

Anthropological Visions of Contemporary Iran

Religious and Cultural Politics in Post-revolutionary Iran

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- ❖ **Lecture 1: Wednesday 26th April (1st Week), 5:00 pm**
Shiism: Culture and Post-revolutionary Politics in Iran

- ❖ **Lecture 2: Friday 5th May (2nd Week), 8:00 pm**
Shiism: Material Culture, Rituals and Gender
Banner ('*Alam*'), (Documentary), 1996, 25min.
Rattle-box (*Jeq-jeqeh*), (Documentary), 2000, 20min.

- ❖ **Lecture 3: Friday 12th May (3rd Week), 8:00 pm**
Shiite Rituals Amongst Women: Space, Singing, Body Movement, Miracle
Standard-bearers of Hussein: Women commemorating *Karbala*, (Documentary), 2003, 35 min.

- ❖ **Lecture 4: Thursday 18th May (4th Week), 8:00 pm**
Women Singers in Iran: Shari'at and Women's protest in Post-revolutionary Iran
Back Vocal, (Documentary), 2004, 40 min.

- ❖ **Lecture 5: Thursday 25th May (5th Week), 8:00 pm**
The End: Cultural Politics and Youth
Off Beat, (Documentary), 2004, 45 min.

Lecture one will be given in the Dahrendorf Room, St. Antony's College.

Films will be shown in the Nissan Lecture Theatre, St. Antony's College.



1- SUMMARY

Iran as a Shiite (more than half of whom live in Iran) country makes up 10 to 15 percent of the world's Muslim population. Upon taking power in 1979, **Ayatollah Khomeini** (rah) and his followers set out to consolidate their authority and to build a new government modelled on an abstract vision of Islamic government, as articulated by **Ayatollah Khomeini** (rah) himself in his construction of the doctrine of "*Velayat-e Faqih*" **Rule of the Jurist Consult.**

During the 1980s and 1990s, the themes of the revolution were kept alive by shifting the focus away from opposition to the Pahlavi regime and towards opposition to the two great superpowers on the international stage, the United States and the Soviet Union. Slogans such as

"*Na sharqi- Na qarbi*" **Neither East nor West** which stressed Iran's independence, became part and parcel of the revolutionary regime's **ideology, rhetoric, and politicise**. Regarding this new way of thinking of the Iranian leaders, Iranian revolutionary policy tried to become more active and more present, especially in Iran. For the revolutionaries, one of the first and best ways of increasing this presence was to inject their ideas and their ideologies into the public arena via: **ceremony and rituals, images and mass media**.

Firstly, regarding **Foreign and Cultural invasion** "*Tahajom-e Farhangi*", all kinds of representations of **West and East** including **image, sound and multimedia** were expressly forbidden. Instead, more Islamic programs were introduced on radio and television. Much of this religious programming consisted of Koranic recitation, Islamic religious education and sermons. On the other hand, television documentary films and fiction films in cinemas showed the events of the **war front** (between Iran and Iraq) and the culture of **martyrs**.

The Friday prayer and sermon became a major vehicle for reinforcing revolutionary ideology and the legitimacy of the state, and this event was presented directly by national television inside Iran and by satellite outside of Iran.

Many ceremonies and rituals especially during **Moharram** were encouraged and financed by the government to take place in all cities in the form of local religious public and street festivals, guided by private and fanatic religious communities “*Hey’at- Dasteh*”.

For the revolutionaries, Iran came to be a symbolic **Shiite country** “*Madineh Fazeleh*” for the whole world.

However, the reaction of the Iranian community within Iran was not as the revolutionaries had imagined, and there are constant objections to these radical religious actions. This is unknown Iran, if not for the entire world, for many communities and nations.

With the introduction and rapid growth of the internet in Iran, new generations (15-24 years) try to find their audiences both inside and outside of Iran. Today, they are familiar with cultural and political activity, and they try to keep up to date with their contemporaries of different nationalities in other countries.

The protest of Iranian society on issues such as cultural activity and the media, for example, photography, music, dance, filmmaking and cinema, is growing, and in the everyday life of Iran, we are witnesses to new phenomena contrary to governmental threats and restrictions.

2-AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

- (a)** To understand some key aspects of the cultural politics of Post-revolutionary Iran as a Shiite country.
- (b)** To present the place and position of Islamic material culture, rituals and ceremonies in contemporary and modern Iran.
- (c)** To discuss the ways of protest in Iran on subjects such as women’s liberation and youth activities.
- (d)** To understand the rule of mass media as a medium of protest in Post-revolutionary Iran.



