

Iran: From Social to Political Change?

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The Revolution of 1979 occurred 17 years—i.e., one generation—after the White Revolution. It was implemented by the “sons” of the Shah, by the people who gained advantage from imperial policy, but, instead of supporting the Shah, they overthrew him. Why? The coincidence between the Revolution and some demographic and cultural facts of 1979 helps to explain the history of this major event. Demographic and cultural facts will also raise questions about the current situation and the possible political changes related to socio-cultural dynamics.

In 1978-1979, for the first time in the long history of Iran, the urban population exceeded the rural, and the literate population surpassed the illiterate one (See Fig. 1). These facts are, of course, a coincidence, but they show that the supporters of Khomeini were young, urban, literate people, and not traditional, rural illiterates, as usually reported by the media. The Islamic Revolution was not a return to the Middle Ages or a Soviet coup. Rather, it was the first post-communist, and the first “Islamic,” revolution, built on a very sophisticated interaction between political, social, economic, cultural, and religious input. This social analysis also points out the gap between the evolution of Iranian society, which kept evolving after 1979, and the political structure and behavior of the Islamic Republic. Is it possible 25 years later, to decipher in the current social situation of Iran, a possible limit or borderline, whose crossing could lead to a political change?

The overwhelming victory of Mohammad Khatami and the reformist movement in the 1997 presidential election shows that a political translation of social dynamics is possible in Iran. The victory of the conservatives in February 2004, however, shows that sustainable political change cannot be based on demonstrations of youth after a soccer match. A deeper social analysis shows clearly that these numerous and active post-Islamist generations are too young now to take over power, even if they hope and are preparing themselves to do so. For the time being, the dynamics in Iran are more social than political, and with the coming maturity of the new generation born after Khomeini, a new and profound domestic political and social revolution may lie ahead. If so, it would be the result of a half-century of dramatic history, starting with the White Revolution of the Shah in 1963, and boosted by the Islamic Revolution in 1978-1979.

In the beginning of the 21st century, the dynamics of Iranian society are becoming ever more evident, and the gap between the clerical state and society is growing wider. Regime change in Iran, or at least a major revolution, can be forecast or hoped for in the near future, making greater

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the temptation of pushing History forward by supporting directly the social dynamics from outside. The misinterpretations of the Iranian situation before the Islamic Revolution may be reason enough to avoid wishful thinking and to look deeper inside Iranian social dynamics. The “sons and daughters of Khomeini” are not the “sons of the Shah;” they are a new generation encountering a truly original political experience among the societies of the Middle East; they are broadly educated, and, for the first time, the female population is also educated and active in the social and cultural spheres. Although ethnic and religious diversity has always been a component of the Iranian Empire and Iranian politics, the question today is this: in these days of globalization and widespread education, is ethnicity still a basic item in national political issues?

The present analysis is based on first-hand geographical and sociological studies conducted on Iran and Greater Tehran by the researchers at *Monde Iranien*¹, in collaboration with Iranian universities and institutions, especially the *Statistical Center of Iran (SCI)*.² Numerous data are used from the 2002 country-wide *Survey of the Social, Cultural and Economic Situation of Families* (later *Survey*) conducted by *Monde Iranien* and *SCI* (nearly 31,000 individual data collected throughout all provinces)³.

Women as Agents of Social and Political Change

The main demographic change in Iran in the last 25 years concerns the participation of women in society, culture, and politics. The increased severity of traditional rules concerning the *hejab* (veil or headscarf), the traditional family code, and the male-dominated social culture are well known and, unfortunately, not entirely new, but the extensive social participation of women in a Muslim society is a historical landmark whose consequences cannot be entirely predicted.

