior Ministry sources close to Moussavi, "the electoral commission initially told him […] he had won, on the evening of the vote on Friday, while at the same time asking him to wait before announcing the result."[7] It must be borne in mind that rumour can take on huge importance in the absence of international observers to supervise the smooth running of elections, and that people are quick to credit what they hear. Thus, leaks from the Interior Ministry suggested that "the candidates' real scores were radically different from those announced officially: pro-reform candidate Mir Hussein Moussavi was said to have taken the lead with 19 million votes (out of 42 million votes cast), ahead of the second reformist candidate, Mehdi Karroubi, who took 13 million votes, Ahmadinejad coming third with 5.7 million votes. On that basis, the ultra-conservative candidate would have failed to win a place in the run-off poll".[8]

How much credit should we give to these scores? It is hard to verify results like this in undemocratic regimes.[9] Whatever the truth of the matter, despite the controversy and the uncertainties involved, large swathes of public opinion subscribed to the view that the election had been rigged. Numerous Iranians believed that the fraud had the support of the highest echelons of the state, which did not even comply with elementary verification procedures (ten days during which to file complaints). The disappointment was compounded by the fact that the supporters of the regime (especially the Supreme Leader and the upper ranks of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards) told the population to accept the verdict.[10]

Big demonstrations were held over the following days, and were covered closely by the Western media, who supported the protestors' cause. The official results were confirmed after an investigation conducted by the religious power in the wake of opposition demands. The popular slogan, "Where is my vote Moussavi?" ignited all sorts of social and political discontent, backing

6. For the electoral results, see S. Ghadiri, "Téhéran vert de rage et de dépit" (Teheran, green with anger and vexation), *Libération*, 15 June 2009, p. 2 and 4; D. Minoui, "Fraudes, intimidations : la nuit où la victoire a changé de camp" (Fraud, intimidation: the night when victory changed sides), *Le Figaro*, 16 June 2009, p. 8; A. Rotivel, "En Iran, les partisans de Moussavi crient à la fraude" (In Iran, the partisans of Moussavi denounce fraud), *La Croix*, 15 June 2009, p. 4-5; M.-C. Decamps, "Iran : la troisième révolution ?" (Iran: a third revolution?), *Le Monde*, 16 June 2009, p. 6.

7. D. Minoui, "Fraudes, intimidations : la nuit où la victoire a changé de camp" (Fraud, intimidation: the night when victory changed sides), *Le Figaro*, 16 June 2009, p. 8.

8. J.-P. Perrin, "Les dessous d'une élection fabriquée" (The hidden truth of a rigged election), *Libération*, 16 June 2009, p. 4.

9. M. Ladier-Fouladi, a socio-demographer, compared the official results of the 2005 and 2009 presidential polls, and noted signs of the fraud committed by the incumbent regime to get Mahmoud Ahmadinejad re-elected at all costs. See www.laviedesidees.fr/Iran-le-dessous-des-cartes.html, accessed on 6 July 2009.

10. F. Khosrokhavar, "Turbulences en Iran" (Turbulence in Iran), *nouvelobs.com*, 8 July 2009. Available at: http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/speciales/special_iran/20090708.OBS3563/turbulences_en_iran_par_fahrad_khrosrokhavar.html, consulted on 10 July 2009.

up the belief that fraud had been committed on a massive scale.

II – THREE REASONS WHY FRAUD WAS ASSUMED

Why did people assume fraud had been committed? There are three possible reasons: the dysfunction of the electoral system; the decline in the regime's legitimacy; and international issues.

It is possible to incriminate the electoral mechanism: elections in Iran all suffer from the country's traditional and archaic system, which has proved unable to stop fraud from becoming virtually systematic. The main failings of the Islamic Republic's current electoral system are the absence of voting booths, the non-existence of electoral registers and voters' cards, and the absence of lists of candidates,[11] which facilitates the manipulation of illiterate voters.[12] In addition, as strange as it would seem, the Interior Ministry has set up a system of mobile ballot boxes (14,000 for the June 2009 vote, compared with 4,000 previously). No candidate representatives accompany these ballot boxes, meaning that no one can vouch that they are used correctly.[13]

The second reason explaining the widespread belief in fraud can be found in the regime's loss of legitimacy, which first became apparent in the December 2005 elections: municipal elections and, more important, elections to the Assembly of Experts, one of the Islamic Republic's leading institutions. These two ballots were very unfavourable to the partisans of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to the point where he found himself on the defensive against Hashemi Rafsanjani, President de Assembly of Experts and an open adversary of the sitting President.[14] The prevailing political environment has revived cultural differences within the ranks, bringing to the fore a type of political cleavage. This cleavage gave rise to the political fracture expressed by Ahmadinejad's victory. Turnout was very low (59.76%) in the previous presidential election in 2005,[15] particularly among young people and women, whose defection actually allowed Ahmadinejad's election. In 2009, however, these voter categories voted massively in support of Moussavi or Karroubi; 70% of votes came from constituencies in which Ahmadinejad lacks a strong electoral base, even though working class voters in urban and rural areas voted for him. The current President's economic management boils down to distributing part of the country's oil wealth and giving money to the poorest parts of the community and increasing pensions, and is highly criticised on the ground that it completely neglects the urban middle class. Consequently, it is unlikely that he won 63% of the vote. Sociologically speaking, it is hard to find any arguments for support to this extent. Moreover, according to Interior Ministry data, Moussavi and Karroubi both lost in their home regions – Iranian Azerbaijan and Lorestan Province respectively – which is fairly unlikely in a country where local ethnic solidarity often takes precedence over national issues.[16] This socio-ethnic factor casts doubt on the score attributed to the incumbent President, as did the toughening of Ahmadinejad's bellicose language, which Iranians do not like very much, on the international stage.

11. In the democratic regimes I know, specifically France, lists of candidates are sent to voters personally prior to polling day. When they vote, voters go into a voting booth to put the name of their preferred candidate into an envelope, and they cannot be influenced at this decisive moment. In Iran, voters do not receive any documents (lists, voting slips or the names of the candidates) prior to the vote, and are therefore pounced on by advice-givers, who in reality seek to impose their views, when they arrive at the polling station. Illiterate voters are particularly targeted.

12. I served as an assessor on four occasions in France between 2006 and 2009 in the town in which I reside, and I saw that the French electoral system complies rigorously with each of these elements and has developed a system that makes fraud very hard to carry out.

13. Due to the lack of reliable sources in French, I was forced to fall back on sources in Persian. Address by Mir Hossein Moussavi at a meeting with academics on 24 June 2009, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/07/090708_op_ir88_mousavi_3tir.shtml, consulted on 7 July 2009.

