

4 “Behaves Like a Rooster and Cries Like a [Four Eyed] Canine”: The Politics and Poetics of Depression and Psychiatry in Iran

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We are the *daheh shasti* (the [13]60s, the sixties [1980s]) generation.¹ We are now scattered around the world. We wear colorful clothes but our insides are all black, dark, and depressed ... we want to extract this bitterness from life and show it to you the way Gholam Hossein Sa’edi² did. We are the most screwed up generation.

We are the *Khāmushi* generation, born and raised under those periods of *khāmushi* [lights turned off, silenced, asphyxiated]. We have had no voice. We want to have a voice.

–Radio *Khāmushi* podcast, Tehran, spring 2009

I. Introduction: The Topological Twist and the Traumatic Self

In January 2009, the Ministry of Health of the Islamic Republic of Iran issued a statement that there was too much sadness in the country and that new programs in engineering happiness should be introduced. Of the three differently culturally marked generations born since the 1979 Islamic revolution, a central one, “the 1360s (1980s) generation,” calls itself the “*khamushi* or silenced generation” or “the ‘lights out’ generation,” stemming from its experiences of the bombings of Iran’s cities during the Iran-Iraq War (1980–8) huddled in darkened basements and bomb shelters. Now in their thirties, many are successful professionals. Many have left Iran, but still suffer the psychological effects, manifested in nightmares and other symptoms of generational and transgenerational emotional repressions. Many other well-educated adults are unemployed in Iran (Behrouzan, 2010a). The 2009 underground podcast serial Radio *Khamushi* is one of the media that voice this generational experience.³ Blogs are another of the media used as affective spaces in which shared traumas can be retrospectively recognized and shared, shattering the suffering in isolation and fear of public articulation.

The phenomenological description of melancholia we use in our title is from a much older discursive time, from the famous Persian physician

Ali ibn al-Majusi (d. 982–4), whose medical textbook was studied in Europe as the *Liber Regalis* or *Regalis Dispositio*⁴ and is technically about one particular kind of melancholia but illustrates a poetic power that both articulates the disjunction between public face and private feeling, repeated in the epigram from Radio Khamushi, and draws upon a rich nexus of continuing symbols that every Iranian knows.⁵

The more explicit discourses of “psychiatric selves” that have arisen in the past twenty years are influenced in part by European and American neurology, psychiatry, and self-help discourses (Behrouzan, 2014). We discern successive powerful moments and layers – neurology, Freud, Jung, Tavistock, psychopharmacology, child psychiatry – of Persianized imports from Europe and the United States over the course of the past seventy years. These inflect and alloy with the powerful affective mix of Persian politics. Changing forms of the unsayable periodically redirect, reformulate, and reshape the circulation of affects.

We begin with five types of contemporary nightmare: blocked processing of sedimented anxieties; allegorical affective insults to the body politic causing individuals to feel isolated; the emotional labor and fatigue of stuckness; failures of self-help therapies; and technomusic remixes of wartime songs that recall confused feelings of nostalgia, dysphoria, and anger. Along the way we acknowledge psychosocial analytic readings of Persian cinematic dreamwork, and the history of Iranian psychiatry and self-help movements. In section III we turn to intra- and intergenerational communication across four generations: those born before the revolution with memories of their youthful parts in it; those born between 1965 and 1970 who came of age during the Iran-Iraq War; those born after Khomeini’s 1981 call for more babies to fuel the armies of sacred defense; and those born in the late 1980s and 1990s who are coming of age through today’s Green Wave (*mouj-e sabz*) struggles over the affective structure of the state in the aftermath of the tenth presidential elections in June 2009.

Thirty years after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), in January 2009, and after a decade of allowing small girls to wear more colorful attire to school, with suicide and addiction rates rising, the Ministries of Internal Affairs, Education, and Health announced a need for an initiative to engineer happiness. It is a remarkable admission of the effects of thirty years of unrelenting efforts to suppress public displays of happiness in the name of stoicism or steady patience (*sabr*) to achieve the goals of an Islamic society, which increasingly has deteriorated from notions of social justice (*adalat*) and competence to mere commitment (*ta’ahod*) to a hierarchical structure. Without denying the existence of laughter and joy, psychiatrists worry about the deadening of

affect among many youth who consult them with obsessive adoption of Islamicist self-discipline and complaints of not knowing how to relate to the opposite sex.⁶

In the past twenty years there has been an explosion of interest in psychiatric and psychological discourses on self-help talk shows on radio and television that attract calls from all strata of society, rural as well as urban. The directness of the language used for interpersonal, sexual, infidelity, mental illness, psychic distress, and traumatic relations is of a kind unimaginable twenty years ago, when such subjects would have been indirectly expressed through poetry and philosophical melancholia (Behrouzan, 2010b, 2014).

Any serious anthropological exploration of trauma, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, as well as the rise of new psychiatric discourses of the self in Iran and its diasporas, requires at least three rings of engagement: (i) explanation or causal social analysis, (ii) explication or interpretive cultural hermeneutics, and (iii) psychodynamics or individual and social life histories.

II. Five Kinds of Nightmare

His voice, his tone, the long alarm siren that followed his words, will never leave me. Nothing makes me feel worse than hearing this thing again; it gives me palpitations. And thanks to the Internet, after all these years, I hear it again because some of my friends find it nostalgic and feel they should e-mail and share it with me (interview with 29-year-old Sara, London, September 15, 2009/OB):

<i>shenavandegan-e aziz,</i>	dear audience,
<i>shenavandegan-e aziz</i>	dear audience,
<i>Alamati ke ham aknun mishenavid</i>	the siren you hear now is a red siren of warning

...	...
<i>Va ma'na va mafhoum-e an in ast ke</i>	And what it means is
<i>Mahalleh eghamat e khod ra tark kardeh</i>	leave wherever you are
<i>va be nazdiktarin panahgah...</i>	and go to the nearest shelter

[siren sounds]

– “The Announcement of the Red Siren” during the nights
of Iraqi air attacks on Tehran

Five kinds of nightmares: (i) anxieties that continue to haunt, (ii) allegorical insults to the body politic, (iii) the emotionally exhausting labor of being stuck, (iv) projections and transferences through an emerging culture of therapy, and (v) disorienting “remixes” of contemporary sound tracks with sounds of war, traditional religious chants, and older-generation pop music.

Psychic traumas by definition refuse to be located in time and place and are never grasped and experienced fully at the moment of their occurrences. They actualize in their belatedness, their *Nachträglichkeit*, their recognition only “after the fact.” This temporality is both a mechanism of survival (repression) and of “working through” rather than encrypting, monumentalizing, or becoming trapped within trauma. This temporality is also the connection to history, to the interaction between social causalities and individual resilience. Herein also lies the importance of the unsaid, what cannot be said, like the massacres of 1988, questioning the continuation of the war beyond 1982, lifting and repressing of sexual mores, or intergenerational shifts of sensibility. The burden of the unspoken and the unspeakable does not dissipate when one leaves Iran. It is not simply that the psychic demands of constructing new anchorages in new environments inhibit reflecting upon the past. More important are the painful scars that cannot easily be reflected upon at all.