The Decline of Fertility and the Making of a New Generation. Female fertility began to decline in Iran in 1986. This phenomenon also occurred in other countries, such as Syria and Algeria, but in a different context, so that the pattern of the so-called Women’s Liberation Movement, which is gaining ground in Iran, cannot be observed elsewhere. The decline of fertility from an average of 6.8 children per married woman in 1986 to 2.0 in 2004 was more rapid and continuous in Iran than in other countries (See Fig. 2). This profound change in family culture and behavior occurred during the Iraq-Iran war, in a period when the Islamic government encouraged a pro-birth policy. The decline was not limited to cities or to

¹ *Monde Iranien* is an academic group of research scholars working on the Iranian world at any point in time in CNRS, University Paris III, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, and École Pratique des Hautes Études (www.ivry.cnrs.fr/iran)

² The main results of these studies are Hourcade, B., Mazurek, M., Papoli-Yazdi, M.-H., Taleghani, M. *Atlas d’Iran*. Paris, Documentation Française, 1998; Ladier-Fouladi, Marie, *Population et politique en Iran*. Paris, INED, 2003; Kian-Thiebaut, Azadeh, *les femmes iraniennes entre islam, État et famille*. Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 2002; Hourcade, Bernard, *Iran: nouvelles identités d’une république*. Habibi M., Hourcade B. *Atlas of Tehran Metropolis*. Tehran, Tehran Geographic Information Center, 2005 (in Persian, French and English); and online: www.tehran-gis.com.

³ This *Survey* on 6,960 households and 30,715 individuals, headed by Azadeh Kian-Thiebaut and Marie Ladier-Fouladi, was conducted in 2002 in all the provinces of Iran in the framework of a joint research program between the *Statistical Center of Iran* (Tehran) and *Monde Iranien* (Paris). A qualitative survey was conducted in 2003 on a limited sample. The main purpose of the research was to conduct an in-depth study of the social, cultural, and economic problems of the youth and the female population of Iran. The main results were published in Persian in 2003 by SCI as *Amargiri az vizhegihâ-ye ejtemâ’i va eqtesadi-e khânevâr*, 138, Tehran, SCI, 1383. A summary is available in Persian on the web site of SCI (www.sci.or.ir), and in French/English on the Web site of *Monde Iranien* (<http://www.ivry.cnrs.fr/iran>). Individual and household data are available and free for academic use.

educated, prosperous women; the population in rural, tribal, and underdeveloped areas of the country also experienced it. A policy of birth control was set up in 1993, but it had little effect since the new trend was based on the increased education level of the female population. In the 2002 *Survey*, the literate female population had 2.5 children while the illiterate population had 6.5 children. Women with only a primary school education had 2.8 children while those with a university degree had 1.3 children. Ethnic differences appear to have very little influence on fertility. Illiterate Persian-speaking women do not have a higher fertility rate than Lur or Baluchi women. The socio-cultural change can also be seen in family and marriage: the mean age for women to marry was 22.4 in 1996 and 19.9 in 1986. The rate of illegal marriage—women under the age of 15—is also declining: 25.3 percent of married women aged over 65 were married before the age of 15, but only 15.0 percent of women between 40 and 44 years old, and only 9.1 percent of women aged 25-29.

Clearly, a literate 30-year-old woman, who was married at 23, and who has two children, is basically a different individual from her illiterate mother, who was married at 17, and who had seven children born alive and three or four born dead. Such a change in so few years has no equivalent in history. It is impossible to predict the political result of such a social change, but the floor is open for the female population of Iran to become more active in the public sphere since families are smaller and family burdens lighter.

Education and the Creation of a New Identity. The increase in the educational level of Iran's female population, especially in rural areas (from 17.3 percent in 1976 to 62.1 percent in 1996), has profoundly modified the balance of power between men and women. For the first time, girls attend school longer than boys (8.5 years) and, in most educational sectors, girls are more numerous than boys, especially in universities. Since 1996, 9.7 percent of the female population and 9.0 percent of the male population over the age of six have attended university (See Fig. 3). Only 5 percent of the female population above the age of six has a university degree (7.3 for males), but 15.5 percent of the female student population between 15 and 29 attend university (compared to 14.2 percent for males). The *Survey* conducted in 2002 shows an average level of female literacy of 81.2 percent, with a great difference between the population above 45 years (47.5 percent) and below (91.7 percent). Two cultures and societies face each other.