14. The Assembly of Experts, comprising 86 clerics, whose deliberations are kept secret (attendance is generally low), is supposed to elect the Supreme Leader. But up until now, things went differently: following the revolution, Khomeini imposed himself as Supreme Leader and designated his successor, Ayatollah Montazeri. But shortly before his death, on 3 June 1989, he instead chose Ali Khamenei, who was at that time President of the Republic. The Assembly of Experts approved his appointment, and Khamenei now been Supreme Leader for some 20 years. In fact, the Supreme Leader, appointed for life, is virtually untouchable. M.-R. Djalili, *Géopolitique de l'Iran*, *op. cit.* p. 83-86.

15. See M. Ladier-Fouladi, *op.cit*.

16. Moussavi is from Iranian Azerabaijan and Karroubi from Lorestan Province. The two thereby belong to two ethnic groups hailing from two distinct regions.

This language is the third argument underlying the assumption of fraud, as it brings to light a domestic political strategy behind the manipulation of the vote. Assuming he made it into the run-off, a victory by Ahmadinejad, even a modest one, would have allowed the regime to rise to the challenge of re-establishing relations with Washington, but the precipitous announcement of Ahmadinejad's "victory" after the first round and the Supreme Leader's congratulations showed just how much the regime needed electoral legitimacy to bolster its position in its confrontation with the West. This hypothesis stems from the fact that the regime has been a leading defender of the cause of the Palestinians against Israel, and the fact that it assumed it would be shoring up its position by announcing a clear victory in the first round, both domestically and internationally.[17]

Consequently, assumptions of electoral trickery are based both on the nature of the electoral system and the regime's lack of sociological legitimacy, the combination having ignited a political protest movement the likes of which had not been seen since the July 1999 student riots.

The domestic protest movement within Iran was echoed by Iranian citizens throughout the world. For the first time, the Iranian diaspora in Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia organised protests in major cities in solidarity with the protest movement at home, demonstrating the existence of a veritable international collective conscience in harmony with the Iranian people. Lastly, it should be noted that the core of these demonstrations was made up of young people, and not just exiled members of the opposition.[18]

To get a better grasp of the issues behind these protests, we will offer two parallel analyses, inspired by empirical research and historical sources concerning the state and society. The current crisis in Iran comes at the crossing of two series of overlapping elements: on the one hand, a social movement with its own logic; on the other hand, dissensions between the two groups in power. We will look at these two realities separately.

III – THE THREE PHASES OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

Without going into too much detail about the complex political system as it stands, we would simply note that, with the exception of the short proto-democratic period known as the "Spring of the 1979 revolution", Iran has never known a democratic regime.[19] However, it is possible to distinguish three important phases during which the regime's driving forces underwent profound change. During these periods, the services and prerogatives of the (elected) President and those of the Supreme Leader (designated by a group of clerics, themselves selected on the basis of arbitrary criteria in a complex procedure that leaves little choice to the people[20]) have often clashed.

The first phase began in June 1981, with the massive repression, in conjunction with the standoff between the Republic's first reformist President, Bani Sadr, exiled in Paris, and Khomeini. This phase, which lasted until Khomeini's death in 1989, was marked by the existence of a theocratic regime with totalitarian ambitions, in the aim of doing away with all cultural and spiritual differences in a society committed to Khomeinian Islamism, undemocratic and totalled closed.[21] The goal of achieving total control over society meant that any opponents had to be eliminated or, at least, sidelined. This "hezbollahisation" of Iranian society prompted a major exodus, and the emergence of an Iranian diaspora starting in the 1990s.[22] It is easy to analyse the functioning of Iran

17. D. Assadi (dir.), *L'Iran sous la présidence de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Bilan et perspectives* (Iran under the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: Past and future), Paris, L'Harmattan, coll. "L'Iran en transition", 2009, p. 5-35.

18. M. Mohammadi, "The opposition at last united and for some time to come" (*L'opposition enfin réunie et pour longtemps*), interview with Kazem Alamdari, *Courrier International*, n° 975, 9 July-15 July 2009, p. 30 [carried on this website: http://www.radiozamaneh.com].

19. For a better understanding of how the Spring of the Revolution descended into repression, see N. Vahabi, *Sociologie d'une mémoire déchirée. Le cas des exilés iraniens*, (Sociology of broken memories: The case of exiled Iranians), Paris, L'Harmattan, 2008, p. 65-106.

20. The most determinant criteria are: being a cleric, occupying a specific rank in the Shi'a religious hierarchy, claiming to be a follower of the Supreme Leader and being of an advanced age. It should be noted, as we have already explained, that the people play only a marginal role.

21. C. Haghighat, *Iran, la révolution islamique*, (Iran: the Islamic Revolution), Brussels, Complexe, coll. "La mémoire du siècle", 1989, p. 33-48.

22. On Iranians' exodus to foreign countries, see N. Vahabi, *Récits de vie des exilés iraniens. De la rupture biographique à la nouvelle identité* (Stories of exiled Iranians: From the break in the story to a new identity), Paris, Elzévir, 2009, p. 25-28.

under Khomeini in the light of the four elements described by Hannah Arendt:[23] the paroxystic cult of the leader, the ideology of death visible in the war against Iraq, the inception of a repressive police system with the Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah and, lastly, the monopolisation of power by the Supreme Guide, who claims divine right, with the notion of *Velaite Faghigh* (guardianship of religious jurisprudence).

The second phase started in the 1990s, in the wake of two decisive events: the end of the war between Iran and Iraq, and the death of Khomeini. This brought the regime into a period that can be described as "Thermidorian", to use an expression popular among specialists of transition periods. After an initial phase of experimentation, the appeal, strength, symbols and sources of the legitimacy of the Khomeinian regime were at a low ebb, even among those who had previously defended the revolution with the greatest amount of intransigence. The tenants of the school of thought that prevailed at that time no longer placed their confidence in repression, and instead opted to move towards the re-secularisation of society. In other words, not only did they acknowledge that Islam is compatible with modernity, but they saw this compatibility as being the very condition for its survival as a religion. This was the school of thought with which Iranian society was confronted at the time of the 1997 political upheavals sparked by the "reformist" President Mohammad Khatami, who sought to personify a synthesis between the institutions forged in the fire of the 1979 revolution and the social forces that no longer had the same horizon as before.[24]

But this reformist policy came up against a major structural stumbling block: the Leader of the Revolution, an absolute monarch of sorts, untouchable and virtually unmovable.[25] Despite this divine obstacle, observers raised questions about the reinforcement of the President's powers, and his capacity to engineer a smooth transition. Some political scientists interpreted Khatami's presence at the heart of the Islamic system as the sign of a genuine openness putting an end to the domination of the Iranian political stage by the militant clergy. Others, however, saw him as a "safety valve" stopping pent-up frustrations from exploding, and ensuring that the regime was kept in power, albeit at the price of a few cosmetic transformations.

The Thermidorian phase ultimately disappointment the sections of society that had voted for Khatami and were disenchanted by the time of the July 1999 student protests: directly involved in these demonstrations, numerous students called for freedom of opinion, and expected the support of a president elected by dint of their active participation. Khatami did not react immediately, but ultimately condemned the movement, accusing it of undermining the country's stability. In short, the reformers' political failure was manifest, and it was clear that greater openness could only be achieved in the cultural sphere.[26] However, for the first time, Iran's youth started growing accustomed to the public and political spheres, thereby demonstrating their growing grasp of the workings of civil society works.