Here ethnographic and linguistic details become signifiers. Generational slang, or memories of children’s television programs (dark in the early 1980s, more colorful with the late 1980s with shows like *Kolāh Ghermezi* [Red Hat]), create a difference in affective memory for people in their thirties from those in their twenties. These different bodily inscriptions produce frequent situations of nontranslatability across generational fractions. One of these affective marks perhaps is the comment one young Iranian biomedical engineer on the MIT campus made on the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, declining to attend a talk on Iran: “Human rights? Leave these things alone; they make you sad.... I don’t want to think about these things” (December 26, 2008: 00:34:20/OB).

i. Anxieties That Haunt

My imagination was obviously open. Very freaky. I was receiving a lot of information that I did not have the capacity to process.

Still today the repetitive dreams are: I am in massive cinemas and auditoriums, not in themselves necessarily negative, but if something flies over my head – airplanes, balloons, and such – it always crashes. (“Neda,” artist in her early forties)

Neda grew up immersed in daily news reports and weekly television footage of the eight-year-long “Imposed War” between Iraq and Iran and remembers the 1979 revolution indirectly as a young child: “I remember someone had gone to the city and seen a strike downtown, and came back home and said that he had seen a cut off head, and you hear stuff like that.” At the time she had nightmares of a “huge worm that

had eaten up my mother; and my dad and I are marching in the street and mourning.” She remembers her grandmother cleaning up vomit so that the local *komiteh* (“committee” policing fundamentalist “religious” codes) could not see the evidence of a party her brother had given during which another boy had thrown up, and overhearing in the background that the boy had died. “Vomit and illness and all these associations were really horrible. . . . My imagination was obviously open. Very freaky. I was receiving a lot of information that I did not have the capacity to process. And I was feeling very unprotected . . . this paranoia thing. We used to have Sri Lankan maids,” who, she fantasized, were planning to kidnap her at night. There were stories about servant uprisings, recalled also by Goli Taraghi in her collection of short stories, *Khāterehā-ye Parākandeh* (Scattered Memories). Taraghi recalls her own “fragmented memories” that their previously loyal maids and their chef, Hassan Agha, confronted her parents demanding their rights immediately after the revolution, arguing “otherwise, why did we have a revolution at all?”

Neda remembers the headline story in the press at the time of a boy named Mehdi who was kidnapped and found dead in a well. (The name Mehdi is symbolically overdetermined: It is a common name, but also refers to the Mahdi, the eschatological savior, the *saoshyant*, the Twelfth Imam, who occulted himself in a well until the end of time, when he will return.)⁷ Neda suffered many death nightmares including one that her brother, who was at the time studying in London, had died of an overdose of heroin, even though, she claims, she has no idea where at that point in her life she would have learned the term “heroin overdose.” He would die a few years later, but not of an overdose, and not in London. Neda reflects that “death was a major thing, always a major thing,” and still today, while death is not there directly, “there is always this somberness in my art, it is gritty, very real” (interview with Neda, LA, February 2009/OB). Neda’s story is not unique for her generation.

Death is always present for this generation – children during the revolution and during the Iran-Iraq War – but this artist’s anxiety structures are layered also with the anxieties of exile and with still older parental anxieties that children pick up along with the anxieties of the stress of the present: “My mom was sent to England at age six. She too had these abandonment issues, but for different reasons.” Raised in an affluent family forced to flee to England with almost nothing after the revolution (her mother had presciently sold some lands just before the revolution), Neda was sent to boarding school. This she experienced as a second exile from the family, even if it was only for weekdays, and responded with self-invented superstitious rituals to keep her parents alive while she was away from them: wearing the same clothing every day, eating exactly the

same amount each day in between phone calls from her mother. One day her mother failed to call, and she panicked thinking the mother dead. Although she was a good student in Iran, language problems interfered. As many immigrant teenagers report, “When you are twelve or thirteen, you are too embarrassed to raise your hand and ask . . . it was a cultural barrier unless someone had picked up on it and fixed it.” Although she had to repeat some of her O levels, she did go on to university. Around that time, her brother, having suffered a nervous breakdown in America and diagnosed with schizophrenia, committed suicide. She claims that because the brother was using so many medications, she herself avoids medication even when suffering bouts of depression. Her mother “is the opposite: she is from the generation that says, oh let’s take a Valium to go to sleep, she takes everything.” The topic is unbroachable between them. It forms, she says, part of the political and social conscience behind her artwork, which focuses on women and makeup, women and identity, women outside motherhood.

In 1992, Neda returned to Iran for the first time, to visit her parents, who had returned to a quiet and isolated life because they could not afford to stay abroad. “There are still moments when these feelings mix up. When I got to Iran, I was petrified at the airport, everyone had guns in their hands, faces were different, nothing like the Iran I had in [my] mind, and I was so scared. So I go to the window and show my passport. The officer, the scary officer, without looking at me, asks, ‘name? [esm!]’ . . . and he doesn’t even ask me how to spell it! So there was an immediate sense of connection, a spiritual connection with this man I have nothing in common with, and who scares me; but he knows how to spell my name!” Sedimented anxieties reappear not only across generations but in an exile’s fears upon return to a strange and uncannily intimate land.

ii. *Insults to the Body Politic*

In my dream, a bus full of passengers falls off the mountain road into the abyss. Everyone is scared. Some are so despairing they are willing to die.

Sarzamin-e Royāyi (Dreamland), blog of female Tehran University professor⁸

In the blog’s comments section, a number of people say that the bus symbolizes Iran in the same way as the apartment building in the film *Ejareh Neshinha* (“The Tenants,” directed by Dariush Mehrjui, 1986) symbolizes Iran, an enclosed space of marginalization, strife, and repression. More importantly, they see it as a repetition of the 1995 bus transporting members of the Writers Association to Armenia that was

sent tumbling into a ravine in a failed mass assassination. The Writers Association (Kanoon-e Nevisandegan-e Iran) has been under constant attack since the 1979 revolution. Serial murders of members were organized by the Ministry of Intelligence during the 1990s. In 1995 when the writers’ bus went off the road, the writers survived, the plot was exposed, and the incident became inscribed in the public memory as iconic of the state treatment by the Islamic Republic of Iran of intellectual free thought.⁹

A variant of the bus dream is much more disturbing:

I had a dream I was on a bus and they tell us another bus should come and stick to ours for support. The other bus comes next to us, and we go side-by-side, very fast. Then, slowly, the two buses merge. They mesh into each other. Suddenly they are full of cadavers. Piles of cadavers. We have cadavers on our laps. Everyone is wearing olive green, like soldiers, like the *bassejis*. And suddenly there is a boy on my lap, ten to twelve years of age, very thin, I feel his bones, alive, and moving, and I realize, oh my God, there is one person who is alive and I can save him, and instead I am so scared and disgusted that, you know, I just push him away. I keep pushing him away. And I wake up trembling. I love kids. Why did I push him away? Death: I often dream of masses, faceless, death. Occasionally individuals dead, mostly masses and faceless death. Also, I felt stuck on the bus, with the boy, for how long? I feel stuck all the time. Yet the bus is going so fast. Too fast. The speed is unbelievable. We cannot stop this thing. The emotional power of stuckness. (December 26, 2008/MF/OB)

The dreamer, a 31-year-old female who left Iran at the age of 24, is a doctor and now lives in the United States. One could speculate that at a surface level many young Iranian professionals who entered the United States in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks suffered such anxieties because of their immigration status. Given only single entry visas, they were unable to leave the United States without risking their return to their jobs and schools. The émigré feels at home neither here nor there, and the concept of home becomes fluid, liminal, ungrounded. Moreover, like many others she suggests that for participants in youth culture and those from secularized families who were born since the revolution there was already in Iran a sense of internal exile.¹⁰ “I felt like an outsider when I lived in Iran; we were the ‘other’ all the time, the ‘*degar-andishan*’, the secular ones, the bad ones.” Moreover, she insists almost obsessively, since this is well known, “There is an abundance of literary work and poems on the concept [of estrangement, of internal exile], from the classical poetry of Hafez’s ‘*man az diar e habibam na az belad e gharib*’ – whose lifelong struggle with censorship and religious authority made him the ultimate ‘*rend*’ [rogue, carouser] – to that of recent poets such as Ahmad Shamlou and Akhavan Sales.”

It is to the contemporary context of the dream that one of us (OB) draws attention, the emotional stuckness, of the diasporic but unsettled, neither émigré nor immigrant, status, rather than to the bus or the war surface content. It is the acceleration, the speed, that stikes the other of us (MF), an image of being stuck in a slowed time warp, while both Iran and the diaspora worlds speed on, leaving the dreamer hanging in between.¹¹ This is the most figural of three dreams reported by this dreamer (see next section) and seems the most disturbed and disturbing, working, like Ibrahim Hatamikia's *Ruband-e Germez (The Red Ribbon)* on a figural emotional level rather than a cognitive, linguistic one. In *The Red Ribbon*, three individuals, differently deranged by the war, have to learn to interact despite their disabilities and miscommunications. In the bus dream, natural emotion (love for children) is disturbed, becomes fearsome, and is abjected; the divisions between the dead and living dead are blurred; one is stuck in a world moving too fast, too fast to gain any sense of grounding. If modernity is grounded in the thrill of speed, here (post)modernity speeds out of control, leaving the dreamer caught, stuck, disempowered.

iii. *Exhausting Labor of Being Stuck*

They both smile, but behind them, instead of the flowers and trees, I see airplanes raining down bombs on the house. Everything is sepia and dark and dusty. I take my eye from the camera and look over it, and all is the garden again. (31-year-old female doctor, 2006)

The same dreamer sees President George W. Bush and his wife. The year was 2006, when talk of a probable United States attack on Iran's nuclear facilities was in the headlines. "They are in our house in Tehran. My parents are going out of their way to be hospitable. We are in the Vanak house where I grew up. It is summer. We are sitting by the swimming pool in the beautiful garden. I am pissed off that my parents are so kind to the Bushes. As if they don't know why they are here. Then they suggest we go on a boat in the pool (we don't have a boat). The couple go on a boat and ask me to take a photo for them. I take the camera and look through the lens. Shocking! They both smile, but behind them, instead of the flowers and trees, I see airplanes raining down bombs on the house. Everything is sepia and dark and dusty. I take my eye from the camera and look over it, and all is the garden again. I look through the lens again. I see airplanes. They keep smiling. I am terrified, but no one else can see what I see. This was one of the most horrifying nightmares I ever had" (July 6/OB). The dream recirculates the filmic device of Mohsen

Makhmalbaf’s *Arusi Khuban (Marriage of the Blessed, 1988)*, in which a disillusioned war photographer sees the contrast between the egalitarian promises of the 1979 revolution and the corruption of the postrevolutionary period with new elites living well, while poverty increases. Each click of the camera shifts time between past and present. The fear of an American attack on Iran was pervasive in 2006 under President Bush’s belligerent stance, merging in the dream uneasily with both the imagery of Iraqi bombs falling on Tehran and the good feeling and diasporic relations between the Iranian middle classes and the United States with the ironic wish/denial that the United States intervene in Iran.

Another dream from a young male Iranian circulated online in blogs barely transposes everyday anxieties of being stuck between worlds, trapped by single entry student visa to the United States, unable to predict whether if one travels home or even on a research trip to London or Paris the visa will be renewed. Just after the election of President Barack Obama in which Iranian Americans expressed an unprecedented excitement and participation, this dream was posted and circulated through linked blogs: “We were talking, he and I. He was very nice. He asked me why I am sad. I said, ‘President Obama! Do you remember when your grandmother was ill and you flew to Hawaii?’ He said yes. I then said, ‘You know, we all have grandmothers who are getting old, who we love so much, but we cannot see them before they die.’ He looked at me and extended his hand to me and pointed to my passport. I gave it to him. He opened it and wrote something in it, then handed it back to me, and smiled and said, ‘You are all set’ (last phrase in English).” (November 2008/OB)

A 28-year-old engineer in Cambridge, Massachusetts, says he has recurrent dreams about his grandmother’s house in Ardebil, a small city in the province of Azerbaijan, where he lived until age 9, when his family moved to Tehran. Ardebil remained intact during the war. For him, the grandmother’s house is the only safe home in his dreams. “I dream a lot that I am back in Iran, and cannot get a visa back to the US, and I am stuck, in our Tehran house.... I dream that I am back in my grandma’s house, which I love and where I long to be. But once there, I feel awkward. I want to get out. But sometimes, I feel happy. I feel it is mine again, and that makes me happy” (March 2009/OB)

He has another recurrent dream, a common anxiety about exams and schooling, exacerbated by the fear that failure in the high-pressure, highly competitive, exams could result in being sent to the war front. It is about failing the national university entrance exam (*konkur*), “that sick and pathological competition that fucked up our minds and souls.... In my dream, I am a PhD student, but I still have to take the *konkur*

