

Acting under Tyranny: Hannah Arendt and the Foundations of Democracy in Iran

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Amidst the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East and the reshaping of political systems in the region, the Iranian people remain mired in difficulties on their path to democratization. The obstacles hindering them have been examined in great detail since the post-election crisis of 2009, yet little seems to have been gained in the way of overcoming them. This standstill could be blamed largely on the repressive mechanisms of the state. In reality, however, it has more to do with the gradual decline in activity within Iranian civil society and the stagnation of political imagination. If Iran is to have a future built on the solid foundation of a viable and legitimate political authority, Iranian civic actors must reimagine and revisit the notion of constitution-making through sustained dissent and deliberation. No other thinker is more useful in this enterprise than Hannah Arendt. Arendt's analyses of revolution, terror, and violence provide a valuable framework for examining historical phenomena and a descent into the anti-political. More importantly, her conceptualizations of power, freedom, and thinking as questioning, as *nonconformity*, make her the quintessential thinker for dissent and the deconstruction of illegitimate political systems. The main purpose of this essay will be to explore how these and other Arendtian ideas may be applicable in the Iranian context. We begin by briefly tracing the history of Iran since the Islamic Revolution and its decline into an anti-democratic state, moving on to a comparative analysis of Arendt's account of totalitarianism and the Iranian regime in order to assess the potential for a reawakening of democracy within the civil society. We then turn to a deeper examination of Arendt's ideas to determine how they can foster resistance, civic engagement, and eventual legitimate authority. The focus in the end will be on what Iranians can do to begin anew, to build foundations for the future, and to tell themselves a new story about their identity.

Revolution and the *Constitutio Libertatis*

When considering the subject of civil society and democratization in the Middle East, the name of Hannah Arendt may not quickly spring to mind. Despite her sweeping, cosmopolitan outlook and her vigorous advocacy of participatory politics, Arendt rarely addressed the region, except occasionally to promote peace¹ and to discuss the problems facing the Jewish nation.² She mentioned Iran only once in her writings, and that was in relation to the demonstration organized against the Shah's trip to Germany in 1967.³ Had she lived a few more years past 1975, however, Arendt would have witnessed a major event which would have lent further credence to one of her most perceptive statements: "Even if we should succeed in changing the physiognomy of this century to the point where it would no longer be a century of wars, it most certainly will remain a century of revolutions."⁴

Widely acknowledged as one of the most important events of the twentieth century because of its far-reaching consequences, the Iranian Revolution remains a significant case study for its paradoxes and unpredictable twists. This phenomenon was surprising not because it caused an outdated monarchy to collapse once and for all, but because of the way in which people organized themselves and participated in massive demonstrations, the likes of which

had probably never been seen in 1789 or even 1917. Before the toppling of the Shah's regime, "The marches proved to be the largest witnessed in Iran, or arguably any other state, in recent times. Some two million people (nearly half the population of Tehran) were said to have participated in an almost unique expression of the 'collective will.'"⁵ What is particularly interesting and often ignored about this colossal event is the fact that the Iranian Revolution was not only largely nonviolent in its enactment but also very much in line with an Arendtian model of action and appearance. The participants in the demonstrations wanted more than anything to be seen and heard; they were willing to act in concert; they served as testament to Arendt's hopeful assertion that "the capacity for action, at least in the sense of the releasing of processes, is still with us."⁶ Why, then, did the Revolution degenerate into violence and tyranny, which still plague Iran to this day? Why did the power of the people, the performance of the capacity to act in concert, collapse in on itself, engendering its opposite, creating repression, stifling thought and action?

The French Revolution seems a good point of reference to begin answering this question. Indeed, the common notion of revolutions turning in upon themselves and becoming antithetical to their original principles—from freedom to repression, fraternity to terror—finds perhaps its fullest expression in the Reign of Terror. Robespierre infamously defended the necessity of the Terror in "On the Principles of Revolutionary Government" by stating: "Revolutionary government needs extraordinary activity, precisely because it is at war. It is subject to less uniform and less rigorous rules, because the circumstances in which it exists are stormy and shifting, and above all because it is continually forced to deploy resources rapidly, to confront new and pressing dangers;" and he went on to establish a model for many future revolutions by declaring: "Revolutionary government owes good citizens full national protection; to enemies of the people it owes nothing but death."⁷ Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1978–79 proved to be one such example.

Following the overthrow of the monarchy and the arrival of Khomeini as the central figure in the movement, the makers of the Iranian Constitution reached a crossroads to decide the direction their new state ought to take: "The first draft of the Constitution after the referendum . . . was remarkably liberal in its basic composition and in many ways reflected an enormous intellectual debt to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906."⁸ Yet it was precisely its indebtedness to the past and to other (Western) constitutions that undermined its attractiveness and ability to ensure social cohesion. This was largely, but not entirely, due to the widespread belief that the revolution ought to lead to an authentic, spiritually cleansing social movement.

The "spiritual dimension" of the Iranian Revolution, through its dependence on Islam, was well-established in the decade leading up to the uprisings. Thinkers like Ali Shariati had already succeeded in disseminating the notion that Iranians should "return to themselves" by resisting the hegemonic influence of the West, "a replica of Fanon's discourse of 'return of the oppressed' but with a peculiarly Iranian twist. Whereas Fanon's discourse was nonreligious in spirit and placed the emphasis on the racial, historical, and linguistic features of Third World struggles, Shariati's discourse was religious in tone and placed its emphasis on 'Islamic roots.'"⁹ This is abundantly clear in Shariati's immensely influential writings and lectures, which in many ways defined the course of the Revolution: "A revolutionary religion gives an individual, that is, an individual who believes in it, who is trained in the school of thought or *maktab* of this religion, the ability to criticize life in all its material, spiritual and social aspects."¹⁰ Furthermore, Shariati's emphasis on a home-spun ideology (ironically built largely from the ideas of European philosophers) demanded that whatever the revolutionaries did had to be done in a distinctive, differentiating manner:

The real or authentic existence is an existence which crystallized in the 'I' in the course of centuries of building history, culture, civilization, art. It is what gives me a cultural identity vis-à-vis other cultures – the West, the East, the American and African. It is my real existence that when I am before the French, the English, the American, or the Chinese, I can say 'I,' as they can say 'I' And this is an existence that has been created in the course of history This authentic personality, my human personality, distinguishes me from the other.¹¹

Due to the influence of these ideas on the movement's eventual leaders,¹² the first draft of the new constitution, which "bore close resemblance to the Constitution of the French Fifth Republic . . . did not reserve any special authority for the *ulema*, and therefore was not, strictly speaking, theocratic,"¹³ was doomed to a short life. The provisional government of Mehdi Bazargan, which still contained many secular and relatively democratic elements, was continually subjected to criticism for its inability to effectively secure central government and for its lack of Islamic character. Within a year of the drafting of the first constitution, "a more rigorous interpretation of Islam" was advocated and tensions rose.¹⁴ As many feared that the Revolution was losing its direction and descending into anarchy, Khomeini urged the people to "take the next steps by sending virtuous, trustworthy representatives to the Constituent Assembly, so that they may revise the Constitution of the Islamic Republic."¹⁵ Thereafter the initiative of these so-called people's representatives "was to begin to redraft the constitution to institutionalize Khomeini's role as the leader of the Revolution, in the form of his concept of the *velayat-e faqih*."¹⁶ This absolute concept, which claims ultimate authority for the highest Islamic jurist, allowed Khomeini to supersede the political views of other government officials as well as the citizenry.