The third phase began in 2005, with the election of Ahmadinejad, who rendered all political science analysis tools ineffective by setting out to wrong-foot his opponents.[27] By maintaining fundamentalist and bellicose language, he presented himself as an adversary of the United States, thereby becoming a veritable "hero" in the eyes of the Arab and Muslim worlds. He struck fear into the West and Israel on the nuclear question, and shocked them on the subject of the Holocaust, while at the same time closing ranks with anti-imperialists, such as Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez. Domestically, he took on the reformist forces of civil society, building on foundations that included, aside from rural areas, the majority of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution, known as the *Pasdaran,* and the Islamic militia (*Basij*). The latter comprise a form of *nomenklatura*, strongly attached to traditional values, defending a form of "justicialism", obsessed by "revolutionary purity", and tolerating no rivals at the summit of the state. In

23. H. Arendt, *Les Origines du totalitarisme. Le système totalitaire* (The Origins of Totalitarianism), Paris, Le Seuil, 1972, p. 189-267.
24. F. Adelkhah, *Être moderne en Iran* (Being modern in Iran), Paris, Karthala, coll. "Recherches internationales", 1998, p. 10-11.
25. M.-R. Djalili, *Iran : l'illusion réformiste* (Iran: the reformist illusion), Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, coll. "La bibliothèque du citoyen", 2001, p. 112.
26. F. Adelkhah, *Être moderne en Iran*, *op. cit.*, p. 9-18.
27. To gain a better understanding of Ahmadinejad's attempts to monopolise power, see M. Ladier-Fouladi, *Iran. Un monde de paradoxes* (Iran: a world of paradoxes), Nantes, l'Atalante, coll. "Comme un accordéon", 2009, p. 234-235.

short, 30 years after the Revolution, we were presented with a hybrid regime: the summit of which was characterised by a veritable duality between an authoritarian theocracy, granted, and "neoconservatives", removed from power, who distinguished themselves from the supporters of the dictatorship by calling for moves in favour of the rule of law.

Two factors in the sitting President's record back up this duality. First, in political and social terms, there is veritable discontent over the absence of freedom of expression, as well as a great deal of lassitude caused by the strict control and repression Ahmadinejad inflicted on society during his first four years in power, the chief victims of which were journalists, young people, women, intellectuals, bloggers and even part of the clergy – all categories which gave their support to rival candidates. In its 2008 annual report, Amnesty International ranked Iran second worldwide in its red list of executions (346, including minors aged under 18).[28] In addition, the author's research into Iranian immigration in Europe shows that the sixth wave of the Iranian diaspora's exodus is attributable to the repressive policy dating back to Khatami's second term, which has intensified over recent years.[29]

Second, in economic terms, unemployment affects between 16% and 20% of the active population, bearing in mind that the rate is much higher for young people. Ahmadinejad considerably increased the wages of people with low revenues during his last three years in office, but the increase was wiped out by unbridled inflation of roughly 15-19%. This is how discontent spread to the most advanced areas of society, going as far as the *bazari* – shopkeepers and industrialists – who have always provided the clergy with solid support. In the import-export sphere, businessmen are being hurt by Iran's isolation following the three United Nations resolutions, and they are penalised by the refusal of foreign banks to help them finance their imports.[30]

These two factors in Ahmadinejad's record were compounded by the fierce struggle for personal interest within the state. The three periods mentioned above as a means of understanding the crisis that is currently besetting the Islamic state are not on their own sufficient to explain the dynamics of the protest movement whose timeline we have described. We must also look at trends among young people in contemporary Iran.

IV – THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW GENERATION

The movement came from the lower rungs of the social ladder, and its dynamism must be taken into account when looking at the reality on the ground in Iran, something that the Western media, which place excessive importance in Ahmadinejad's posturing (especially in the wake of this year's election) and paint the picture of Iran falling into the embrace of the fanaticism and radicalism reminiscent of the early years of the revolution, are apparently not keen to do.[31] The lack of information and the refusal to acknowledge that Iranian society enjoys any measure of autonomy vis-à-vis the regime have prompted a degree of confusion that effectively clouds the veritable historical turning point at which the country currently finds itself. Some observers only give Iranian society a supporting role, sometimes reducing it to a simple mass manipulated by the mullahs.[32] These people tend to ignore

28. See the Amnesty International report, "Death sentences and executions in 2008", ACT 50/003/2009, 25 March 2009, p. 7. Available on http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ACT50/003/2009/en/0b789cb1-baa8-4c1b-bc35-58b606309836/act500032009en.pdf

29. For the different waves of the exodus, see N. Vahabi, "Étude psychosociologique des réfugiés iraniens" (Psycho-sociological study of Iranian refugees), doctoral thesis, EHESS, April 2004, p. 116-140.

30. D. Assadi (dir.), "Les conséquences des sanctions économiques contre l'Iran sous la présidence de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad" (The consequences of economic sanctions against Iran under the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad), *in* D. Assadi (dir.), *L'Iran sous la présidence de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Bilan et perspectives*, *op. cit.*, p. 28-34.

31. After the appearances before the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Teheran of a number of opponents, reformists close to the two candidates opposed to Ahmadinedjad, demonstrators, two employees of the French (Nazak Afshar) and British (Hossein Rassam) embassies, as well as Clotilde Reiss, a young French tutor at the University of Isfahan, on Saturday 8 August 2009, a climate of fear descended on Iran, where comparisons have been drawn with the repression in 1983, or the Moscow show trials. C. Ayad, "L'Iran vise l'étranger pour mieux réprimer" (Iran is aiming at foreign countries to tighten its repression), *Libération*, 10 August 2009, p. 2-3.

32. M. Ladier-Fouladi, *Iran. Un monde de paradoxes*, *op. cit.*, p. 9-16.

the identity of the leading protagonists, and all too often see Iranians as an immature people who put their support behind the clerics after having rejected a form of modernity proposed by the Shah.[33] They see society as a whole as being in symbiosis with the regime, from which it is indivisible. On the contrary, we need to look at the social transformations and the emergence of a youth movement in the light of the three key phases in the history of the Islamic republic, paying especial attention to demographics.

Due to the high level of births and deaths in the recent past, and despite a considerable slowdown in the pace of demographic growth in recent decades, Iran's population structure has been characterised by a high proportion of young people since the end of the Second World War, as stated by Marie Ladier Fouladi, for whom "people aged under 25 accounted for nearly 58% of the total population in 1956 and 50% in 2006". We also need to take into account people aged between 25 and 29: due to the chronic economic crisis and the increase in the amount of time spent studying, delaying access to stable employment, many people in this age bracket do not have the means to start a family. Applying "arbitrary" limits of 15 and 29, young people accounted for 35% of the total population in 2006 (or 25 million people). However, this generation's social representation is only a recent phenomenon, thanks to increased urbanisation: 38% in 1966, 47% in 1976.[34]

We must accordingly look closely at young generations since the 1970s in order to see how they have evolved, as they have played a determinant role in sparking protest movements on three occasions since the installation of the Islamic Republic.