[national exams for university admission], I don't know why. And I fail. The anxiety takes my breath away. It is horrible. Sometimes, the place where I am taking the exams, is bombed." The anxieties of the past merge into the anxieties of a present when he too, like many of his generation, asserts "that war never ended. It never will" (March 2009/OB). These themes – war, exam anxiety, home – are repeated by many others in strikingly similar accounts. More importantly, it is the way the dreamers link their dreams to historical and generational traumas that makes them function as dreamwork, either repetitively producing anxiety or occasionally allowing some "working through" into acceptance if not quite resolution.

iv. Projections and Transferences

Exiles (*avareh*), says the psychiatrist-writer Gholam Hossein Sa'edi, are different from migrants (*muhajir*). . . . *Avareh* feel themselves paralyzed or suspended in an unreal limbo or purgatory (*barzakh*) unable to move forward into a new life, unable to return to their roots. (Fischer and Abedi, 1990, pp. 253–5)

It seems sudden and new, a fad of the last fifteen years, in both Tehran and California: the passion for therapy and self-help and for television and radio talk shows about one's psychological and relationship problems, about addiction, domestic abuse, and depression. In the 1980s, although depression was recognized among Iranian exiles in California (Good, Good, & Moradi, 1985), therapeutic discourse was also found to be restricted in Persian and somewhat easier in English (Lotfalian, 1996). In Persian complicated taboos inhibited, and lexemes for taboo subjects were not available; both were easier to negotiate in English as a foreign, second, nonfamilial, nonintimate language. Acting out psychological distress frequently took the forms of divorce, spousal murder, self-immolation (often covered with political overtones), and even a dramatic hostage taking. This last, near the Berkeley campus, was deciphered by Lotfalian (1996) as an infiltration of deforming and demeaning media stereotypes processed through the disturbed discourse of an individual in extreme distress.

With the growing popularity of therapy and self-help culture in both Iran and its diasporic community in southern California (where more than twenty-eight Iranian TV channels that also had audiences inside Iran were based), dreams have entered the popular discourse of Iranians in ways different from traditions of religious visions and interpretation, more attuned to displacements of complicated manifestations of traumatic or exilic pasts, as well as more obvious stress and anxiety. Talk shows and celebrity psychologists took hold in the 1990s with public talk

of family dysfunction and other psychosocial mental health problems. That films and television soap operas paved the way, and that most Persian language self-help books are translations of American ones, can obscure the history of psychiatry, psychology, and self-help movements in Iran.

One of the more important of the self-help movements in Iran is Parvaresh-e Nirooha-ye Ensani (Training in the Skills of Being Human, PANA) founded by Belgian-educated Ebrahim Khajeh-Nouri and continuing in Tehran today.¹² Its vocabulary has been taken over by the celebrity psychologist Ebrāhim Holākoui in Los Angeles, whose talks can draw audiences of a thousand or more and who is but one of a generation of immigrants who have found new professional careers as psychological counselors. The discourse, the vocabulary, of PANA includes *mehr-talabi* (hunger for compassion, for acceptance) and *pishraft-sanji* (evaluating one's progress). In the decades after the revolution Ebrāhim Khajeh-Nouri's legacy was continued by his students, who created a training curriculum for group leaders or teachers (*ostad*). Two hour sessions in Tehran occur in private houses, rotating among members of a circle. Attendees are mainly women, but there are also sessions for men, for children, and for couples. The first hour is a discussion of concepts: the art of forgiveness, of telling people why you were upset by something they did, emphasizing the “I feel” rather than “you are a bad person” or “you did this to me.” In the second hour, participants share their experiences of the past week and how they had practiced the concepts, for instance, forgiving their husbands. This is called *pishraft-sanji* (evaluating progress by reviewing the actions of the week in accord with the PANA concepts). Participants share success stories. There are tea and sweets. The socializing creates good friendships and support networks.

PANA in a way is the opposite tactic to that of psychoanalysis: It avoids the hurt, and rather than digging deep, it teaches letting go, making situations look good, not struggling with repressed emotions. This is the strategy adopted also by Farhang Holākoui and other self-help gurus, both Iranian and American. Holākoui acknowledges his own dilemmas. He was a Baha'i, and so while he loves Iran and wants to contribute and ideally go back to Iran, he cannot. His two California born sons, he says, speak Persian to him and are “totally Irani although they have never been to Iran.” But then: “My kids love LA and don't want to go anywhere else.” Still, he insists to make the point, “all their friends are Persian, all fifty of their friends,” deploying one of his frequent numerical emphatics, a gestural rhetoric not meant to be taken quite literally. Presumably the Iran to which his sons cathect is his Iran, not the actually existing Iran today. A couple of his closest friends were executed in Iran, one on the

day Holakoui's younger son was born and after whom the son then was named. He admits, "It has been very hard to cope." Outwardly a very successful man, he changes the subject when PANA in Iran is mentioned, (interviews, LA, February 2009/OB). Perhaps it is not just a desire to project a singular genius without predecessors, but more symptomatically a denial that his picture of Iran is often dated, dependent on people in Iran who call his radio show and present their personal cases detached from social context. There is a tendency to create an image of Iran, through these cases, as a disturbed and maladjusted society, not unlike the rhetoric of Los Angeles Persian language television in the 1980s, described by Hamid Naficy (1993). Indeed women-marriage-and-family therapists at another well-known therapeutic establishment, the Personal Growth Center, with three satellite locations in southern California often talk about the way in which Los Angeles culture of the first generation migrants who arrived at the time of the revolution is often frozen in the Iran of the 1970s, constituting a unique subculture that exists nowhere else.¹³ The center's founder left Iran at age 13 with her mother after the revolution and was forced by her mother, a former television anchor in Tehran, to read the Persian poetry of Hafez and Sa'edi every night (and be tested). As rebellion, she jokes, she told her mother, "OK, I'll read Hafez for you, but Iraj Mirza for myself." Iraj Mirza, a Qajar prince, was a late nineteenth-century poet whose satirical poetry and prose are full of sexual references, mocking religious dogmatism and traditional Iranian values. Another of the therapists is a well-known pop song lyricist, and while she observes that lyrics (*taraneh*, using colloquial Persian) are given less status than formal poetry, one wonders whether the *taraneh* do not provide as much entry into therapy as the poetry on which Iranians claim to model their – philosophical and saturnine – emotional dynamics. Pop music from Los Angeles, as well as now rap, rock, and hip hop from Tehran, has become the coin of a transnational Persian youth culture; the former speaks of love; the latter of rebellion and demands for telling things as they are.