This development signals a key moment in the course of the Revolution: at this significant point the sovereignty of the people together with their ability to act in concert was undermined in favor of an uncompromising, monolithic structure. The fact is that the Revolution in Iran, by following the path carved out by the French Revolution, degenerated into tyranny because it failed to establish freedom following liberation. As Arendt has insightfully pointed out,

It may be a truism to say that liberation and freedom are not the same; that liberation may be the condition of freedom but by no means leads automatically to it; that the notion of liberty implied in liberation can only be negative, and hence, that even the intention of liberating is not identical with the desire for freedom. Yet if these truisms are frequently forgotten, it is because liberation has always loomed large and the foundation of freedom has always been uncertain, if not altogether futile.¹⁷

Foucault, in his unfortunate (mis)appraisal of the Iranian Revolution, once asked: "Is this political will rooted deeply enough to become a permanent factor in the political life of Iran or will it dissipate like a cloud when the sky of political reality will have finally cleared, and when we will be able to talk about programs, parties, a constitution, plans, and so forth?"¹⁸ The way he should have phrased the question is: "Is this political will rooted deeply enough to become a permanent factor in the life of Iran *by establishing a constitution* to secure political freedom?" And in light of the abovementioned developments, it is clear in retrospect that the answer to this is a resounding "no." The purging of the old regime through summary trials and executions, the suppression and elimination of all dissenting voices, and the censorship of the press against questioning the principles of the revolution all echo grimly the words of Robespierre and the triumph of terror. This view is tinged by fatalism and inescapability; but the Iranian Revolution was only doomed insofar as the actors involved chose to pursue a flawed revolutionary model and adhere to ideological rather than deliberative methods.

As according to an Arendtian analysis, the foundation for freedom was destroyed when the constitution was taken out of the hands of the people and appropriated by a group imposing its laws upon them.

In distinguishing between the French and American revolutions, Arendt praises the latter and the ability of the Founding Fathers to deliberate about power, to thoughtfully construct a constitution with the cooperation of the people. She mentions that “the main question for them certainly was not how to limit power but how to establish it, not how to limit government but how to found a new one.”¹⁹ This, Arendt argues, is a key step in laying a foundation for freedom because it demonstrates what she considers a proper understanding of power, showing through incisive analysis how often this notion has been misunderstood and misused. According to her, the men of the French Revolution saw power residing in the people as a natural force outside the political realm, a violent and destructive torrent, the same force that eventually swept them away; the Americans, meanwhile, differentiated between power and violence, and understood that “power came into being when and where people would get together and bind themselves through promises, covenants, and mutual pledges; only such power, which rested on reciprocity and mutuality, was real power and legitimate.”²⁰ Most significantly, the establishment of proper authority, which required absolute law to be laid down in the form of a constitution, was done right in America because the founders “distinguished clearly and unequivocally between the origin of power, which springs from below, the ‘grass roots’ of the people, and the source of law, whose seat is ‘above,’ in some higher and transcendent region.” Following Burke, Arendt criticizes the abstract foundation of rights and laws and locates them instead in organic, bottom-up institutions and the activity of citizens.²¹ In so doing, she enlarges our understanding of what went wrong with the Iranian Revolution.

The theocratic foundations of the Islamic Republic, particularly through the institution of the *velayat-e faqih*, demonstrate that there was no participatory constitution-building at the critical stage of the Revolution, and show the way in which power slipped from the grasp of the people. Still, it could be argued that the Arendtian view of constitution-making has no application in a place like Iran because such a country could never have followed the American example: because its revolution was always a revolution of the *mostazefin* (dispossessed); because there could be no time for deliberation, for power to be balanced between the statesmen and the citizenry; and because a *constitutio libertatis* never had a chance to take root in the soil. But while this may be true in hindsight, it certainly is not binding in the present circumstances. It does not imply that power can never be relocated, that the constitution cannot be changed and built anew, or that such changes require a sudden and complete revolution. In fact, there is much potential lying dormant in Iranian society. We have seen it manifested in protests and social movements, and we can see it still slumbering in the lines of the constitution. For reform to be possible, the republican character of the constitution must be awakened and employed against the tyrannical tendencies which conceal and suppress it. What remains in Iran today is a dual sovereignty—divine and popular—which has to be overcome if the people are to have political power and to grant the legitimacy of proper political authority. Having mentioned these two conflicting principles of sovereignty elsewhere,²² the emphasis here will be on analyzing some aspects of the socio-political structure of the Iranian regime and the possibilities it leaves open for change.

Iran between Totalitarianism and Republicanism

In critiquing the Islamic Republic of Iran for its anti-democratic character, it is easy to resort to exaggerations and misnomers, to label the regime as dictatorial or totalitarian. In reality,

Iran's political structure is much more complex than what appears at first glance. Delving more deeply into this composition can allow us to determine to what extent Iran really is a totalitarian regime. At first, a comparison using Arendt's framework from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* reveals several striking similarities and convergences. Yet it remains questionable whether in the end it is reasonable for us to conclude that we are dealing with a totalitarian state. Ultimately, the ambiguity surrounding this question is precisely what offers possibilities for reform and democratization.

Arendt's ideas on the beginnings of totalitarianism at first show little, if any, semblance to the development of the Islamic regime. The opening of *Origins* is irrelevant to the comparison as there were very few traces of racial hatred in the Iranian Revolution, certainly not enough to be considered as a pillar or a stepping-stone for a transition to authoritarianism.²³ Furthermore, many parts of Arendt's discussion, such as "Totalitarianism in Power," find no echoes in the Islamic Republic, as of course the Iranian regime does not pursue domination of others as its goal. It does, on the other hand, control its own populace to a considerable extent. This domination at the individual level is the first major concurrence with Arendtian views—particularly isolation, solitude, and loneliness—and it is therefore a good starting point for the comparison.

To reach the concepts of isolation and loneliness, Arendt first discusses the problem of marginalization and the resultant loss of rights. She explains how those who become excluded and stateless struggle for identity and inclusion against the tendency that tries to expel them from the political realm and strip them of rights.²⁴ There is a clear connection between this rejection stateless people face and the descent into the anti-political which later plagues all members of a totalitarian society: exclusion from the political realm is an insidious process which gradually erodes the idea of what a *polis* ought to consist in. Stateless people and minorities are the first victims of this degenerating force. Their plight illustrates the fact that "The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective."²⁵ Hence such people, divested of human rights, "are deprived, not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion."²⁶ With this lack of recognition and the denial of the right to act, Arendt argues, the very idea of abstract rights fades away.