1) Revolutionary youth

The youth movement dates back to the 1960s, when young people started calling for change and more openness in the social and political spheres, ultimately leading to the 1979 revolution. The 1960s were a watershed: they were marked by the break between a feudal Iran and the new Iran that emerged from the Shah's land reform, as well as the sustained development of national liberation movements throughout the Third World: Egypt was striding ahead under Nasser's impetus, Algeria was moving towards its liberation, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was becoming a force thanks to the reconstitution of the Fatah and to Yasser Arafat, while Che Guevara was being feted as a hero in Latin America, etc.[35] But Iran was immobile due to the elimination of reformist political parties, plunging society into a sustained socio-political crisis. Politics were entirely dominated by the Shah's single party, Rastakhiz. A repressive system, underpinned by a formidable secret service network and omnipresent police effectively nipped any hint of protest in the bud. Imposed social order guaranteed the state the appearance of calm, making Iran the silent empire.[36] The members of various levels of society tried to demonstrate and organise themselves in a bid to relieve this latent tension and lift these structural impediments. Their initiatives inspired a confrontation between the despotic action of the state and the political reaction of the body social.[37] The elimination of traditional opposition forces led, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to sporadic urban violence, raising questions about the wait-and-see stance adopted by the Mossadeghist National Front[38] and Tudeh, the Iranian Communist Party.

It is against this backdrop of international and national protests, largely inspired by Marxist movements, that two political parties defending the armed struggle were created, hailing from two different ideological branches: one of a religious and progressive nature (the People's Mujahedin), the second an offshoot of the revolutionary left (the Iranian People's Fedai Guerrillas).[39]

33. One of the contentions of some royalists is that the modernisation ushered in by the Shah was too fast for Iranians. See F. Pahlavi, *Mémoires*, Paris, XO Éditions, p. 10-50.

34. M. Ladier-Fouladi, *Iran. Un monde de paradoxes*, *op.cit*, p. 85.

35. N. Vahabi, "Étude psychosociologique de la mémoire des réfugiés iraniens", *op. cit.*, p. 202-208.

36. C. Haghighat, *Iran, la révolution islamique*, *op. cit.*, p. 6-7.

37. A. Moladjani, *Sociologie politique de la révolution iranienne de 1979* (Political sociology of the 1979 revolution in Iran), Paris, L'Harmattan, coll. "Comprendre le Moyen-Orient", 1999, p. 219.

38. The Mossadeghists are the partisans of Mossadegh, Prime Minister from 1951 to 1953, who was overthrown by a coup orchestrated by the United States and the United Kingdom following the nationalisation of Iran's oil industry.

39. For more information on these two organisations, see Y. Richard, *100 mots pour dire l'Iran moderne* (A hundred words to describe modern Iran), Paris, Maisonneuve & Larose, 2003, p. 125-129 et p. 68-70.

As such, the emergence of the youth movement took place in a society characterised, throughout the two decades leading up to it, by radical transformations in its economic structure. Between 1962 and 1966,[40] Iran underwent a land reform that did away with the former ownership structure, dominated by big landowners. The demise of the landowning aristocracy that organised rural life changed the relationship between town and country, and the reform amplified the rural exodus by individualising landowner status and leaving non-landowner peasants without the benefit of solidarity networks within their communities.[41] The 1979 revolution was the consequence of a change in the mindset of Iran's youth, and the reflection of an upheaval in Iranian society's socioeconomic framework, with half of the population now urbanised and the aspiration for an urban lifestyle now widely shared. Everyone wanted to live in towns, everyone wanted to consume.[42] In this unstable society, the revolutionary movement emerged in the towns and expanded with the support of urban strata, ultimately leading to the overthrow of the monarchy.[43]

However, the movement ran out of steam a few months after the revolution, and the image of an urban population united against the Shah faded. Urban residents, who were united in backing the revolution, were the first to be affected by the dissension that began tearing society apart. The signs of this dissension were invariably swept under the carpet, lest they should undermine revolutionary unanimity. Teheran and a number of large towns (Mashhed, Shiraz, Isfahan, Tabriz, for instance), became the focus of the strategies of the new regime. They were also central to the constitution of Hezbollah, which attracted a lot of young people, the intimidation of people calling for the freedoms promised by Khomeini, the imposition of the veil on women, the sidelining of young people who aimed to use their recently acquired freedoms to reinforce their autonomy. A period of extreme repression began at that time in Iran, although the country retains fragile and fleeting memories of the glories of the revolution. The last big peaceful rally was held on 20 June 1981, following the ousting of President Banisadr: it left dozens of people dead, hundreds wounded and thousands under arrest.[44] It was followed by a period of silence.

2) Post-revolutionary youth disenchanted with Khatami

The ceasefire between Iran and Iraq on 20 August 1988 and Khomeini's death in 1989 allowed the Islamic state to initiate a shift towards a planned economy. Undermined by the serious economic crisis but reinforced by the trials of the revolution and the war, the regime postponed discussion about the forming of political parties and groups, which began as soon as the war was over. And while Islamic associations were preserved, their activities were restricted to symbolic demonstrations ordered by the state. In this new context, rightly known as the post-revolutionary period, access to the public sphere remained, as under the *ancien régime*, closed to the country's youth. But young people in Iran had absolutely no intention of allowing the Islamic state to exclude them from the social and political spheres. Born between 1975 and 1985, they came of age in a contradictory and complex environment: at a time when major socioeconomic changes were in the process of modernising Iranian society, the regime sought to re-establish a form of authority based on a patriarchal model, seen by young people as unbearably archaic. Nor did the younger generation adhere to the sort of traditional and religious values that the regime sought to foster through the mass media, making the country's press and broadcast media "the voice and face of the Islamic Republic".[45] This was the situation when Iran's youth participated massively in Khatami's election in 1997, handing victory to the partisans of reform. Above all, young people were the artisans of demonstrations at the University of Teheran following the closure of reformist newspapers in 1999. Despite the fact that these people had the same aims as protest forces 20 years earlier, the strategies they adopted to achieve them were radically different:

40. F. Adelkhah, *La Révolution sous le voile. Femmes islamiques d'Iran* (The Revolution behind the veil: Islamic women in Iran), Paris, Karthala, coll. "Hommes et sociétés", 1991, p. 24.
41. F. Khosrokhavar, *L'Utopie sacrifiée. Sociologie de la révolution iranienne*, (Utopia sacrificed: The sociology of the Iranian revolution), Paris, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, p. 39.
42. F. Khosrokhavar, *Anthropologie de la révolution iranienne. Le rêve impossible*, (Anthropology of the Iranian revolution: The impossible dream), Paris, L'Harmattan, coll. "Comprendre le Moyen-Orient", p. 213-224.
43. Y. Richard, *L'Iran. Naissance d'une république islamique*, *op. cit.*, p. 267-305.
44. N. Vahabi, *Sociologie d'une mémoire déchirée. Le cas des exilés iraniens*, *op. cit.*, p. 104-105.
45. M. Ladier-Fouladi, *Iran. Un monde de paradoxes*, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

the youth of 1979 opted for revolution, which is by definition a violent act, while their counterparts in 1999 aimed above all to renovate the Islamic state rather than to overthrow it. As such, at an interval of 20 years, protests and political action by two generations of young Iranians resulted in two very distinct socio-political configurations, which raises the issue of how these movements were run.