While there is faddish cultlike behavior around some of the self-help movement, there are also pragmatism and cynicism among a public long accustomed to not accepting matters at face value. A former Tehran University medical student, now married in Los Angeles to an engineer, gushes about Holākoui, "He saved my life. When I got here, I was home-sick and all ... I would have gone crazy if it were not for Dr. Holākoui and his programs" (M, LA, February 4, 2009/OB). Holakoui's charisma is palpable. A handsome man in his sixties with salt and pepper hair and gray eyes, he is a consummate verbal performer. His voice is strikingly beautiful. His choice of words is both sophisticated and fun. He peppers

his speech with jokes and anecdotes drawn from his radio shows. He has numbers and statistics for everything, even if most are made up: “Twenty percent of people in Iran are depressed but only half of them seek help.” He has, says a local Westwood, Los Angeles, bookseller who carries his books, both *hafezeh* and *lafezeh* (the gift of memory and a silver tongue, respectively). He is very smart, but “you know, at the end of the day, he is an *akhund* [preacher]; he was a Baha’i missionary-*akhund* before they kicked him out” (interview, LA, February 2009/ OB). There is something important about all these terms – *hafezeh*, *lafezeh*, *akhund*, *Baha’i*. Baha’ism not only is a modern reform movement that began in Iran in the mid-nineteenth century; it promotes an ecumenism that sees similarities in all the world religions’ moral codes and says becoming Baha’i does not entail rejecting one’s previous religion, only understanding it in more universalistic terms. An *akhund* is a preacher. In Iran, the role of *akhund* is both admired for its skill in orchestrating emotional moods and its rhetorical powers, and at the same time (as in Plato’s rejection of sophists) cynically viewed as a business (*dokan-e mazhab*, shop of religion) and purveyor of empty moralisms. So too, of course, are many California-style self-help gurus. Still, self-help has been a powerful movement from the Norman Vincent Peale (also a religious figure, a Protestant preacher) power of positive thinking, enrolled by the advertising industry, to various therapeutic protocols (the twelve step programs in Alcoholics Anonymous and its Narcotics Anonymous offshoot in Iran [Erami, 2009]), and more recently the evolution of executive and life coaching (Ozkan, 2007).

A 2009 Holakoui event at UCLA attracted a sold-out crowd of more than a thousand. He made a majestic entry – late, of course, and after the hall was packed. People ran toward him, from one end of the hall to the other, to greet him. He barely deigned to return greetings. He walked like a king visiting one of his provinces. This event, organized by UCLA students, is unlike other of his talks: There are a lot of young people here. There is a lot of makeup, hairdos, designer suits and dresses. Young people walk in pairs, with their friends, checking out others, throwing seductive looks at the other girls or guys across the room. To do this they promenade the hall, even crossing paths. Girls almost catwalk, in very high heels, looking away when you look at them. Parents introduce their children to one another in hopes of striking marriage interest. Beginning an hour and a half late, the talk goes on and on, with an intermission only at almost 10:30 p.m.

Holākoui is but one of a generation of immigrants who have found new professional careers as psychological counselors. There is an “elective affinity,” Max Weber might have said, between their pragmatic need

to earn a living in a new society where previous professional qualifications may be hard to reestablish and their own psychological need to be recognized as cultural translators, both for their own self-esteem and for recognition as father figures for the insecurities and feelings of loss and meaninglessness of fellow migrants. There is simultaneously widespread skepticism toward the Iranian therapy offerings in Los Angeles. The bookseller, a former leftist who now owns a bookstore on Westwood Avenue in Los Angeles, acknowledges both sides, the con-man actor and the taboo-freeing healer: “You know, in this city, no one has identity, all the *motrebha-ye khaiboon Cyrus*” [“buskers of Cyrus Street,” an idiom from early twentieth-century Tehran] are now here. And they look for a cultural identity. They are lost. They are fake, full of *pedar soukhteh baazi* [charlatanry].” He names television personalities and political pundits. He goes on: “They go to this or that college and pay and get a one year certificate on *moshāvereh* [counseling] and then they practice as *ravanshenas* [psychologists].”

And yet, Holākoui with his great skills of *hafezeh* and *lafezeh* is “like a *nishtar* [scapel] for the infectious cysts of this society; he releases the pus, so he is doing something” (B interview, LA, February 2, 2009/OB). A physicist and another therapist concur: Holākoui is not practicing therapy, but he has broken a taboo and popularized the concept of therapy and created a discourse. That itself is a contribution (F&AN, LA, February 4, 2009/OB). He breaks taboos of silence about sexuality, interpersonal relations, marriage and divorce, alienation, addiction, and so on, and allows people to live more freely. He represents the loss that people feel but do not want to forget. He is a father figure, with all the comfort and failure to think for oneself that father figures impose.

v. *Technoremix*

New CDs of Kuwaitipour now with gray hair, with headphones on his head like a pop star ... remixed with like “oops oops” ... [and] with keyboards. It has become a hip thing, the Ashura night ... black make-up, black nail polish, very hip (D&OB interview, LA, February 2009)

“I dreamt I was dead: people were wearing white, people were lost and wandering.” “I dreamt I was running in a Metro tunnel and the train was chasing me like a missile.” “I dreamt it was the day of resurrection.” “I dreamt about the man in the chocolate cloak [i.e., President Khātami: *mardi baa abaye chocolati*].” “I dreamt about the Imams and the Prophet.”

“I had a dream that we were all in high school, and suddenly a group of people broke in with guns.” “I dreamt of my twenty-first birthday when the *komīteh* [morals police] arrested me and my boyfriend; they treated

me like a whore. Instead of wanting a bribe, the *komiteh* guy wanted me: it was horrible.” “I dreamt Bush attacked Iran; the sounds were those of the Iran-Iraq War.” “I dream a lot about air attacks.”

There is an abundance of dreams reported by Iranians aged 25–35, filled with war images. There seems to be a rich reservoir of images and sounds recorded in the minds of the then-children whose experience of the war ranged from immediate destruction and bombing, to subtler resonances of the war in children’s programs on TV, extracurricular school activities, radio shows, soap operas, slogans wishing death to the Imperialist West they had to practice at school, mobility of exiled peers to and from schools in different cities, anthems and dirges (*nouhehs*), sermons (*khotbeh*) to be reported on for school, and a wide range of visual and auditory input carrying Karbala paradigm concepts and war-related meanings.

“The war never ended,” says a 32-year-old female Ph.D. student. “It stayed with us. In our dreams, In our collective memories that would make sense to no one except ourselves. It never ended if you ask me. We internalized it. And yet we were the lucky ones, children of Tehran. Tehran remained intact except for the periods of city bombings. But no Iraqi set foot in Tehran. We only got to see the destroyed buildings, the dust and rubble left after each attack, the hasty phone calls after the all clear siren, to see which relative’s house was damaged, to see who was dead and who was alive. At that age, you only know that when the red siren goes off, you have to run to the basements, to the shelter. That’s all you know. There were nights where the entire family was sleeping in the basement; in one room. It was so much fun. My grandma would bring lots of snacks and candies and nuts. We would play. It felt as if we had a tree house like in the movies. Lots of imagination was at work I suppose, you see, I was only eight” (OB, 2008/MF).