This situation is not unique to Iran, but there the female population uses the cultural, artistic, and scientific spheres to break with social traditions. They use the fact that Islamic tradition supports science and knowledge, even for women, to encourage females to become more active in the public sphere at school or university and to confront male domination of society, especially familial domination by fathers and brothers. If allowed to study through high school and then at university, they can postpone an imposed marriage. Thanks to their advanced level of education, the female population of Iran between 15 and 30 has built up a genuinely new identity. They are able to face the older generation and participate more significantly in economic and global affairs than their mothers' generation.

Women as agents in Iranian society. The number of employed women is still very low in Iran (12 percent), but the increase is three times higher than the increase in employed males in the last ten years. Even if the weight of tradition makes women give up their professional

training and their capacity to be economically active, the increased rate of higher and skilled education will have rapidly visible consequences. This evolution is increasingly necessary because of insufficient low salaries and the need for two incomes in middle-class households. For the poorest sectors of the population, women are very active in the informal sector of the economy and in working at home. This experience is a first step to gaining access to the formal sectors of the economy.

The participation of women in political affairs remains at a very low level, but it does exist. Equality between men and women in national political activities is supported by only 56.7 percent of the women between 20 and 24 (40.5 percent for the women above 65), but 75.9 percent have a favorable inclination towards women's participation in local political activities (*Survey*). A number of women were elected to local councils in villages and small towns in 1999. This higher participation of women in public affairs has had a significant impact on their presence in the public sphere and in the streets, their use of public transportation, and their participation in public activities, all of which had previously been monopolized by men. In this context, the question of *hejab* and of women's public behavior becomes more critical. Only 18.8 percent of literate married women think that housework is a specifically female task, and only 41.7 percent of the illiterate agree.

No one can predict the political consequences the emergence of this newly growing population will have on Iran. For the first time in its history, women have a sustainable role in public activities throughout the country. The strengthening of this culture need not mean a weakening of nationalism or a decline in Islamic values. Dealing with a society where women are more active and have to find their place could produce new challenges and priorities. The making of this new female culture in Iran has reached such a level that reversal is impossible, but restrictive social policies and harsh legal decisions could slow down or delay this process.

Young Adults: The New Revolutionary Masses?

Iran is one of the most crowded countries of the Middle East (68 million people in 2004), on the same level as Egypt and Turkey. The Iranian population is no younger than the populations of other countries of the Middle East or Asia – the mean age is 27, the median 21.5. In 2004, 70.2 percent of the population (52.0 million people) were under 40; and 51.4 percent (35.6 millions) under the age of 25 (i.e., born after the Islamic Revolution). At the same time, Iran's population is quickly becoming older because of the rapid decline in fertility since 1986. The population under 20 was 51.4 percent in 1996, but only 39.3 percent in 2004, and the population 50 and older increased from 11.5 percent to 14.7 percent respectively.

Main demographic data of Iranian population (Figure 1)

	1956	1966	1976	1986	1991	1996
Total population (millions)	18.9	25.8	33.7	*49.9	55.6	60.1
Annual rate of growth (percent)	1.7	3.1	2.9	*3.8	2.5	1.5
Fertility index	7	7.3	6.7	6.3	4.1	2.8
Mean Age	20.2	16.6	17.4	17.1	17.6	19.4
Population 0 – 14 years (percent)	42.2	46.1	44.5	45.5	44.3	39.5
Life expectancy (years)	46.1	50.8	55.9	60.6	61.3	67.2
Age of first marriage (Women)		18.4	19.7	19.9	20.0	22.4

Source: *General Census*, Statistical Center of Iran.