The greatest peril that the loss of rights brings is the concomitant loss of identity. Working its way within the political realm, it decays action, without which there can be no individuating principle, so that personality, "deprived of expression within and action upon a common world, loses all significance."²⁷ Arendt goes so far as to call these circumstances the "conditions of savages," as for her a civilization without *citizenship*, *opinions*, and *deeds* was a civilization on the brink of collapse—or more specifically, implosion. If we take a moment to ponder these well-known insights of Arendt, we will discover that today they are as relevant as they were during the age of the most infamous totalitarian systems. Not only does the threat remain the same for even the most purportedly democratic government,²⁸ but it is an already existent phenomenon in a country like Iran. Countless observations have been made about the lack of human rights in the Islamic Republic.²⁹ In light of Arendt's examination, however, we can consider here the more difficult conceptual problem of the loss of identity in Iranian society with a brief literary analogy.

Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, one of Iran's most prominent novelists, provides a pithy exploration of the theme of identity in his short story "The Mirror." In an obscure Iranian village, a man who has lost his government-issued identity card is prompted by an announcement on the radio—"all 'dear citizens' must renew them"³⁰—to seek out everyone he knows in hopes

of acquiring one. After hitting several dead-ends, he encounters an archivist who offers him the option of selecting among various lost identity cards, myriad possibilities: "Where would you like to have been born? Where would you like to have been raised? What occupation? What face or image would you like to have? Everything is possible. Will you make your own choice or shall I draw a lot for you?"³¹ In the end, the nameless protagonist asks the archivist to select the identity card of someone who has died, but as he heads home he is overcome by a strange sensation: "He suddenly felt that his teeth were peeling away, falling out, dropping down along his legs and landing on the tips of his shoes. He also felt that, one by one, a piece of his jawbone, an eyelid, his fingernails, were falling off his body. It occurred to him that perhaps it was time for him, if he did get home and did walk into his room, to go straight to the mantelpiece and take one look—one last look—at himself in the mirror."³²

This frightening and absurd ending has much to tell us about the stark reality of Iranian society: with the amount of control exercised by the government on its own populace, self-creation has been stifled to the extent that individuals have had no point of origin, no starting point for determining their own identities. This, according to Majid Tehranian, is due to an emphasis on purification, as it exemplifies a historical period in which power and purity have combined in the hands of the government and "cultural creativity has been suppressed by the imposition of a particular secular or religious ideology."³³ Hence Dowlatabadi's subtle critique illustrates the way in which the ideology of the Islamic Republic reaches stealthily into the private lives of Iranians and prevents them from becoming individuals capable of realizing their distinct identities or acting in the political realm.

One of the most concrete and deplorable examples of the regime's mistreatment of its own citizens is the persecution of the Baha'is, a religious minority excluded from much of the public realm for its adherence to a set of beliefs diverging from a "correct" interpretation of Islam. Echoing the notion that what such people face is nothing less than the erosion of their identity, Iranian legal scholar Payam Akhavan maintains that the intolerance they face "is the reflection of blind obedience to leaders who elevate hatred to patriotism and transform victims into aggressors. The discrimination against Baha'is, the denial of their human rights, the hate propaganda against them: these are merely particularly notorious manifestations of a culture of exclusion and violence."³⁴ The Baha'is, like other non-conforming groups, are denied access to government jobs and education, imprisoned and tortured arbitrarily, and as "legal non-persons," denied the means to seek reparations through the court system.³⁵ This aggression is ubiquitous in Iran, and it affects many different groups, among which women are the most prominent.³⁶ The marginalization of such large groups—which alongside other minorities end up comprising a majority in the population—is tantamount to a widespread status of statelessness as elaborated by Arendt. In her terms, Iran could similarly be described as a "nation of minorities," in which the status of particular groups, instead of their nationalities, differentiates them from the "ideal" or "pure" image that the Islamic Republic would like to impose. Such groups—because they are religious minorities, because they are women, because they are fluid shapes unwilling to conform to that forced impress—are barred from the political realm so that their identities remain in perpetual flux, denied the one identity the regime would have them take and prevented from forging one of their own through political action.

So far, it is clear that there are at least two basic similarities between the Iranian regime and the totalitarian systems analyzed by Arendt: the loss of rights and the accompanying loss of identity on a large scale. What is truly important to consider, however, is how far-reaching the consequences of such deprivation are, and whether they allow us to conclude that the whole Iranian citizenry has been reduced to *masses*. Arendt highlights the significance of

this force by discussing it as a primary necessity, for “totalitarian regimes, so long as they are in power, and the totalitarian leaders, so long as they are alive, ‘command and rest upon mass support’ up to the end.”³⁷ She identifies the masses as those who are “not citizens with opinions about, and interests in, the handling of public affairs.”³⁸ As has been stated by thinkers like Ortega y Gasset, the masses, “by definition, neither should nor can direct their own personal existence,”³⁹ for when we are dealing with the “quantitative and visual” concept of the multitude, “There are no longer protagonists; there is only the chorus.”⁴⁰ Simply put then, such crowds, because of their mob mentality, are plastic, malleable, easily brainwashed. Arendt’s concept of superfluity shows that such manipulation can be taken to an extreme level, to the point that individuals no longer question anything and so, to those who rule over them, no longer matter.

Under totalitarian regimes, unquestioning compliance in turn produces the notion of self-sacrifice on a grand scale, so that in facing injustice, “Selflessness in the sense that oneself does not matter, the feeling of being expendable, was no longer the expression of individual idealism but a mass phenomenon.”⁴¹ Such thinking is reinforced by propaganda and the belief that the nation’s collective deeds are historic, drawing on the greatness of the past to glorify the task of the present.⁴² Moreover, propaganda is used to make myths, to blur the lines between reality and fantasy, which dissolves only when the system declines. While it is alive, though, the system organizes society to “act and react according to the rules of a fictitious world.”⁴³ Meanwhile, the state remains fluid in its organization, introducing new layers and new degrees of militancy to “control the controllers.”⁴⁴ The leader is responsible for the whole operation, and all his functionaries are his “walking embodiment,” which distinguishes him from an ordinary dictator, who would not identify with such people. Arendt follows Alexandre Koyré in characterizing totalitarian movements as “secret societies in broad daylight,” with “sword blood brothers” against “sworn enemies.”⁴⁵ But she adds that “Perhaps the most striking similarity between the secret societies and the totalitarian movements lies in the role of the ritual,” the use of “frightful, awe-inspiring symbols.”⁴⁶ Through these diverse but collective methods, the success or failure of the regime becomes irrelevant—all is swallowed up by myth: “In a totally fictitious world, failures need not be recorded, admitted and remembered.”⁴⁷ It is well-known how Arendt’s penetrating understanding has illuminated the inner workings of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. But do her observations about the masses, propaganda, and myth-making have the same relevance to Iran?