It should be borne in mind that in a society where there are no political, municipal or union institutions, political meaning attaches to personalities, as there is no institutional order in which it can grow.[46] We also need to point out that the institutionalisation of a charismatic personality is never achieved in a uniform manner, and that Khatami, who was president from 1997 to 2005, suffered from "bad institutionalisation": many people became aware of his lack of courage when he closed his eyes to the repression unleashed on the youth movement in July 1999, aligning himself with the Supreme Leader and leaving the young protesters high and dry. Strangely, Khatami, who was seen at the time of the 1997 election as a defender of free speech, dialogue and respect for civil society, had, by the end of his term, lost his appeal for a majority of the young people involved in this movement. Was the disenchantment of Iran's youth linked solely to the connivance between Khatami and the Supreme Leader, or does it stem from the fact that Khatami was unable to deliver on the goal of renovating Islam?

It is not possible to be sure at this time who is the veritable representative of Shi'a Islam in Iran, as the revolution gave a tribune to at least four tendencies that categorically opposed Khomeini's interpretation Islam.[47] From a sociological point of view, however, whatever the interpretation, we still need to ask how much legitimacy can be given to an authority in a country bereft of democratic institutions. In the absence of rational legitimacy, a characteristic of modern Western states, the youth movement follows the person who assumes leadership. It is for this reason that we must look at the personality representing a different form of Islam, who gave Iran's youth a new breath of life, namely the losing candidate, Mir Hossein Moussavi.

3) Youth without ideology

The social protest movement that sprang up spontaneously within the space of a month was the offshoot of two movements we looked at earlier, which emerged thanks to the opening of the political, social and cultural sphere during the 1979 revolution. But sociologists Farhad Khosrokhavar and Olivier Roy contend that the existing public sphere is highly standardised: dress codes, sex segregation and restrictions on social contact are all enforced; as such, today's younger generation is very different from the generation that brought about the revolution; the previous generation was characterised by swift and extroverted modernisation, following foreign models fostered by the Shah. By contrast, today's youth has emerged from an introverted educational system, focused on the values of authenticity and religious identity, with a dogmatic edge and an extreme interpretation of Islam.[48] The public sphere, which was closed during the four years of Ahmadinejad's first term, did not allow free speech. So why did Iran's youth force the public sphere open again in June 2009?

The most likely explanation may be found in the concepts and analysis models put forward by Michel Dobry in his sociological study of fluid conjunctures, entitled the "logic of conjunctural desectorisation of the social space". According to Dobry, when the objectivation of sectoral relationships of complex systems and societies is suddenly undermined by major political crises, leaders are unable to retail control. In other words, the objectivation of social relationships within different sectors is not sheltered from the blows exchanged and the tactics employed by the protagonists of such confrontations, and the phase during which objectivation is lost does not come without consequences or without causing problems. On the contrary, the moments of madness – or "creative effervescence" – of "major" political crises become realities during these periods.[49] It is often said that one needs

46. N. Vahabi, *Sociologie d'une mémoire déchirée. Le cas des exilés iraniens*, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

47. For two differing visions of Islam, see N. Vahabi, "Deux visions différentes sur l'islam chiite en Iran" (Two opposing views of Shi'a Islam in Iran", masters dissertation, University Paris-VIII, Saint-Denis, 1997.

48. F. Khosrokhavar and O. Roy, *Iran : comment sortir d'une révolution religieuse* (Iran: how to get out of the religious revolution), Paris, Le Seuil, 1999, p. 162.

49. M. Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques. La dynamique des mobilisations multisectorielles* (Sociology of political crises: The dynamics of multisectoral mobilisation), Paris, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, coll. "Références", 1992, p. 99-114.

to keep all one's options open in politics, but it can happen, to quote Dobry, that "calculations escape".[50] How does the Iranian example relate to this theory?

As we have said, Khatami's election in 1997 was facilitated by the progress of "reformist" ideology, and his language on civil society destabilised the religious oligarchy and its totalitarian components inherited from 1981. Granted, Ahmadinejad's first four years in power slowed the opening of the public space, but relatively free televised debates and the launch of new newspapers got "political *habitus*"[51] moving again, one of the legacies of Khatami's term in office for Iran's youth, to the extent where "objectivised sectors" started losing their autonomy. The televised debates during the presidential campaign played a critical role in this respect in the opening of the public space and promoting Moussavi over the sitting president. While Ahmadinejad blithely denied the extent of increasing unemployment and Iran's economic decline, Moussavi emphasised the scope of the disasters caused by the incumbent. Ahmadinejad was seen by a majority of viewers as a cynical and arrogant liar, while his challenger was perceived as an honest and sincere partisan of democratic openness and the rule of law. Another vital symbolic phenomenon added itself to the exceptional circumstances prevailing during the pre-electoral period: for a few weeks, an intense socialisation, of a festive and exuberant character, was allowed – or even encouraged – in the street. Numerous young people, hungry for freedom and wanting to make themselves heard, were carried away by this ambience. They stayed out until late at night to support their candidate, more often than not Moussavi.[52] This ambience, coming on top of the debates, pro-reform newspapers and the internet, largely galvanised the troops in a campaign in which the protest movement took on a number of specific characteristics.