New and Numerous Age Groups. Although young adults who are able to work constitute the majority, the declining minority of elders remain the primary decision-makers. The major demographic issue in Iran is the emergence and coming of age of numerous groups of young adults born after the Revolution who have grown up knowing only Islamic rule. The age group between 20 and 50 is the largest in the country's history (50.3 percent). They are the baby boomers of the end of the Shah's regime, born after the White Revolution and, in many cases, the Islamic Revolution as well. The generation of the "sons and daughters of Khomeini," which has lived only under the Islamic Republic, now comprises the majority of the Iranian population. The members of this generation are important not because of their number, but because they had a unique experience in their lives. They are the witnesses and victims of one of the most radical revolutions of the 20th century, carried out by their parents, and of one of the century's deadliest wars. They were not the actors in, or the protagonists of, the Revolution, and they are not yet in a position to rule the country – only one ran as a candidate in the 2005 presidential election. But the situation will be different in the next election.

While the demographic, cultural, and political identity of these young adults is known, their role within the whole population of the country, and their relations with parents, grandparents, and younger siblings is unknown. The "failure" of the reformists and the disappointment felt about the lack of progress under President Khatami cannot be explained only by the despotism and violence of the clerical authorities. Part of the explanation is also found in the demographic data and specific situations of the three age groups: youth, adults, and elders, each having a specific experience and identity related to the Islamic Revolution. Such a situation does not exist in Egypt, Syria, or Uzbekistan, where the population has the same demographic structure but not the same history.

The generation under the age of 20 is only 32.3 percent of the total population, meaning that Iran is no longer a young country. These people have no personal recollection of the imperial regime, the war with Iraq, or the Islamic Revolution. Their political and cultural background and memory do not include references to the Shah's regime and the myths of Revolution. This third generation of younger people, looking more towards globalization and international civilization than towards the Islamic Revolution, is declining in number because

of the decline of fertility since 1986. As electors they will play a major role, as they did in Khatami's election in 1997, but their political capacity will remain limited.

Ahead of them are the older people of 50 years and more (17.4 percent of the total population). They are seen as guilty of not being able to achieve some form of democracy without overthrowing the Shah and of having easily accepted – or efficiently imposed – the cultural and social demands of the most conservative clerics, especially where the female population is concerned. Most of the top rulers and elite, even in economic and cultural fields, have remained the same since the Revolution of 1979. The young adults are usually allowed to have technical or executive roles under the political control of the protagonists of the Revolution who have the power in their hands, and who of course do not wish to give it up.

New Political Agents Concerned with Nationalism, Islam and Globalization. In 1997 and 2001, the electoral success of Mohammad Khatami was a clear demonstration of political and social change in the Republic, where the legal voting age is 15. This major historical event was the first obvious and overwhelming demonstration of the existence and the demands of the new generation. But this was not sufficient to change the route of the Revolution. Since there is no republican or democratic tradition in Iran, power rests firmly in the hands of people in possession of a specific ideology and the means of political containment, but who also belong to the same generation – that of the “sons of the Shah,” those who toppled the last imperial ruler.

The political and cultural background and identity of the rising generation is very complex. It is not simply opposed to the Islamic regime and open to international culture. The dualistic and simplistic opposition between tradition and modernity is no longer an operating paradigm to understand the dynamics and identities of Iranian society. The new identity of Iran and Iranians is built on at least three main components: Iran, Islam, and international activities. The dynamics of nationalism, Islamism, and globalization all act simultaneously to influence Iranian society and thus none of them can be eliminated.

- *Nationalism is a common and well-known value* strongly shared by the whole population of Iran, regardless of political or cultural background. The most recent examples of the strength of Iranian nationalism are the Iraq-Iran war and the current nuclear issue.
- *Islam is no longer a matter of tradition* after the Khomeini Revolution and the new religious thought developed among many young Iranian clerics. For economic or social reasons, and also to some extent because of ideology, many young adults support the clerical structures of the Islamic state that are now very well-rooted and even quite modern and open to international relations and networks.
- *All Iranian factions want to participate* in the cultural, social, political, economic, and scientific life of the 21st century. Most consider international life and activities as necessities, as matters of fact, and as challenges for a prestigious country like Iran, the second largest oil producer in the world.

In Iran, the debate about the balance of power between Iranian, Islamic, and international issues began with the Islamic Revolution and was experienced by the present generation of young adults. Before them, Islam was traditional and detached from international politics;

Iranian nationalism was more cultural than political and faced international opposition or military actions; and international relations dealt with elites and oil rather than scientific and cultural challenges.