Let us recall that at the dawn of the Iranian Revolution, when the time was ripe to establish a legitimate government through participatory constitution-making, it was Ayatollah Khomeini who stepped up to entrench his position as head of administration, as unquestioned leader. The nature of his rise to power is highly significant. “I will appoint the government,” he told the nation with confidence. “I will slap the existing government in the face. I will appoint a government. On behalf of this people, I will appoint a government. I, because the people believe in me.”⁴⁸ Khomeini’s prophetic words, so often laden with repetition and simple assertive assurance, were combined with various other means to produce a kind of enchantment among the population, securing his role, the institution of the *velayat-e faqih*, and the creation of a repressive regime that would force acquiescence at all costs.

The Islamic regime’s ascendancy, Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi argue, would be based on the use of symbols, as “The art of persuasion, successfully executed, is an invitation to a symbolic realm of operation in which identities are defined, destinies articulated, the sense of purpose in life and of meaning in the world suggested and legitimated.”⁴⁹ Viewed in this light, Khomeini was simply an image behind which one could take refuge, an image that made the world trustworthy and easily graspable. Similarly, the use of other

“awe-inspiring symbols” and rituals was pervasive during the nascent stages of the Iranian regime, as the memory of Shi’ite history was invoked through *ta’ziyeh* performances, marches during Muharram and Ashura, and the Karbala paradigm, all referring to the past to give meaning and significance to the present historical movement.⁵⁰ All of this contributed to a myth-making process that had the same effects as those of the totalitarian regimes discussed by Arendt. In Iran, through Khomeini’s evocation of the sacred memories of Shi’ism, “‘Truth’ or ‘lie’ [became] irrelevant.” Under such circumstances, “What matters is the power of convincing that links the signifier, the sign, and the signified together, and with them locks the targeted audience into the grip of the manipulator of the whole act of signification.”⁵¹ Hence we saw in Iran the same kind of self-sacrifice as in totalitarian regimes, exhibited through the glorification of martyrdom and the deaths of countless Iranians during the Revolution and the ensuing war with Iraq.⁵²

Despite the accumulation of connections between the Islamic Republic and totalitarian regimes, however, there are three major reasons illustrating why the former does not fully conform to the latter.

First, the people of Iran were never fully converted to masses in the same sense that Arendt had in mind, never rendered superfluous or completely excluded from the political realm. The most obvious disparity between the regimes is that the Islamic Republic, despite its unlawful imprisonment, torture, and killing of many political dissidents, never established death camps or other mechanisms of systematic elimination resembling those of the totalitarian regimes. For Arendt, these were the tools of total domination, and they exemplified a plunge so deep into the anti-political that it seemed only the complete removal of the regime from power could save the society from self-destruction. As Dana Villa observes, there are no examples of such systems today, “nor do any of the contemporary criminal or authoritarian regimes we know aim at achieving ‘total domination.’ We seem to have moved back from the precipice of ‘everything is possible’ to the more recognizable Hell of ‘everything is permitted’ – to preserve the state, the ethnic identity of a people, or the purity of a religious morality.”⁵³ So while the regime in Iran has manipulated the citizenry and repressed them to a considerable degree by using symbols, propaganda, and other methods, it has never succeeded in either converting them to masses or rendering them superfluous. According to Gheissari and Nasr, even though “the scope of the bloodletting in the 1980–1982 period deeply scarred Iranian society and nudged the budding revolutionary state toward totalitarianism . . . the Islamic Republic justified consolidation of power in terms of providing a public good.”⁵⁴ Hence the people still looked to the government to grant certain rights and freedoms. The interdependence of state and society was different in Iran because here, despite the state’s domination, many social groups continued to have a voice and not everyone fell in line with the ideological indoctrination of the regime. This could be seen in the political activities of many groups, particularly women and students, following the 1978–79 Revolution.⁵⁵ Their protests and ongoing interaction with the government demonstrated their involvement in political affairs, refusing to become completely marginalized, isolated, or ousted from the political sphere. And even though many were seemingly mystified by the myths spun by the revolutionary government, over time they became more and more disenchanted by its ideology, pressing instead for more pragmatic secular solutions for social ills.

The second difference between Iran and any totalitarian regime to date therefore concerns the long-term ineffectiveness of the Islamic Republic’s myth-making. The Iranian citizenry’s transition from blind optimism and obedience to disenchantment and concerted democratic action manifested itself most clearly in the mid-1990s following the election of Mohammad Khatami to the presidency and the accompanying emergence of civil society in the public

sphere. Since then the shift has been plain to see: “In recent years Iranians have sought to alter the balance of power between state and society, subjecting state power to the rule of law while empowering civil society. Less interest has been shown in accommodating the utopian ideals and values of the Islamic Republic.”⁵⁶ As the myths have come under scrutiny and unraveled over time, many groups now comprising a majority of the population have shown that, far from being masses, they are prepared to question the legitimacy of the state and the claims it makes on them.⁵⁷

The third and final difference is that, in Arendtian terms, Iranian civil society is still very much capable of creating new beginnings through a rediscovery of republican principles, and by extension, of forging a new identity. Arendt argues that only a new beginning can lift people out of the stagnation of the past, for “Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man’s freedom.”⁵⁸ Beginning entails creativity, going beyond the old forms through the exercise of freedom in the political realm. By rediscovering the republican roots of their political life, Iranians have evaded the menace of totalitarianism and begun to carve a path toward democratization. To continue down that path, they must be aware of their potentialities and the tools they have at their disposal. Arendt’s relevance in this regard proves particularly valuable, as she allows us to conceptualize new possibilities for nonconformism.

Dissent and Deliberation

Despite her uneasy relationship with theoretical categories and classifications,⁵⁹ Hannah Arendt remains an indispensable figure for nonviolent dissent in modern political thought. Her interpretation of the term *vita activa* places her, as she herself states, “in manifest contradiction to the tradition”⁶⁰ of political theory, and gives her writing an impetus which demands more of citizens, compelling them to participate in the operations of society. This would require those in democratic and nondemocratic states alike to break loose from the confines of *social* existence—housekeeping, economics, material comforts, the designation of jobholders—and take part in the *public* realm, where they could forge more meaningful identities. While she has been criticized for her occasional atavistic tendencies, particularly for invoking the model of Periclean Athens to revitalize it in a modern context, and for her ostensible penchant for theatricality, Arendt nevertheless presents a scathing critique of modern civilization and a call to political action which remains timelessly relevant.