These characteristics are as follows:

a) Youth smothered by religious interdictions

At a time when the revolutionary and patriotic ideal has been fading, since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and when part of the world has achieved secularisation by placing religious values into the private space, Iran's youth lives within the framework of four interdictions: sex segregation in schools, right through to university and in a number of other areas, including buses, which have separate doors for men and women; dress codes: short-sleeved shorts for men were tolerated during Khatami's term of office, but have been banned today, women are obliged to wear the chador, and other rules relating to general "decency" are imposed; men and women are not allowed to mix, and women are not allowed to be in the company of men except their husband, brothers and cousins, with whom such contact is allowed under Islamic law; and leisure activities are tightly controlled, with censorship of films and TV programmes, the closure of dance halls, sex segregation in sporting clubs, etc.[53] These interdictions provoke daily clashes between the police and young people, who fall foul of the state in its struggle against the "Western cultural invasion".

b) Youth hungry for the rule of law

Most observers agree that the Iranian revolution laid the foundations for a new form of political Islam in the 1980s and since.[54] The June 2009 demonstrators employed the religious symbols that gave the Islamic revolution against the Shah its legitimacy: the slogan *Takbir* ("God is great") shouted from the rooftops, at night, starting at 10:00 p.m., the green ribbons (the colour of Islam) worn by young people, the green headscarves donned by girls. These religious symbols raised fears, despite the fact that they were grounded in protest, about religious interference in politics. The colour, for instance, posed the problem of political Islam, forcing Moussavi to put forward a more cultural and artistic explanation for its use: "The idea of the colour green came to me when, on a campaign trip, when a young man aged 18 or 19 made the suggestion, and put a green scarf around my neck. The colour green is not bad from an aesthetic point of view, speaking

50. Lionel Jospin's non-election in France in 2002 is an example of this.

51. P. Bourdieu, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste), Paris, les Éditions de Minuit, coll. "Le Sens Commun", 1979, p. 196-222.

52. F. Khosrokhavar, "Turbulences en Iran" (Turbulence in Iran), *nouvelobs.com*, 8 July 2009. Available at: http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/speciales/special_iran/20090708.OBS3563/turbulences_en_iran_par_fahrad_khrosrokhavar.html, consulted on 10 July 2009.

53. F. Khosrokhavar and O. Roy, *Iran : comment sortir d'une révolution religieuse*, *op.cit.*, p. 162.

54. F. Adelkhah, *L'Iran* (Iran), Paris, le Cavalier bleu, 2005, p. 9-15.

as an art specialist, and I decided it worked well. The wealth of this colour is important in Iran's cultural history, as it provides a reference to the family of Mahomet. It has a religious meaning, and our people feel it is a very beautiful colour. Green is featured on our flag, and green is the colour of nature."[55] It should also be noted that Moussavi's choice of a colour (green) to symbolise his campaign was inspired by international social movements, particularly in Eastern Europe, with the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, for instance.

Should we fear that these Islamic rituals will become Islamist and political? Iranian society has paid a high price for Islam's role in politics, and has grounds to fear the religious aspect. In reality, there is a contradiction between, on the one hand, intense secularisation and, on the other hand, acceptance of an Islamic compromise to combat despotism installed in the name of religion. For instance, women have profound reasons to execrate the Ahmadinejad era: under his aegis, the feminist movement has been savagely put down, and several of the young Muslim women who launched a "campaign for a million signatures" in favour of equal rights with men were sent to prison, sometimes for terms lasting several years, while others were assaulted or subjected to extremely virulent repression. Consequently, many Iranians have no illusions about political Islam, and see first and foremost its negative consequences on the emancipation of civil society.

The disillusionment with the Islamic system is causing the pendulum to swing back. The things that fascinated the previous generation as it became politicised (Islamism, the left, revolution) are no longer compelling for today's generation. Western democracy is back in favour: the new generation also wants to have control over its pleasures and leisure activities; women want to be considered as fully-fledged people. Iran's young people are a blend of the following desires: to live their lives outside the moral order, as individuals consuming goods and leisure activities, but also to be acknowledged as free and autonomous people in political terms. In a society where the moral order is omnipresent, it is normal that the call for freedom should be immediately political or, more precisely, that it should entail political change. The politicisation of contemporary Iranian youth is in that sense negative: it is not in favour of a new Islam, it is against all forms of hegemony. These two claims meet in what in Iran now goes by the name of the rule of civil society, or the rule of law.

c) Well-educated youth

The new generation is, in a sense, better educated than the previous one. Literacy advanced from 59% in 1976 to 79% in 1991.[56] Women have closed some of the gap: literacy among women rose from 35.5% in 1976 to 67.6% in 1991, while literacy among men increased from 58.9% to 80.6% over the same period. The gap between boys and girls has virtually disappeared at primary level; but while it is still present at secondary level in the country's poorer regions, more girls then boys attend secondary school in the bigger towns. They account for 30% of university students.[57]

The university system suffered from its closure during the cultural revolution between 1980 and 1983. While 16,000 degrees were awarded in 1978, the number fell to just 9,000 in the period from 1978 to 1982. It was only with the opening of the State University that the number of tertiary students returned in 1986 to its level in 1980. In 1991, there were more than 500,000 students (compared with 15,400 in 1976), 60% of whom were enrolled in public universities.[58] While academic standards have declined and the quality of Iranian university degrees is disputable,[59] tertiary education has become increasingly widespread in the country's towns, explaining why we are seeing the emergence of well-educated young people. This change provides a clear explanation of why high-school students, university students, artists and, more generally, women and relatively young men, not to mention numerous parents inspired by their children, took to the streets to

55. Due to the lack of reliable sources in French, I was forced to fall back on sources in Persian. Address by Mir Hossein Moussavi at a meeting with academics on 24 June 2009, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/07/090708_op_ir88_mousavi_3tir.shtml, consulted on 7 July 2009

56. S. Paivandi, "L'analyse démographique de l'analphabétisme" (Demographic analysis of illiteracy), *Population*, n° 4-5, 1995, cited by F. Khosrokhavar and O. Roy, *Iran : comment sortir d'une révolution religieuse*, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

57. *Id.*, *ibid.*

58. F. Khosrokhavar and O. Roy, *Iran : comment sortir d'une révolution religieuse*, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

59. For a more in-depth study of the decline in educational standards in Iran, see A. Taefi, *Sociology of the brain drain*, in Persian, Cologne, Frough, 2008, p. 10-53.

denounce a rigged electoral system and a contemptuous and impervious political regime. The country's youth deserves to be heard, but the fraudulently re-elected president dismissed the demonstrators as "insignificant dust" at his first press conference.[60]

d) Towards class "homogenisation"

It is never easy to present a country's youth as an autonomous social category. This is especially so in the case of Iran's July 1999 movement, which never extended beyond its initial bounds, either socially or geographically. However, it is easier to generalise about Iran's youth today, because it is a much more homogenous category than at the time of the Shah, unified both by social modernisation (consumerism, urbanisation, extension of education) and by Islamisation, which affects areas to which it is sensitive (clothing, leisure activities, relations between the sexes). Class differences were fundamental under the Shah, as they were synonymous with highly divergent educational backgrounds and leisure activities: the middle and upper classes that emerged with modernisation under the Shah lived in a totally different world, culturally speaking, than the lower classes, their offspring and the farmers affected by land reform, who flocked to the towns and took up residence in the popular districts.[61] In Teheran, the former live in the northern part of the city, and the latter in the southern part, and the distinction between north and south took on a symbolic meaning, synonymous with wealth and poverty respectively. Even the city's topography helped emphasise the split, with the wealthy northern districts on the slopes of the Alborz Mountains looking down on the poorer districts below. During and after the revolution, the young people in the poor districts to the south of Teheran spearheaded the political movement. Khomeinian discourse gave the "dispossessed" youth a greater sense of self worth and mobilised them against the "oppressors" in the northern part of the city.[62] This populist language was bound to have an effect, as it was based on a symbolic dichotomy felt intensely by the inhabitants of the poor districts, convinced that they had been unjustly deprived of advantages going solely to people living in the northern districts. While the north-south dichotomy persisted in cultural terms after the revolution, the Islamic state made real efforts (building parks, sports grounds, swimming pools, cultural centres and libraries, organising painting exhibitions, music, singing, painting, and calligraphy lessons, etc.) in order to reduce the cultural gap between the two parts of the city. Moreover, the imposition of Islamic dress codes paradoxically lessened the previously very visible difference between the clothing worn by young men and women from the northern districts and those from the south.