Fear is intermixed with childhood memories of warmth and pleasure. A young male Ph.D. student recalls, “At the age of 7, I knew the meaning of death. I knew that after that siren goes off – oh, the bloody siren, it still makes me want to puke – but we knew that after that moment, we might die. The house might not exist after a few moments. But still, we were living our lives. People would have weddings and birthday parties disrupted by the sirens. Then they would go back upstairs and continue dancing. It was not like what you see on news footage. We had a life. We too, have childhood memories filled with Cinderella and spaceships you know. But I think we are older souls than our peers in the West. We were too close to death at a very young age, without even knowing. They took away our school playground, and in its place they built a [bomb] shelter. There was construction as long as I remember elementary school, and

we had nowhere to play. I detested them for doing that” (R, Cambridge, March 2009/OB).

“We all share a fucked up history,” D says. She is commenting on a Persian blog with a post about the children’s program series from the 1980s called *Chāgh o Lāghar* (The Fat Man and the Thin Man). It was the story of two SAVAK detectives¹⁴ who consistently failed to block revolutionary activities in the 1970s. There was particularly a 10-year-old boy they could not defeat. The actors wore puppet masks and it aired during the first ten days of February, the annual celebrations of the victory of the 1979 revolution. The blog post shows a photo of the two detectives and directs readers to three YouTube videos of the program. The post itself reads, “It has been a long time that I have buried them in my unconscious. The stupid detective pair we knew from Channel 2 (when the country only had two channels, with only two hours of children’s programs per day, always interrupted by the call to prayer and the prayers that followed). This was the special program for *daheye fajr* [the ten days of the month of Fajr (February)]. Today I found three videos of them on YouTube. When I shared it with others on Friendfeed, I received very interesting comments back. Half said they used to be scared of the detectives. Someone said he always wondered why they had human hands (in white gloves) but doll heads. I never had a good feeling about them. The truth is that the feel of most of the cartoons we used to watch was very gray, very gloomy, filled with misery and misfortune. All we knew was orphans who had either lost their mother or father and spent their lives searching for them. Indeed almost all cartoons were about finding a mother who was often in fact dead. And at the end of the day, they never found anything. All the cartoons we watched were filled with ideology: that this world is nothing but misery, and you children are no exception, lest you think there can ever be a happy life awaiting you. This is who we are: the envious generation. We envied, and we envy, and envy, and envy.”¹⁵

Of the 35 comments on this post, most talked about fear and how gray and somber everything was. Some recalled other cartoons: *Hāch* (the bee looking for its lost mother), *Hana* (the farm girl who had to work hard for her living), and *Nell*, the saddest of all with sad music and gloomy colors that turned Paris into a dull village. Nell looks for her mother, who is said to have gone to the city called “Paradise.” OB remembers when she was about seven, she got excited when she recognized the pun and that “paradise” meant heaven in English. At the end of each episode, Nell’s grandfather would arrive in a carriage to pick her up. His face was invisible; he had long gray hair and a beard. The music made you want to cry. Then there was the show *Ali Koochooloo* (whose father was away at war so he was the man of the house; the images dark and dull); *Pesar-e*

Shojā’ and *Ramkal*, both stories about orphans. One brighter comment said, “I used to love the detective pair: I loved their old Jian [the Persian name of the Citroen 2VC or deux cheveaux]¹⁶ which was colorful and could fly; I was a boy fascinated with cars back then.”

The blog stimulated other memories, and D talked about the slogans students had to shout in the morning. From 7:00 to 7:30 a.m., they would line up in queues, listen to the Qur’an, shout slogans, do exercises, and then march to class. Amid the slogans of “death to” (death to Amrika, to Israel, to Englis [England], to ‘anti-*velayat-e faqih*’ [the opponents of the doctrine of the guardianship by the theologian], to the imperialist [hardly knowing what the word meant]), “the creepiest slogans,” she recalled, “were the ones that came after morning prayers: ‘*khodāyā!* [oh God! protect the revolution of the twelve imams, protect Imam Khomeini until the reappearance of the Mahdi]’ and ‘*khodāyā! az omre man behah o bar omre rahbar afza* [oh God! cut off years from my life and give them to extend the years of life of the leader!]. “How on earth would you make a 7-year-old pray to live a shorter life so that the 1,000,000-year-old Khomeini should live longer? One can only laugh. No wonder we are all fucked up” (D, LA, February 2009/OB).

YouTube and blogs provide ever-present availability for reviving sounds and images, increasingly remixed with new accompaniments or contexts. One of the most famous voices of the war was that of the singer Kuwaitipour, who sang the *nouheh* (lament), *chang-e del ahang atash mizanaad-naleye eshgh ast o atash mizanaad* (my heart’s melodia is playing the song of fire; it is the song of love and it burns all). The beautiful poetry in the form of a long *qasideh*, mystical in content (*erfani*), performed in the singing style of religious *nouheh* (laments), worked many youths into a state of willingness to charge across minefields (as “cannon fodder” to explode the mines for infantry following behind, so as not to waste expensive tanks). On the nights of each of the *amaliyāt* (military actions, attacks), there were rituals, they sang together and they reached this *hal* [state of ecstasy] and they just went, these teenagers. This is when they are said to have been given keys to heaven in the event they should become martyrs. Many young Iranians abroad have access to Kuwaitipour on YouTube and listen to it nostalgically. For slightly older Iranians the recirculation of the sound of Kuwaitipour’s *nouheh* evokes painful nostalgia. They blame Kuwaitipour for contributing to the deaths of thousands of teenage boys on the battlefield. Still, the beauty of the poetry and the sound of the *nouheh* remain deeply moving. “Of course I know it [Kuwaitipour’s *nouheh* renditions]; I listen to it on YouTube,” a 20-year-old tells a surprised 30-year-old, who thinks of the younger man as being too young to remember.

There are also video clips of interviews on the battlefield with teenagers. “And they talk; they are thirteen, fourteen, and they are talking about, you know, how nothing matters but what the Imam says, and if he wants me to be here, I should be here. It’s just crazy. And these whole interviews are in the form of *nouhehs*; they just turn into *nouhehs*.¹⁷ I don’t know how to put it, but there is a lot being done with this music, and also the music in the cities that we grew up with in school, on TV, everywhere, now it is being recycled and remixed. There are new CDs of Kuwaitipour now with gray hair, with headphones on his head like a pop star, and they are remixed with like ‘oops oops’ because these are very rhythmic. Except back then there were only drums, and now they are remixed with keyboards. And they are sold on the streets.