Getting rid of the clerical regime in Tehran is possible, but the new political and social forces in Iran have their own complex identities, experiences, and demands. These identities are formed as a function of time in the context of political struggle. The political attitude of the young adults who are on the verge of becoming decision-makers in Iran is not simple at all and cannot be analyzed through models set up before the Islamic Revolution. The complexity of the present Iranian society could be qualified as "post-modern," not a place where tradition is facing modernity, but where Nation, Islam, and the World are intertwined.

The Conflict of Generations. One of the main conclusions of the *Survey* on Iranian Families conducted by the *Statistical Center of Iran* and *Monde Iranien* concerns the width and the complexity of the generation gap in Iran today. One side is composed of the 50 years and older segment of the population, who knew the Shah's regime and participated in, supported, or accepted the Islamic Revolution; the other side includes the younger generation of adults. This is a distinguishing factor - the younger the people, the wider the gap. The increasing number of people involved and the high levels of education nationwide further widen the gap. In rural families, children now attend school more than three as long as their fathers did in the past. If we add birth control and the influence of information about foreign life coming through transport facilities, radio and, above all, television, then never have differences and problems between parents and children been so deep.

As an example, 37.5 percent of married women 15-20 years old approve of parents choosing a husband for their daughter, compared to 77.5 percent of women 65 years and above. Furthermore, 94.5 percent of literate married women think that discussions with children and efforts to reach an agreement with them is better than using force and constraint.

Educational Gap Between Generations (Years of school attendance) (Figure 2)

	Urban Families	Rural Families
Fathers	4	2.1
Children	9.3	7.7
Percent Difference	133	267

Source: *Survey, SCI - Monde Iranien, 2002.*

Under these conditions, there is little room for violent conflict between generations. Everybody in Iran knows the high cost of revolution, and the necessity of change is obvious for both the older and younger generations. The point is that the natural demise of the older age groups – who have possessed power in all sectors of political, social, and economic life since the 1979 Revolution – will not only be a progressive change in the age of the rulers and managers. It will also be a major qualitative change. When young adults are old enough to rule the country at the top level, the Iranian political and social system will be a very different place, even if the political regime or ideological system remain according to the

current law. The demographic revolution has already been made, and its translation into political issues is or should be in the making.

Ethnic and Geographic Issues.

Iran is a large and diverse country, and the nationwide change that has been described in this essay is not as clear and effective in smaller cities, or among the non-Persian speaking populations, as it appears in Tehran. But, it is clear that even the most remote places of the country are, at some stage, experiencing the same social, political, and cultural dynamics.

The End of the Imperial Model of Ethnicity: Bilingualism and Individualism. The traditional ethnic and religious diversity of Iran is one of the constituent specificities of this country that has been an Empire—and not a centralized kingdom—for many centuries. To a great extent, the unity of the country has been formed by the particular role of Persian language and literature, which was shared by all the elites, even those outside the country (for instance, in India and in the Ottoman Empire). The knowledge of Persian is directly linked to literacy and to education, but not directly to the central power of the Shah or of the Islamic Republic. It is worth remembering that the rulers of Iran used to be Turkish, and that the mother tongue of Reza Pahlavi was Mâzândarâni and not Persian⁴.

Main regional languages (2002) (Figure 3)

Language	percent	Number (000)
Persian	45.5	30, 940
Turkish (Azeri)	23.3	15, 844
Kurdish	6.7	4, 556
Lori	9.8	6, 664
Caspian	8.1	5, 508
Arabic	3.5	2, 380
Baluchi	2.4	1, 632
Turkmen	0.7	476
Others	0.1	68

Source: *Survey SCI & Monde Iranien*, 2002

By declaring all local languages to be legal in Iran and simultaneously establishing Persian as the only official language, the constitution of the Islamic Republic (Art. 15) has made the development of education in Persian easier throughout the country. In 1986, approximately 83 percent of Iranians spoke Persian; by 2002, the number who could speak or understand Persian had risen to 95 percent of the total population. The difference between men (95.9 percent) and women (93.1 percent) is now very small. Even among the less literate populations, such as the Baluch, 76.3 percent of the total population knows Persian. Bilingualism has become a common characteristic of the Iranian population, except for the native Persians (45.5 percent of the total population) who can only speak one national language. The ability to speak the national language is a cultural revolution; it frees people

⁴ Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was the first Iranian ruler of Persian origin since the Buyids.

from their collective attachment to their local language and facilitates migrations outside of lesser-developed areas.