This change is clearly visible in Teheran, and I would contend that it is also visible throughout the rest of the country;[63] during the 2009 election, members of different social classes blended sociologically and culturally to vote for Moussavi: the vast majority of students, large swathes of the urban middle classes, a sizeable proportion of the dispossessed – who are hurt by inflation without being supported by the state, and who were for that reason disappointed by Ahmadinejad's unfulfilled promises[64] – numerous farmers hit by competition from massive imports of agricultural products, large numbers of young people of all social backgrounds, as well as all those who felt they had been taken in by a president who ignored evidence of the country's economic malaise in his strident declarations. The social transformations of recent decades have whetted the appetite for democracy among a majority of the population, prompting a big falloff in adherence to radical Islam and religious fundamentalism.[65]

In fact, the size of the protests, which peaked on 15 and 17 June 2009, shows that the youth movement is tending towards democratisation, a greater blend of social classes, in favour of the rejection, shared at different levels of society, of the regime's rigorist commandments.

60. E. Raha, "Silence by day, Takbir by night" (*Silence le jour, Allah Akbar la nuit*), *op. cit.*, p. 15.

61. F. Khosrokhavar and O. Roy, *Iran : comment sortir d'une révolution religieuse*, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

62. This analysis concerns Teheran, as social movements there are invariably more important in size. However, while guarding a sense of proportion, it could be applied to other important cities such as Shiraz, Isfahan, Mashhed and Tabriz.

63. This contention could be verified by means of empirical research, but I do not have reliable information at this time.

64. When Ahmadinejad was mayor of Teheran, from 2003 to 2005, he achieved a measure of notoriety, explaining in part his election to the presidency in 2005. Since then, however, his popularity has waned.

65. F. Khosrokhavar, "Turbulences en Iran" (Turbulence in Iran), *nouvelobs.com*, 8 July 2009. Available at: http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/speciales/special_iran/20090708.OBS3563/turbulences_en_iran_par_fahrad_khrosrokhavar.html, consulted on 10 July 2009.

e) Youth without organisation

It is impossible to guarantee the survival of a movement that is only two months old, especially when its continuity over time and its extension in space are under threat, in that its leader, Moussavi, absent from political life for nearly 20 years, only returned to the political stage two months before the election. Does this means that the movement may have been nothing more than a flash in the pan?

Granted, Moussavi only wanted to reform the Islamic state in a few areas. He did not seek to overturn the regime, merely to democratise it. However, the majority of the country's youth would like to go further, to live a freer life, more open and less subject to interdictions. Characterised by its steep demands, the movement does not have any organisation in Iran, while the exiled opposition, cut off from a society on which it has had no leverage for 30 odd years, has trouble monitoring change and is in reality at loggerheads with it. Nor does the reformist movement, which is also rent with factions and is relatively heteroclite, have a reliable organisation due to the outlawing of political parties, meaning that it is not in a position to channel the country's youth into creating a form of opposition.[66] Ahmadinejad's partisans are better structured. Consequently, it is very difficult to predict the future of the movement born on 20 May 2009, as the person who took its leadership is an outsider with no institutional role, finds himself in an increasingly weak position and is unable to satisfy the aspirations of the numerous Iranians who have taken to the streets. Despite this, Moussavi's name has become one of the slogans of the country's youth. Mir Hossein is associated with the name of the third Shi'a imam – and the demonstrators' preferred expression is, "Oh! Hossein [third imam], oh! Mir Hossein [Moussavi]." This slogan carries a dual message: aspiration for political modernisation on the one hand and the maintenance of religious legitimacy in Iranian society on the other hand. Questions nevertheless remain: is religious legitimacy in the process of squeezing out a form of political legitimacy that poses a genuine threat to the Islamic state and claims to symbolise a true form of Islam? Is the struggle of religion against religion the veritable subtext to the youth movement, something the state would have trouble accepting?

The five characteristics of the Iranian youth movement that we have just examined are the consequences of changing family structures (the shift to the immediate family circle, fostering individualism), greater and more widespread educational attainment for girls, greater control over fertility rates (allowing women to take part in public life), the affirmation of youth at the same time as older people (including the leading ayatollahs) have lost their sacred aura and the disobjectivation of social relationships since the emergence of the reform movement in 1997. The result of all this is a new emphasis on the notion of the individual as the main protagonist in civil society, and more specifically young people, the chief players seeking to open up the social space in order to assert themselves and liberate themselves from the authority of the divine Troika.[67]

V – THE DIVINE TROIKA: AN INSTITUTIONAL OBSTACLE

Following the Supreme Leader's 19 June address, the youth movement ran out of steam. Why did the movement allow itself to die down, raising the prospect, as we saw with the example of the 1999 protests, of a period during which young people will keep a low profile?

It is too early to analyse the process at this stage. However, we would emphasise the fact that, from the very start of the 1979 revolution, the process by which the clerical regime took on a sacred aura is the reflection of a philosophy of commandment and obedience ensuring political order, as intended by the Islamic state.[68] This political order manifested itself via a number of major, undemocratic – or even antidemocratic – institutions, including the Office of Supreme Leader of the Revolution (run by an ayatollah),

66. The regime responded by imprisoning the opposition's leading figures, intellectuals who had come out against the incumbent president, internet activists who braved its diktats, and all those who contested Ahmadinejad's election.

67. The Russian word *troika*, meaning a "group of three personalities" (Petit Larousse, 1996, p. 1034), for me stands for the three political institutions of Iran's religious oligarchy, namely the Supreme Leader, the Guardian Council of the Constitution and the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution. We will look at these later.

68. To gain a better idea of the meaning of political order and social order, see B. Lacroix, "Ordre politique et ordre social" (Political order and social order), *in* M. Grawitz and J. Leca (dir.), *Traité de science politique. La science politique, science sociale. L'ordre politique* (Treatise on political science. Political science, social science. Political order) (vol. 1), Paris, PUF, 1985, p. 470.

para-state bodies like Hezbollah,[69] repressive institutions like the Committee,[70] the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution (Pasdaran), the Assembly of Experts and the Guardian Council of the Constitution,[71] appointed by the Supreme Leader, etc. These institutions put paid to any shift towards democracy, and the clergy gradually set about evicting the moderates from power; this transformation involved an extreme interpretation of Islam.[72] This brand of "closed Islam", with a monopoly on the sacred aura of the political order,[73] was instigated by Khomeini himself, just after the revolution, with a spectacular gesture: the ousting in June 1981 of the country's first president, Banisadr, who subsequently tool up exile in Paris.