There is a tone of urgency in much of Arendt’s writings, but nowhere does she sound more concerned than in her critique of the modern world presented in *The Human Condition*: “The last stage of the laboring society, the society of jobholders, demands of its members a sheer automatic functioning . . . [which] may end in the deadliest, most sterile passivity history has ever known.”⁶¹ But Arendt remained hopeful in the end that this may be overcome:

Thought, finally—which we, following the premodern as well as the modern tradition, omitted from our reconsideration of the *vita activa*—is still possible, and no doubt actual, wherever men live under the conditions of political freedom. Unfortunately . . . no other human capacity is so vulnerable, and it is in fact far easier to act under conditions of tyranny than it is to think.⁶²

Here, Arendt seems to relegate thinking to a place of secondary importance. Thinking, in her writings, often takes place in a position that is antithetical to plurality and its concomitant “acting in concert.” According to her thorough analysis in *The Life of the Mind*, while “a man indulges in sheer thinking, and no matter on what subject, he lives completely in the

singular, that is, in complete solitude, as though not men but Man inhabited the earth.”⁶³ She instead stresses action as a solution, as a fight against conformism, which is applicable in any place where the freedom of the people and their ability to act in concert is undermined. Arendt’s denunciation of passivity made her a champion of nonconformists everywhere; according to Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, “‘Social nonconformism,’ [Arendt] once said bluntly, ‘is the *sine qua non* of intellectual achievement.’ And, she might well have added, also of human dignity.”⁶⁴

Nonconformism as action did not necessarily have to come in the form of rebellious feats. The reason Arendt considered it an *intellectual* achievement was that it entailed the use of speech and deliberation, for in the lost years of the past, “To be political, to live in a polis, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion, and not through force and violence.”⁶⁵ It is also true that a simultaneous thread of “theatricality” and glory runs through her work. Shortly after her discussion of deliberation, she would go on to say: “The public realm itself, the *polis*, was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (*aim aristuein*). The public realm, in other words, was reserved for individuality.”⁶⁶ This tension in Arendt’s ideas has created an interpretive schism between the “associational” readers (such as Benhabib and Habermas) and the “agonistic” proponents of her thought (such as Honig and Villa). The implications of these readings will be expounded further below, but in light of the relevance of Arendt to Iran, suffice it to say at first that no matter how one acts in the political realm, it is always a fight against normalization and uniformity, for “The monolithic character of every type of society, its conformism which allows for only one interest and one opinion, is ultimately rooted in the one-ness of man-kind.”⁶⁷ Simply put, an inclusive political realm is above all antithetical to absolute, uncontested rule.

Before exploring the aforementioned readings, it is helpful to look to Arendt’s discussion of power in the “cause of freedom versus tyranny.”⁶⁸ The subject cannot be simplified by advocating arbitrary, reckless actions. It is important to clarify *how* to act in concert. Here, Arendt’s emphasis on nonviolence is significant.

The reason we cannot simply advocate a violent revolution, the sudden toppling of a regime, is that if such a theory “arrives at a glorification or justification of violence as such, it is no longer political but antipolitical.”⁶⁹ For Arendt, violence signals a descent into conditions which, instead of ameliorating the detrimental effects of dictatorships, either reawaken them in new forms or even exacerbate them. She emphasizes Aristotle’s point that man, “to the extent that he is a political being, is endowed with the power of speech,” while “Violence itself is incapable of speech.”⁷⁰ The point is to focus on power rather than violence, for the latter “is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues.”⁷¹ Arendt argues that violence is “utterly incapable” of creating power—that “the danger of violence, even if it moves consciously in a non-extremist framework of short-term goals, will always be that the means overwhelm the end. If goals are not achieved rapidly, the result will be not merely defeat but the introduction of the practice of violence into the whole body politic.”⁷² She thereby explains succinctly how violence diminishes the power of those who use it.

Power, the lifeblood of Arendt’s ideas, flows from the heart of her political thought, the concept of plurality. “Power,” she says in many ways, “corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert.”⁷³ It is well known that plurality, the basic fact that “men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world,” is for her “*the condition—not only*

the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam*—of all political life.”⁷⁴ Hence it goes without saying that true power can be generated only in collaboration with others. This is precisely the kind of power alluded to earlier, where Arendt says that “only such power, which rested on reciprocity and mutuality, was real power and legitimate.” But in order to bring this about, particularly when faced with a regime which is exclusionary and repressive by nature, it would seem that some catalyst, some agitator, some *agonist* is needed. It is here that we can turn to the role of individuals, who embody the concept of *natality* and stand as the main representatives of dissent and nonconformity.

So far, two possibilities have been mentioned in relation to Arendt’s models of action: focusing on people on a large scale, acting in concert (this would amount to the associational or Habermasian view, emphasizing consensus); or on individual actors, espousing the expressive or agonistic view. These latter are excluded from the political realm, and become political actors through constant questioning, resisting ideology and refusing to turn into a mass movement; they keep the element of *natality* alive, all the while operating under the basic premise of plurality. It will be seen that both of these models of action are necessary.

The importance of plurality and nonviolence has already been shown, but it is equally important to acknowledge that plurality alone is not enough to ensure the questioning of a political system or a move toward emancipation. As is implied by Arendt’s earlier quote that “it is easier to act under conditions of tyranny than it is to think,” the activity of thinking is under threat where there are no conditions of freedom, and it is therefore possible that actions committed in concert can degenerate into dangerous, thoughtless deeds. Though Arendt has seemingly placed thinking on a lower level than action, she nevertheless acknowledges the former’s value. In *Life of the Mind*, she discusses the importance of thinking as questioning, as the effort of disassembling systems and ideologies, and she shows how this relates to the individual level: “Each new generation, every new human being, as he becomes conscious of being inserted between an infinite past and an infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave anew the path of thought.”⁷⁵ This sounds strikingly similar to her language about the new beginnings, the concept of *natality*, required to overcome totalitarianism and other conditions of unfreedom. For Arendt, dismantling metaphysics becomes an activity that goes hand-in-hand with leaving the oppressive past behind and beginning anew: “Such dismantling is possible only on the assumption that the thread of tradition is broken and that we shall not be able to renew it . . . [this loss] does not destroy the past, and the dismantling process itself is not destructive; it only draws conclusions from a loss which is a fact and as such no longer a part of the ‘history of ideas’ but of our political history, the history of our world.”⁷⁶

Who are the individuals that effect this rupture with the past, this act of dismantling? Are they to be reduced only to her famous “heroic actor” who uses theatricality to gain recognition and self-definition? This interpretation would reduce Arendt’s vision of politics to a “dramaturgic” one in which individuals vie for attention in a very selfish, undemocratic way, and it has drawn a host of criticism.⁷⁷ Arendt tries to defend her theories from allegations of elitism by explaining that those who are the best in political life and show themselves as such need not be confined to a select few. In *On Revolution*, she advocates inclusiveness by saying that, though the individuals who cannot be happy without partaking in politics are, politically, “the best,”⁷⁸ the exclusion of others from politics “would not depend on an outside body; if those who belong are self-chosen, those who do not belong are *self-excluded*.”⁷⁹ In championing thinking individuals who choose to participate in politics, she hoped to extend her vision of those who dismantle ideologies—of those who have the courage to begin anew—to all manner of people who have the capacity and the willingness to uncover and exercise

freedom. She states this in many different parts of her oeuvre, but perhaps most eloquently in the following part of “What is Freedom?”:

What usually remains intact in the epochs of petrification and foreordained doom is the faculty of freedom itself, the sheer capacity to begin, which animates and inspires all human activities and is the hidden source of production of all great and beautiful things. But so long as this source remains hidden, freedom is not a worldly, tangible reality . . . [it] develops fully only when action has created its own worldly space where it can come out of hiding, as it were, and make its appearance.⁸⁰

It is individuals who must bring out such freedom into the public sphere; and in order to emerge from non-political life, individuals must in turn have a degree of bravery and commitment to a cause: “It requires courage even to leave the protective security of our four walls and enter the public realm . . . Courage liberates men from their worry about life for the freedom of the world. Courage is indispensable because in politics not life but the world is at stake.”⁸¹ This further illustrates the fact that Arendt’s heroic actors are not limited to those who simply want attention for themselves. They can be any of those concerned with freedom, those who want to question, to make a change: *nonconformists* or *pariahs*. Jennifer Ring and Lisa Jane Disch have developed this aspect of Hannah Arendt’s thought in a way that has interesting connections to the thread of this essay.

Ring argues that Arendt’s emphasis on both “individualism” and “acting in concert” are equally important, and that the former can be explored in a useful way if we focus on the figure of the pariah. In contrast to the image of the heroic agent reminiscent of Homeric characters, “it is the humble notion of the individual who chooses to speak out rather than retreat to the relative security of his own household or even his own hunger, who constitutes the sustained image of the political activist in Arendt’s work. The Greek hero becomes something of an aberration, while the outsider, the ordinary man or woman, the pariah, steps forth as the more consistently maintained model of a political actor.”⁸² Disch builds on this idea by identifying the pariah as instrumental in breaking down Archimedean thinking and abstract impartiality, the privileged position of those who claim to view the world and speak from “nowhere.” For Disch, the Archimedean norm “has two aspects, both of which carry perverse consequences for politics. It prescribes a model of power as control over others. This power is legitimated, in turn, by a model of knowledge as that which is prior to the ‘human interests’ of a particular time and place. [Arendt] counters this norm with a model of collaborative power and situated knowledge.”⁸³ In other words, Arendt is able to propose a democratic model which neither relies on a detached and disinterested vantage point, nor privileges only particular groups in an elitist fashion: “This redefinition of solidarity opens the way for Arendt to propose a new understanding of collective action, one that draws its energy not from unanimity but from plurality. This is what she is getting at with the metaphor ‘acting in concert.’”⁸⁴ As such, both Ring and Disch show that when approaching Arendt’s work, plurality and individuality are needed in equal measure and, in many ways, co-dependent.

Having surveyed the two principles of plurality and natality, the only remaining condition for a reopening of democratic spaces is *publicity*. This of course is the condition of being seen and heard in public, which requires a space of appearance. Such a space, Arendt states, “comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action,” but “unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men—as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed—but with

the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever.⁸⁵ This perfectly illustrates the current situation in Iranian civil society and the fading of the Green Movement.

The space of appearance in Iran's civil society must be recreated through action if there is to be any hope of a further move toward democratization. In a country where strong authoritarian governments have predominated for a century, the eruption of the idea of civil society in the public debate does not automatically lead to its empowerment. For the time being, Iranian civil society does not have the power to press the state to change through its representatives. That is why the current public debate pertains essentially to the ideological preconditions for the establishment of civil society, which has had a turbulent and uncertain past.

The Iranian civic movement of June 2009 is considered a pivotal moment in modern Iranian history. Initially, the uprisings were against the rigged Presidential elections, but they turned into a national fight for democracy and the removal of the theocratic regime in Iran. The Green Movement became a historic nonviolent struggle for establishing a republican and accountable government. It increasingly became clear that the fraudulent elections had given the Iranian people an opportunity to not only defend what little democratic rights they had but to also attempt to begin laying new foundations for a truly democratic society. Considering the complexities of Iranian society, it is important to highlight the fact that the Green Movement, specifically with regard to its democratic beliefs, did not suddenly materialize within the Iranian consciousness in the aftermath of the fraudulent elections—in the last 20 years, Iran has been on the course of a major political and societal evolution since the increasingly young population has become more educated, secular, and liberal. As a result, this generational gap, though it has its exceptions, has divided Iranian society between conservative and reformist elements and brought liberal ideals to the forefront of political discussions in Iran. The Green Movement was clearly the manifestation of such changing political, social, and cultural attitudes that have been slowly emerging among Iran's intellectuals, students, women activists and overall young population.

While the Arab Spring has toppled regimes across the region, The Iranian Green Movement has by now lost much of its strength and mobilizing capacity. This is empirically evident based on the diminishment of major protests or other mass demonstrations of dissent in Iran since 2009. In its initial stages, the Green Movement was quite limited in its tactics when it was up against the state and street protests turned out to be the movement's main weapon.⁸⁶ Instead, the Green Movement should have enlisted the support of key segments of the Iranian economy, which would have included major industries, transportation and trade unions, government employees, bazaar merchants, and, most importantly, oil workers.⁸⁷ The movement, however, is alive as a potential for civil change, inside and outside Iran, and its leadership has shifted from being centralized to being multicentered, and is effectively represented by all the dissidents now living in exile. Many believe that the Green Movement has lost its unity and its momentum because of the violent crackdown by the Iranian regime. Others would say that it had the potential to accomplish almost anything, though it was held back by the weakness of its leadership. Whatever light we view it in, it is clear that the movement not only managed to impact Iranian politics and culture, but also further delegitimized the Islamic Republic. The protests and demonstrations also showcased the democratic maturity of the Iranian people, who were willing to risk their lives in order to defend the few democratic rights they had.

It is thus evident that Iran's civil society has manifested both the conditions of plurality and natality, but that publicity has been lacking. The argument to be made here is that in

order to open new spaces for dissent and deliberation, further bold undertakings are required. Once again, such actions need not be confined to self-aggrandizing or glorious deeds; they simply have to be courageous actions on the part of individuals and groups who desire freedom. Again Arendt reminds us that “the appearance of freedom, like the manifestation of principles, coincides with the performing act. Men are free—as distinguished from their possessing the gift for freedom—so long as they act, neither before nor after; for to be free and to act are the same.”⁸⁸ Following the trail of the earlier argument regarding the co-dependency of plurality and natality, singular and collective actions must be carried out such that they constitute an *intersubjective* response to the monolithic message of the regime. For one thing, this would mean going beyond the previous strategy of organized protests and expanding to other forms of civil disobedience such as sit-ins and strikes. More importantly, it would also mean reinvigorating civil society through grass-roots political organizations and open engagement in dialogue. Through such mechanisms, it is possible for power be born in the form of promise-making and constitution-building. As citizens engage in contestation and dialogue, their aims, so long as they remain pluralistic and inclusive, could become not only agonistic but also constructive. Having surveyed Arendt’s concepts of power and plurality, it should be clear that such principles serve as very helpful lessons in Iranian politics. One of the main intentions of this essay has been to show that by combining such ideas with the bold actions it has already showed itself to be capable of, Iranian civil society may achieve its goal of creating a more participatory, inclusive public sphere.