“So if you go to Tehran on an Ashura night (memorializing the death of Imam Hussain) which is now turned into the Husain party – you know about the whole Hussain party thing – so it has become a hip thing, the Ashura night. Young people go. There are certain spots, Meidan Mohseni, Andishah, and certain other neighborhoods. Young people go there; they wear black. Black is the color of Ashura, traditional *dasteh*, groups of young men chanting dirges about Husain and beating their chests or swinging *zangir* (chains) onto their backs, wearing black shirts. Here young people also dress in black, but they have black makeup, black nail polish, very hip [MF: almost Gothic]. Almost Gothic. But it is also like a meat market, so people exchange phone numbers and everything, and then many really luxury cars are just basically racing in [the neighborhood called] Shahrak-e Gharb and other places. And the loud music is this, except it is techno now” (OB, December 26, 2008/MF). These dreams and figurations in their variants, displacements, and repetitions circulate like jagged-edged and turbulent shards across the generations of children born after the revolution and across the gaps between parents and children.

III. Intergenerational Transfer

saroomad zemestoon
shekofteh baharoon
gol e sorkh e khorshid baz oomad
o shab shodeh gorizoon
kooha laleh zaran
laleh ha bidaran
to kooha daran gol, gol, gol,
aftab o mikaran

The winter is over
 The spring has blossomed
 the red flower of sun is back
 and the dark night is running away
 The mountains are covered with tulips
 The tulips are wide awake
 In the mountains flowers, flowers, flowers
 and “the Sun,” they are planting

(Leftist song refunctioned by
 Mir-Hussein Mousavi campaign
 May–June 2009)¹⁸

In the contested June 2009 tenth presidential elections and its aftermath, something dramatic happened. Youth and their parents joined in the mass demonstrations of June and July 2009 against the manipulation of the tenth presidential elections.¹⁹ It was a moment of reconciliation (*āshiti*) between generations who had been unable to speak.²⁰

In the streets, parents and children refunctioned slogans and songs from 1979. A leftist song used by Mir Hossein Mousavi’s campaign for president at first outraged leftists and secularists around the world, who accused him of hijacking a song for which many had been executed during his prime ministership in the 1980s. A month later, when Mousavi proved a courageous leader who stood by the protesters after Khāmenei declared Ahmadinejād the winner a few hours after the election polling stations closed, many leftists willingly joined his cause, happily allowing their anthem to become one of the main symbols of the “Green Wave” reform movement.

For a long time, the songs and anthems and sermons of the war-time were the stuff of memories and dreams. They belonged in “school textbooks, dull and boring; where were fed lies about our history,” says one of our informants, a 26-year-old graphic designer whose active involvement in election campaigns forced her to flee to Europe after the June 2009 coup. “Those concepts like martyr, brother, sister, solidarity, sacrifice, they all belonged to our fathers and their idealistic dreams of changing the world when we were not even born. The word martyr always reminded me of obligatory school anthems, of pictures of commanders and baseejis after whom streets were named. They were different. They were the past. They didn’t use the Internet. They didn’t blog. They were another generation. And now, suddenly, I am using the word, choking, calling for my sisters and brothers who are dying on the street, who are ‘martyrs.’ And I am so willing to use this word now, with pride. Because now you see, we have dreams too. Dreams to fight for. [Our fathers] always accused us of being carefree, of being indifferent, of only obsessing with MTV and Hollywood. Now you see, we have dreams to fight for. We want our votes back. We want our country back. And for that, we are happy to die” (R, London, September 2009/OB). Yet, “those memories were always in the background” a 27-year-old female student in physics tells me. “No matter how much we hated the official narrative of the revolution and so forth, I think part of us always envied our parents’ generation for having had those ideals. Maybe we had waited for this moment all our lives.”

In the light of what happened in summer 2009, it is strikingly interesting how not only inside Iran, but also among the diaspora, the same Khāmushi generation is slowly finding an anchor around a common voice. They insist that they are a united voice “but with different

demands and hopes.” A 30-year-old female graduate student puts it this way: “We are all green, but green has different shades. This is our chance to educate and practice precisely this – that we are different shades of green; but we are all green.” “Whatever happens, we have come a long way and achieved a lot,” a young architect tells me in London, sitting among fifteen peers who have gathered to plan a protest against Ahmadinejad’s trip to the UN in September 2009. Another friend interrupts him. “You know, what really strikes me is that the concept of ‘each citizen is one medium’ has come true.” For the Green Wave, the slogans and songs, at least, have taken on renewed emotional charges as the Islamic Republic sheds its republican pretensions for a more coercively Islamic state that openly advocates ideological commitment (*ta’ahod*) over expertise (*takhasos*), being a “servant of God” over being a citizen, and that targets youth culture as not merely frivolous (*bidard*, without pain) but an addictive disease (Westoxification, *gharbzadegi*), rails against cultural invasion through the media (*tahajom-e farhangi*) and a moral crisis (*bouhran-e akhlaq*), and makes statistically charted “deviance” studies (of rates of addiction, suicide, runaway girls, depression) that are stamped “secret” as matters of national security. Even the Ministry of Education as early as 2000 worriedly reacted to surveys about the extent of depression and suicide attempts among the youth by urging elementary school girls to begin wearing brightly colored clothes, and by organizing festivals of laughter and joy (*jashn-e khande va shadi*) to counter the melancholia discipline of puritan state ideology. Surveys of the youth are stamped “secret” and “national security” matters, and Khosravi argues (2007) that these surveys are in fact the documentation of the result of their own unceasing emphasis on the dangers of cultural invasion (*tahajom-e farhang*) from the West and emphasis on the youth as vulnerable targets of Western seduction who need constant correction (*eslah*) and guidance (*ershad*) through such agencies as the Ministry of Islamic Guidance.

The third generation (*nasl-e sevom*) of the Islamic revolution in Iran, born after 1981, is fractured into parts: the exiles, the emigrants (born abroad), the *baseeji* or *hezbollahis* (paramilitary supporters of the Islamic Republic), and the chafing middle-class youth. All but those born abroad are deeply, if differentially, marked by the Iran-Iraq War. The *khāmushi* generation or the “sixties” (1360 [1980s]) generation, in one of its fractions also calls itself “the unfortunate generation,” “the burnt generation [*nasl-e soukhteh*], the envious “generation.” The third generation has no memories from before the revolution and today constitutes some three-quarters of the population. Born after Khomeini’s call for producing children to empower the army of Islam, they are the guinea pigs of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s cultural revolution and casualties of Iran’s

poorly planned social revolution. After the Iran-Iraq War, Iran reversed its natalist policies and the rate of population growth dropped from a wartime high above 4 percent to 1.5 percent. The population explosion of the 1990s has created a crisis in education and employment, produced high levels of crime and drug use, polarized the polity, and resulted in a brain drain with annual emigration applications exceeding 150,000, the majority with university education, and 38,000 working as illegals in Japan in the late 1990s (Sassen, 1998, p. 66). The social crisis, with its mental health burdens (depression, drug use), is recognized by the Iranian government as a moral crisis (*bouhran-e akhlaq*).