Contrary to received wisdom, the notion of "sacred" is not defined in this context – using the concept set out by Jacques Lagroye – as an explicit call on a divine order, even though the notion of divinity can be seen in the proposals, behaviour and rites that inform the magical and/or religious attitudes of some Islamic Republic leaders. Rather, the notion of "sacred" here refers to "political 'metaphysics', implying a founding reference to 'truths' that escape common understanding without the mediation of authorised interpreters, an order hidden in the exercise of legitimate power, which must be unveiled and revealed".[74] The language of power feeds on this sacred order, tying social life to time, calling on the past and the future to legitimise the actions of the state in the present, while at the same time removing the other actions of politics: as such, on a day-to-day basis, loyalty to an "idealised" spirit – that of Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic – guarantees the legitimacy of the regime that emerges. The country then enters a process of radicalisation and politicisation of this "sacred" power, which gives itself the political legitimacy that allows it to tolerate no opposition.[75]

Iran's current political system is accordingly founded on the divine Troika[76] formed by the Supreme Leader, the Guardian Council of the Constitution and the hawks of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution. Ultimately, the last word goes to the Supreme Leader, illustrating the idea of an unelected gerontocracy: the Supreme Leader is aged more than 70, Ayatollah Jannati, head of the Guardian Council of the Constitution, who oversees the laws made by Parliament and decides which candidates may run for Parliament or stand as president, is aged 87.

The novelty in June 2009 was that the movement was in flagrant contradiction, or even all-out warfare with the Supreme Leader, who does not have the same charisma as Khomeini and who was in reality significantly weakened during the movement. The official ideology is one of *Velaite Faghigh* (guardianship of religious jurisprudence), which by definition provides for permanent guardianship and transforms the population into an aggregate of "minors". The demand for the rule of law is in this respect a demand to be treated as an adult. This makes it easier to understand how the simple demands of the youth movement immediately took on political meaning. The new society is looking above all for a legal system that protects it from arbitrary rules and decisions, and allows people to be treated as adults, and not as eternal children.

69. These institutions limit very precisely the scope of the two country's democratic institutions, namely the Parliament and the presidency.

70. The word *committee* was used during the French Revolution to refer to groups that undertook urban management in town districts. After the Revolution, these organisations, often autonomous, were taken over by the state. The committees gradually became a new instrument of repression for the government, which had big need of one, as the police and the *ancien régime*'s other instruments of repression had been disbanded.

71. See note 3. These bodies place significant restrictions on the scope of Iran's two democratic institutions, namely the Parliament and the presidency.

72. For a more in-depth study, see N. Vahabi, *Sociologie d'une mémoire déchirée. Le cas des exilés iraniens*, *op. cit.*, p. 77-106.

73. This is a new political order: the state must be seen not as a static or frozen entity, but rather as a collection of components imposing an order on a society undergoing permanent change. B. Lacroix, "Ordre politique et ordre social" (Political order and social order), *in* M. Grawitz and J. Leca (dir.), *Traité de science politique*. *La science politique, science sociale. L'ordre politique*, (vol. 1), *op. cit.*, p. 476.

74. J. Lagroye, "La légitimation" (Legitimisation), *in* M. Grawitz and J. Leca (dir.), *Traité de science politique*. *La science politique, science sociale. L'ordre politique*, (vol. 1), *op. cit.*, p. 419.

75. For the periods of repression, see F. Khosrokhavar, *L'Utopie sacrifiée. Sociologie de la révolution iranienne*, *op. cit.*, p. 81-93.

76. I prefer the term *troika*, as the Guide needs the Guardian Council to give his decisions legal weight. Hashemi Rafsanjani, who heads important institutions such as the Assembly of Experts and the Expediency Discernment Council is completely excluded from the troika.

CONCLUSION

Since 12 June 2009, the Islamic state has been in the throes of a profound crisis, which has reached the very top of the Iranian regime, in the wake of the rigged election. The election was like a spark that finally ignited the profound bitterness of a society that feels outraged by the religious domination of the divine Troika.

The extent of the youth movement recalls two previous movements, the 1979 revolution and the 1999 protests, but its socioeconomic profile is totally different, and highlights a more broadly based theme: what happens when the logic of identifying the religious sphere with the political sphere is pushed to the limit?

Thirty years of Islamic government make it possible to answer this question: secularisation, which is seen as the move of religious aspects into the private realm, is the message borne by Iran's youth, paving the long road to the emancipation of civil society and the rule of law. The question of the youth movement's future is legitimate: will it fizzle out by itself, end in bloody repression, or flourish, leading ultimately to change in the Islamic state?

There are two possibilities. Initially, a Solidarity-like scenario sprang to mind, with Iran enjoying its own version of perestroika. But given that the movement has run out of steam, it may be more realistic to draw comparisons with Tiananmen Square. But that would be to forget that the Chinese state was able to promote economic growth, while the Iranian regime is not in a position to fix the county's enfeebled economy. Moreover, fault lines are appearing at the top of the state, reducing the power of the religious oligarchy and excluding Khomeini's favourites from the political sphere, as symbolised by Moussavi, the losing candidate, who has been cast as the first victim of governmental purges. Moussavi only became leader by default. For this reason, the future of the movement depends in part on his position and his courage to go all the way: in a society bereft of democratic institutions, politics are synonymous with personal charisma. An interesting parallel can be drawn with the 1908 scenario, in which the reactionary Mohammad Ali Shah[77] suspended the Constitution and, after a short period of despotic rule, was hounded from power by the constitutionalists. If we apply the matrix described in this paper, with the movement starting from the lower echelons of society and the cracks in the ruling elite, it would appear that the regime could implode, which would put us in a pre-transition period, namely the shift from an opaque dictatorial regime to democracy.

This ambivalent crisis reflects an essential property of the fluid conjunctures used in sociological analyses of crises in periods of transition. The movement's implicit message is that "calculations escape": the situation is an unimaginably shifting one in which the Supreme Leader is in a precarious position and the very foundations of his authority are being undermined as he loses his sacred aura. The Supreme Leader's loss of control over sector logic can be seen in the fact that the youth movement's multi-sector mobilisation tends to emphasise, in the pertinent calculations, referent universes, indices and markers used to assess the situation that are largely external to the specific social logic generally used by the Supreme Leader. Does this not imply that the crisis will frighten all the players in Iran's fragmented political landscape? Is it not possible to envisage a gradual move towards the rule of law?

77. In 1908, Mohammad Ali Shah had Parliament bombed in order to suppress the constitutional regime. But his despotism did not last long, and the constitutionalists returned to power in 1909. See Y. Richard, *L'Iran, Naissance d'une république islamique*, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

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