Forgiveness, Memory, and Storytelling

To set the time aright means to renew the world, and this we can do because we all arrived at one time or another as newcomers in a world which was there before us and will still be there when we are gone, when we shall have left its burden to our successors . . . it is only in a metaphorical sense that we say we *feel* guilty for the sins of our fathers or our people or of mankind, in short for deeds we have *not* done.⁸⁹

Thus, Arendt summarizes the final haunting truth hanging over the youth in Iran today—theirs is a question of responsibility and not of guilt.⁹⁰ This responsibility hinges first and above all on the idea of forgiveness.

Forgiveness plays a crucial role in Hannah Arendt’s understanding of political action. In *The Human Condition* she claims that forgiveness allows the public sphere to remain both confident and able to move from the past into the future. Forgiveness is perceived by Arendt not only as an opportunity for a new commencement or recommencement, but also as releasing the political future of a society from the results of its past misdeeds. This break with the past, therefore, is an act of freedom that would be impossible without the faculty of forgiving. Moving on from the past—while not constituting a completely new way of thinking—entails a negation of and liberation from past actions. In contrast to revenge and retaliation, the act of forgiving is a way to remedy an action’s predicament of irreversibility: “Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever.”⁹¹ Forgiveness here is clearly linked to a society’s genuine action to free itself from the chain of revengeful attitudes and to re-establish the moral integrity of the public sphere. The individual who forgives is an actor emerging out of his/her forced marginality in order to enter into relations with others based on plurality. In this play of commencement or recommencement lies an act of narrating or

interpreting history without being crushed by the memory of guilt. Therefore, forgiveness is on the one hand a genuinely new and free action, and on the other hand “the miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin.”⁹²

For Arendt, the unforgivable refers to the crimes against humanity practiced by totalitarian regimes. But if “crime against humanity” is a concept initially conceived to characterize Nazi crimes, in what way could it be applied to the Iranian regime? Arendt’s distinction between totalitarian governments and dictatorships hinges on the fact that the latter are not purely criminal, and that if they do commit crimes, these are against open enemies of the regime.⁹³ Her contribution to the concept of crime against humanity and its application in the Iranian context can be explained in relation to her definition of this crime as an attack on plurality and human diversity. Again, what has taken place in Iran is not equal to totalitarianism because it never descended into total domination. Here instead, certain crimes have been committed as tools to achieve certain political goals. This political perspective has not been unique to Iran, but it seems that the extent of violations of human rights in the past thirty-four years brings us to a point to think that justice is important in the transition from a monolithic Islamic regime to a democratic one. This justice cannot be achieved simply by eliminating all the members of a regime which has committed crimes against plurality and diversity.

Forgiveness is the most significant concept that could emerge through the political evolution of Iranian society. When all the offenders are brought to account before the law, forgiveness would counter the trend of violence in such a society; for unlike vengeance, it is not an automatic reaction against pure political violence. The need to forgive arises in Iran, as elsewhere, from our responsibility to the future. In recognizing the indispensability of forgiveness in Iranian political life, we affirm our capacity to come to a shared understanding of what went wrong in the past. Following Arendt, then, we can show that there may be grounds for forgiveness in Iranian politics that could differ essentially from those reducible to the *Realpolitik* of violence. Forgiving for the sake of Arendtian natality is not the same as the forgetfulness advocated by the rhetoric of resentment and vengeance. For if violence wins in the future of Iran, we will simply cease to tell a story, rather than seeking an end to the historical narration that identifies the other as our enemy.

Telling a new story entails going beyond the limitations of narrow, monistic thinking. It is a significant form of resistance that allows individuals to share their perspectives with one another, a way of getting to know more about the unfamiliar. This emphasis on a plurality of perspectives—aside from allowing us to overcome the kind of absolutist thinking which would exact vengeance through violence—facilitates the construction of a home in which individuals feel they are part of the world, creating their own identities rather than being moulded or excluded. As Mahmoud Dowlatabadi’s story reminds us, many Iranians have long felt the need to participate in their own self-creation in such a way and, lacking this capacity, now inhabit an absurd world. Like Kafka, whose stories “force the reader to the fringe by building a fictional world in which the familiar is re-presented in strange, dreamlike, and even nightmarish terms,”⁹⁴ pariahs like Dowlatabadi and countless civil society activists and intellectuals have managed to elucidate the problem of marginality in Iran. According to Disch, who expounds some of Arendt’s most useful albeit largely overlooked insights, such people “who are conscious pariahs, that is, whose audience is not just the dominant society but a community of resisters, may be able to imagine alternatives to its conventions.”⁹⁵ These are precisely the kinds of individuals who must expand the concept of the public sphere, create new democratic spaces, and in so doing overcome the absurd and exclusionary nature of the monological “reality” that the Iranian regime has built.

Storytelling is an important means by which members of Iranian society could identify the basis of their political affinities, but also give an account of what remedy they may propose for themselves. If democracy is supposed to be the cornerstone of the future of Iran, it is essential that differences within the Iranian society be confronted and talked through. Therefore, all stakeholders in the Iranian public sphere should learn to tell their own stories, as well as to listen to those of others. After all, storytelling sustains the promise of participatory democracy based on freedom, plurality, and solidarity.

Above all, the new story that must be told in Iran is one of responsibility. Arendt accounts for personal responsibility in the following way: those who refuse to acquiesce in the crimes of an unjust regime are those who have the “disposition to live together explicitly with oneself, to have intercourse with oneself, that is, to be engaged in that silent dialogue between me and myself which, since Socrates and Plato, we usually call thinking.”⁹⁶ For Iranians, this would mean redefining themselves by refusing to do what is expected of them, which is the same as refusing to support the regime. In her final significant insight which relates to Iran today, Arendt shows that it is a fallacy to look upon the actions of men in criminal regimes as mere obedience, for by not rebelling they in fact tacitly consent—“Hence the question addressed to those who participated and obeyed orders should never be, ‘Why did you obey?’ but ‘Why did you support?’”⁹⁷ To be responsible under an illegitimate government is to refuse to support it, to be a pariah.

If Iranians are to tell themselves a new story about their identity, they would do well to be attentive to their capacity to create power through the exercise of both mutuality and bold actions. Following Arendt’s call to nonconformity and dissent, they could thus shape themselves in a meaningful way by continuing to actively participate in the political realm. Only then could they look themselves in the mirror and see a more cohesive reflection—one that is neither in decay nor imposed by an outside force. And only then could they lay the foundation for a new home over the stubborn ruins of the past, “a house where freedom can dwell,” the place where a new constitution based on deliberation and promise-making can be made.