Lecture 1: Wednesday 26th April (1st Week), 5:00 pm

Shiism:
Culture and Post-revolutionary Politics in Iran

Objectives:

- (a) An understanding of the general aspects of the series
- (b) General introduction to Shiism
- (c) Post-revolutionary Iran and Shiite idealism and symbolism

In this first lecture we will introduce our general program for whole term. We will also talk briefly about the history and key elements of Shiism and Shiite culture in general and specifically in Iran. Finally, we will discuss Post-revolutionary Iran, its Shiite policies and culture.



Lecture 2: Friday 5th May (2nd Week), 8:00 pm

Shiism:
Material Culture, Rituals and Gender

Banner ('*Alam*), (Documentary), 1996, 25min.
Rattle-box (*Jeq-jeqeh*), (Documentary), 2000, 20min.

Objectives:

- (a) To introduce the ambiance and place of Shiite rituals in modern Iran.
- (b) Acquaintance with the importance and function of religious material culture in Shiite rituals and ceremonies.

(c) The role of gender and masculinity in Shiite rituals and ceremonies.

In this section, we will show two short documentary films made by two different Iranians in two different cities of Iran. Through these two films, we will learn more about the way of production and the function of Shiite material culture that is used in Moharram ceremonies. These films will show us the place of Moharram rituals in Iran and the role of men and women during these religious activities.



Lecture 3: Friday 12th May (3rd Week), 8:00 pm

**Shiite Rituals Amongst Women:
*Space, Singing, Body Movement, Miracle***

Standard-bearers of Hussein: Women commemorating *Karbala*
(Documentary), 2003, 35 min.

Objectives:

- (a) To introduce the role and position of women in Shiite rituals and ceremonies in modern Iran.
- (b) The role and function of Shiite beliefs and traditions in female Shiite communities.
- (c) How Shiite ceremonies and rituals create the opportunity for women to prove their beliefs and wishes through simultaneous prayer and body movement.
- (d) The relationship between Shiite beliefs, traditional and religious media (*Geriseur*) and miracles.

In this session, we will present a documentary film made by a non-Iranian, non-Muslim female anthropologist in the city of Shiraz in Iran. Through this film, we see how female Shiite Iranian believers as “Gender” involved in these ceremonies and rituals. This is a good chance to see how women commemorate the Imam Hoseyn and his related family ceremonies during Moharram in Iran. We see also how body movements and communal prayer can help women to contact the local female *Geriseur* to resolve problems such as infertility and cancer.



Lecture 4: Thursday 18th May (4th Week), 8:00 pm

Women Singers in Iran:
Shari'at and Women's protest in Post-revolutionary Iran

Back Vocal, (Documentary), 2004, 40 min.

Objectives:

- (a) To introduce new cultural activities and monuments in Post-revolutionary Iran.
- (b) To present the way in which the Iranian in general and specifically women find their own methods and solutions to government bans regarding their professional activities.
- (c) To introduce the real situation of a woman who wants to be a singer in Iran.

In this session, a film banned by the Iranian government made by an Iranian who lives in Iran, will convey the new voice and message of Iranian female singers. In lecture (3) we saw under what conditions and in which situations women are free to arrange manifestations, carry out body movements and sing songs, but here we will see that in the same time, same period and same place, women cannot do this alone. *Shari'at* says that the voice of single female singers is forbidden, and since the Islamic revolution there have been no **Solo** concerts by female singers. The subject of our lecture and of this film is the governmental proposals and the reactions of women in protest.



Lecture 5: Thursday 25th May (5th Week), 8:00 pm

The End: *Cultural Politics and Youth*

Off Beat, (Documentary), 2004, 45 min.

Objectives:

- (a) To introduce the situation of the youth (18-25 years) in contemporary Iran.
- (b) To present the activities, interests, ideas and ideology of the youth in contemporary Iran via media and music.
- (c) Multimedia and music as the new media for the young Iranian generation to speak about their living conditions and situation.
- (d) Cultural politics of the Iranian government regarding these activities.

In our first three lectures, we talked about and saw how, under the umbrella of Shiism and the cultural politics of the Iranian government, many rituals, manifestations and musical activities are not only free, but also financed and encouraged to take place. Here in another banned documentary film, by M. Mirtahmasb, we enter the Tehran youth community and witness how they conceal their musical activities. They want to make and play contemporary music and songs such as hip hop, rap, rock and reggae, but governmental restrictions forbid this. Therefore, **Underground** (*Zir zamini*) youth bands have been formed over the last few years in Iran to show and to prove: **We want to be Free.**

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