**Evolution of the knowledge of Persian: 1986-2002 (percent of total population)
(Figure 4)**

	1986	2002
Can speak Persian	82.7	90.0
Understand (but cannot speak)	2.7	4.6
Cannot understand	14.3	5.4

Source: *National Census*, SCI, 1986, and *Survey SCI- Monde Iranien*, 2002

Although ethnicity remains strong and alive in cultural and personal identities or in some aspects of behavior, the *Survey* shows that the major social differences are linked to educational level and not to ethnic origin. For instance, in 2002 the average number of children born to a literate woman was 2.5, but the average illiterate woman bore 6.5 children. The figures vary less between ethnic groups, indicating that education is now more important, or discriminating, than ethnic identity, even if the myths and symbols of the past remain strong. Ethnic forces and identities remain a basic component of national Iranian identities in current and short-term issues, but not in a strategic perspective, since the dynamics are new.

Number of children per woman (by regional language and level of literacy) (Figure 5)

Language of the mother	Literate	Illiterate
Turkish	2.2	6.5
Baluchi	2.3	5.8
Kurdish	2.5	6.3
Mâzandarâni	2.5	6.1
Arabic	2.7	5.8
Persian	2.7	6.7
Lori	3.0	6.6
Total	2.5	6.5

Source: *Survey*. SCI-Monde Iranien, 2002

Migration and the Emergence of Provincial Cities. Because of urban migration, populations are shuffled and cultural identities are no longer entirely linked to a specific area of land. There are many more Azeris in Tehran than in Tabriz, and Karaj has become an important city for Kurds. Ethnic issues have shifted from territorial questions, such as the political status of Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, or Baluchistan, to ones concerning culture and population (people of Kurdish, Azeri, or Bakhtyari culture, living anywhere in the country).

The migration of ethnic people from peripheral areas of Iran to the major regional capital cities of the central plateau, such as Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, Tabriz, or Shiraz, is a familiar pattern of change reflected in nationwide ethnic dynamics, but few migrants go any further than necessity takes them. The majority of migrants have gone primarily to the closest city in their native province. Between 1986 and 1996, 63.4 percent of the total migrant population remained inside their province. The rate was 54.9 percent between 1976 and 1986 and 49.5 percent in the previous decade. Even though Tehran receives 60 percent of the migrants coming from other provinces, the population of Greater Tehran (12 million in 2004) is increasing slowly (1.1 percent per year in 1986-1996), while the growth of smaller cities (those with between 100,000 and 500,000 inhabitants) is approximately 5.6 percent per year in the aggregate. These local migrations have profoundly transformed the geography of the provinces located in the periphery of the “Empire,” which are often underdeveloped, rural, and non-Persian. With the very rapid growth of their population, local cities are no longer simply the headquarters of traditional landlords, bazaaris, or tribal families; they are also the places where new residents settle and an educated middle class is in the making. In other words, new centers of political power in Iran are developing not only in Tehran, but in the provinces too.

While the 1999 local elections gave this new elite the opportunity to acquire some political visibility, they did not yet possess the necessary capacity to rule their counties or provinces. Their political ideology is not always very clear. Some with a more politically conservative orientation and good relations with the local population, (due to their backgrounds as engineers or civil servants), were elected to the Parliament in February 2004. Relations between small- and medium-sized cities and villages are now very smooth thanks to the efficient development of local roads and transportation facilities after the Revolution, which facilitated the further reduction of social and cultural differences. Thus, the tendency to focus on ethnic differences or on the dichotomy between urban and rural populations when forecasting political change in Iran is less relevant than it seems.