NOTES

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1. Hannah Arendt, Wolfgang Bauer et al., “Appeal for Peace in the Middle East,” *The New York Review of Books*. June 14, 1973. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1973/jun/14/appeal-for-peace-in-the-middle-east/?pagination=false>.

2. See, for example, “The Jewish Army—the Beginning of a Jewish Politics?” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 46–49.

3. Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution” in *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt, 1972), 228.

4. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, 2006), 8.

5. Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), 265.

6. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 323.

7. Maximilien Robespierre, *Virtue and Terror*, trans. John Howe, intr. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2007), 99.

8. Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 279.

9. Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 112.

10. Ali Shariati, *Religion vs. Religion*, trans. Laleh Bakhtiar (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2010), 35.

11. Quoted in Farzin Vahdat, *God and Juggermout* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 139.

12. Though Shariati and his group of followers were purged and prevented from participating in the making of the state following the Revolution, the ideas he put forward were crucial

to the ideology the regime went on to establish. See, for an analysis, Ervand Abrahamian, "Ali Shari'ati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution," *MERIP Reports*, no.10, "Islam and Politics" (Jan. 1982): 24–28.

13. H.E. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 265.

14. Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 281–282.

15. Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 266.

16. *Ibid.*, 282. *Velayat-e faqih* can be defined as the incontestable rule of the Islamic jurist, deemed legitimate as according to the absence of the Twelfth Imam and the devolvement of authority to the supposed living representative of the true sovereign's word, whom Khomeini deemed to be himself.

17. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 19–20.

18. Quoted in Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 208.

19. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 139.

20. *Ibid.*, 173.

21. *Ibid.*, 174.

22. Ramin Jahanbegloo, "The Two Sovereignties and the Legitimacy Crisis in Iran," *Constellations*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2010): 22–30.

23. There were, of course, some such traces, and this is relevant in the case of persecuted minority groups such as Baha'is, discussed below. See also Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 224.

24. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1973), 292.

25. *Ibid.*, 296.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, 302.

28. One of the more recent and scathing critiques is found in Sheldon Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

29. See, for example, Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), Shirin Ebadi, *Iran Awakening* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2007), Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), and Human Rights Watch, "Human Rights in Iran," (May 31, 2012), <http://www.hrw.org/middle-east-africa/iran>.

30. Nahid Mozaffari, ed., *Strange Times, My Dear: The Pen Anthology of Contemporary Iranian Literature* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2005), 4.

31. *Ibid.*, 7.

32. *Ibid.*, 8.

33. Majid Tehrani, "Power and Purity: Iranian Political Culture, Communication, and Identity," *Iran Between Tradition and Modernity*, ed. Ramin Jahanbegloo (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 188.

34. Payam Akhavan, "The Baha'i Community, Human Rights, and the Construction of a New Iranian Identity," in *Civil Society and Democracy in Iran*, ed. Ramin Jahanbegloo (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 221.

35. *Ibid.*, 224–225.

36. See, in the above volume, Victoria Tahmasebi, "Green Women of Iran," Amin-Reza Koohestani, "A Feminist Agenda for the Iranian Constitution," Haideh Moghissi, "The Other Side of the Quest for Democracy in Iran," and Shadi Sadr, "Women and the Women's Movement in Post-Elections: Double Females?"

37. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 306.

38. *Ibid.*, 308.

39. José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 11.

40. *Ibid.*, 13.

41. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 315.

42. *Ibid.*, 316.

43. *Ibid.*, 364.

44. *Ibid.*, 369.

45. *Ibid.*, 376–7.

46. *Ibid.*, 378.

47. *Ibid.*, 388.

48. Quoted in Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 39.
49. *Ibid.*, 33.
50. These performances were of tremendous religious and social significance, invoking the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and uniting devout Iranians through re-enactments of his story and those of other important religious figures. For further explanation, see Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), especially 97–106; and Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, 170–71.
51. Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*, 306.
52. To make the connection even clearer, the aforementioned authors also state that “readiness for martyrdom was an essential psychological compulsion, fortified by religious conviction to engage in revolutionary acts of self-sacrifice. Khomeini fully recognized the political necessity of this readiness and rhetorically linked it to the most compelling forces of the Shi’i sacred sensibility. The men of imagination from which Khomeini borrowed readily created a sustained atmosphere of shared conviction in which the revolutionary sage and his devoted followers could remap the world,” 276.
53. Dana Villa, “Terror and Radical Evil” in *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 37.
54. Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 96–97.
55. See Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 285–279.
56. Gheissari and Nasr, *Democracy in Iran*, 6.
57. One source which contains a wealth of information on this trend is: Nader Hashemi, Danny Postel, eds. *The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran’s Future* (New York: Melville House, 2010).
58. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 479.
59. This is evident in many critical appraisals of Arendt’s work, but especially in descriptive accounts which try to situate her within particular classifications. See, for example, Maurizio Passerin d’Entreves, “Hannah Arendt,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2006), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arendt/>.
60. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 17.
61. *Ibid.*, 322.
62. *Ibid.*, 324.
63. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt, 1978), 47.
64. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), xv.
65. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 26.
66. *Ibid.*, 41.
67. *Ibid.*, 46.
68. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 1.
69. *Ibid.*, 9.
70. *Ibid.*
71. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), 51.
72. *Ibid.*, 70.
73. *Ibid.*, 44. Consider also her similar point that “Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that then may follow,” *ibid.*, 52.
74. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.
75. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 210.
76. *Ibid.*, 212.
77. See, for example, Sheldon Wolin, “Hannah Arendt and the Ordinance of Time,” *Social Research* 44 (Spring 1977): 91–105; Hanna Pitkin, “Justice: On Relating Private and Public,” *Political Theory* 9 (1981): 327–325; and Seyla Benhabib, “Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition and Jurgen Habermas,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 73–98.
78. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 271.
79. *Ibid.*, 272; emphasis added.
80. Hannah Arendt, “What is Freedom?” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 169.
81. *Ibid.*, 156.

82. Jennifer Ring, "The Pariah as Hero: Hannah Arendt's Political Actor," *Political Theory* 19 (1991): 450.
83. Lisa Jane Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 31.
84. *Ibid.*, 41.
85. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199.
86. Nader Hashemi, Danny Postel, eds. *The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future* (New York: Melville House, 2010), 328.
87. *Ibid.*
88. Arendt, "What is Freedom?" 152–53.
89. Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 28.
90. She expresses the same idea in another essay entitled "Collective Responsibility," arguing further that though the guilt such people feel is not valid, the responsibility rests on everyone's shoulders, for this is "the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our fellow men," *ibid.*, 158.
91. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 237.
92. *Ibid.*, 247.
93. Arendt, "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship," *op. cit.*, 33.
94. Disch, 189.
95. *Ibid.*, 190.
96. Arendt, "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship," 45.
97. *Ibid.*, 48; emphasis in original.

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