Tehran, a Capital City for Iran and for the Iranians. Although Tehran became the capital city of Iran under Reza Shah, with the makings of a modern state and a centralized administration, the gap between the capital and the provinces remained deep. The Islamic Revolution changed these relations, since the upheavals and the struggle against the Shah’s regime occurred in almost all the cities and provinces, including Tabriz, Esfahan, and Qom. Through this unity of popular participation in the Revolution, Iranians have acknowledged that Tehran is, without contest, their capital city. In spite of the still very strong centralization of the Iranian political system, the relationship between the center and surrounding areas is no longer a matter of power being projected from the former onto the latter; it is now a bilateral debate between center and periphery. This debate is often difficult, since there are no traditions or institutions able to mediate relations between the numerous regions, ethnic groups, religious communities, local powers, and the State. Nevertheless, the unity of the country is no longer a matter of debate. The main issue for the surrounding populations is their demand of a share in the central power and oil revenues.

Migration to Tehran is much more diverse than it was before the Revolution. For almost two centuries, at least 50 percent of the migrants going to Tehran were from Azerbaijan, and the

remaining 50 percent from mainly Caspian provinces and Hamedan. During the last twenty years, however, the capital of Iran has received migrants from all the provinces, and Azerbaijanis have become less than 25 percent of the total migrants. For the first time, new local elites from Baluchistan, Bushehr, Kerman, Lorestan and the Kurdish-speaking provinces are going to Tehran to live in the capital city, not in the suburbs as the traditional migrants did (Fig. 5). Political issues and debates in Iran have to be evaluated in this new internal geopolitical context. Tehran is now the mirror of Iran, and any event occurring in any city or province is now known and discussed in the capital city. This new relationship between the main regions of the country gives Tehran a stronger position, based on more equal relations, and not only on oil and political muscle.

Everywhere in Iran, individualism has emerged and become a major pattern in current political dynamics, even if collective behavior in the framework of tribes and ethnic groups cannot be neglected. This new trend gives a leading role to the melting pot of Tehran and the large Iranian cities in the making of Iran's political future, in spite of the various provincial ethnic contradictions.

Conclusion: A Global Change in the Making?

Today's Iran has little in common with the Iran that existed at the end of the Shah's regime. The demographic structure of the population and its cultural, social, and geographical characteristics were considered as potentially revolutionary, in diametric opposition to the current dominant trends under the Islamic regime. The Revolution and the changes it wrought after 1979 have been made, but the last stage is lacking – the move to the political field. This is a matter of time. Political and social changes could be implemented in a few years with the coming of the new generation of young adults and the emergence of new regional cities. *The dramatic experience of a revolution is in the minds of all Iranians, and few are ready to pay such a high price again without any guarantee for success.*

The relationship between international and national factors is strong in Iran. International relations may enforce the positive evolution of Iranian society, but some unpredictable actions may halt the dynamics and stop the change – for example, by making Iranian nationalism stronger and thus preventing Iran from opening to the world, an opening which the majority of the population demands. Recent Iranian history shows that Saddam Husayn's invasion of Iran in September 1980 gave the then weak clerical regime the opportunity to ban all political dissent and to build a political system that has survived for more than 25 years.

As for Iran's political evolution, the debate is not over whether change will occur in the medium/long-term. This is quite clearly the case. However, in the short/medium term, the regime may be able to exploit local crises to extend its political life, forestalling a more rapid change. The failed student revolt in 1999 showed that Iranian society was not ready for radical change. During the eight years of Khatami's presidency, young adults had the opportunity to strengthen and implant their ideas, networks, and knowledge of policy-making. They were too young to take top positions, and were only allowed to vote for the older generation. Nobody knows exactly what the political ambitions of these newcomers are. There is no evidence that they will be friendlier to the West, less ambitious or assertive

about Iranian nationalism, or willing to marginalize Islam, but in the coming years, who or what can prevent this rising younger generation from obtaining power?