In understanding the laments of the different generations and their contrastive fractions, historical references and the delayed public circulation of memoirs and memories become catacoustically powerful. For many Iranians now in their forties, the experiences chronicled in Marjane Satrapi’s comic book and film *Persepolis* read like their own diaries, but these experiences are quite different for a younger generation who were university students in the euphoric days of hope in the late 1990s under President Khātami, when from the office of the president there were calls for strengthening civil society, public sphere debate, dialogue of civilizations, and in general taking spirit of change away from repressiveness and for whom the crushing of liberal hopes in the elections of President Ahmadinejād occurred as disillusionment and despair.

For men born in the 1960s, the war was experienced on the front or in political prisons. Memoirs of war veterans and political prisoners and accounts of the large-scale massacres of 1982 and 1988 of leftist or secular reformers have begun to recirculate after twenty years of silence, especially in the aftermath and as a reaction to the June 2009 elections.²¹ Women of this generation either stayed and lived a *Persepolis 2* life in Iran (Satrapi, 2009) or left Iran in the 1980s.

All of these gendered and fractional experiences, echoes of war, oppression, fear, anxiety, and displacement, manifest in dream and dreamlike life-worlds years later, including in therapy groups in California.

M. dreams he is taking his visiting mom and sister to a city that feels like somewhere in the central part of the United States, a place he has never been. There is a temple. Very calm. Pilgrims come and go. Then Ahmadinejad and family arrive! M. starts to talk with him. Friendly. Giving him a chance. He has vivid images of his face, of the lines around his eyes. He even says Ahmadinejad was funny and personable. Then Ahmadinejad says something like “for managing the country, it doesn’t really matter if a few people get killed.” M. explodes. Starts swearing and calling him names. Really bad. He can’t stop. Ahmadinejad looks at him as if he doesn’t hear him. Smiles even. Ignores. The scenes shift to New York City, in front of the United Nations, where Ahmadinejad is being filmed and photographed. In the background, M. is standing, with fists up in the air, swearing and

yelling, but no one hears him. He is invisible to them. He wakes up shaking. Too much anger. Even when he recalls the dream, he is infuriated

(July 2009, i.e., just after the contested presidential election and the crushing of protests in the streets of Tehran and cities all over Iran)

IV. Conclusions

Everyone is on Fluxetin (Prozac). (Psychiatry resident, Tehran, 2009/OB)

“Human rights? leave these things alone; they make you sad ... I don’t want to think about these things.” (MIT graduate student, summer 2009)

Work on the self has been a psychocultural thematic of Iranian reform movements over the last century and a half, but perhaps never in as intense and differentiated ways as in the aftermath of the 1977–9 revolution, the eight-year-long Iran-Iraq War (1980–8), the second wave of postrevolution emigration abroad, and the interweaving of satellite television and the Internet into the fabric of Iranian and Persian culture. It is perhaps no surprise that so many of the second and third generations, particularly in the diaspora, but also their age mates in Iran, should be turning to psychology as both therapy and profession.

Persian nightmares often occur as (i) metadreams (I dream I was dreaming [*khāb didam ke khāb mididam*]) that express a sense of unreality about the real or bewilderment in reading the signs of the real (*khābe gong didam*);²² (ii) catastrophic disruptions of ordinary life plans, sustaining feelings of being unsettled whether in the turmoil of postwar Iran or that of exile and migration into the diaspora; and as (iii) remixes of traditional religious imagery, 1980s Iran-Iraq War sounds and imagery, and allusions to the violence of the 1990s culture wars.

Dreams occur as repetitions, displacements, and prefigurations. In Persian, nightmares (Arabic, *kabus*; Persian *khāb-e bad*, *khāb-e narahat*, *khofhtak* or *khofhtu*, *faranjak*, *bakhtak*, and many other colloquial variants) are described as causing feelings of suffocation, strangulation, weight on one’s chest, paralysis, fright attacks, anxious dreaming, and sadness-increasing dreams (*ghamasa*, *khāb-e narrahat va gham afza*).²³ Both “sadness” (*gham*) and “dream” (*khāb*) are loaded terms, the first with emotional roots both in the philosophies of melancholia and stoicism and in the Shi’ite passion plays of Karbala in which the heroes are abandoned and made to feel as strangers (*garib*), hidden or occulted (*gheib*), amid the corruptions of the world and injustices of the hegemonic; the second (*khāb*) with emotional roots in the moral discourses of purity amid a corrupt world, the visions of prophets and poets that cannot be conveyed to ordinary people because of the emotional layeredness of the imagery, the philosophical training required

to counter emotional chaos, the deafness and unwillingness of people to know, or the psychological defenses of scarring and need for survival.

Catastrophe disrupts life expectations, creating layered psychologies and personas, multiple consciousness, feelings of alienation and fracturing, disseminating anxiety, guilt, and feelings of helplessness about the inability to put the genie-jinn back whence it was contained. Much of this inability is not personal, but social. Dreams come as repetitions, displacements, and prefigurations of the social fracturing. They come as remixes of cultural bits and bytes: childhood political chants in school, ephemeral pop songs, and wartime radio emergency warnings that inscribe generational differences into the depths of the autonomous reflexes of the body. Their inscriptions are also to be found in a wide array of cultural detailing: in blogs, in YouTube videos, in television psychology talk shows, in videos of interviews with teenage soldiers in the war formatted as religious *nouheh* (mourning chants), as music compact discs with recycled and remixed old *nouheh* and *soroods* (martial anthems), in the Goth-like recycling of the black dress for Ashura with black makeup and nail polish, and technomusiclike syncopation to old wartime *soroods*,²⁴ and dreams with their sounds of sirens, battlefield images, signs of the undead, of being chased by trains and other noisy machines, of explosions.

The sexuality of nightmares is a theme that is highly dramatized in the techniques of interrogation and torture used by the Iranian state. Anyone paying the least attention cannot fail to be impressed that reports by victims of interrogation techniques in Iranian prisons always focus on making one confess to sexual deviances, crimes, or indiscretions, and torture escalates to involve various forms of rape. Rape is devastating and bears the profoundest stigma to women and to men alike. It is intended to break people. Iranians often like to claim melancholy as a distinctive tap root of philosophical Persian culture, but Europe too in the Baroque period saw melancholy as a sign of gravitas and realism. The intertwined mandrake-like roots of melancholia in the Islamic and European worlds go back to the humoral theory (in Persian, called *junani* [Greek] medicine) of balancing the four humors, and of melancholia as the overabundance of the black (*melas*) bile (*kholes*), hence “melancholia.” Hippocrates in the fifth–fourth century B.C. diagnosed a symptomatology of melancholia. Ishaq (Isaac) ibn Imran (d. 908) wrote of the mood disorder *malikhuliya*, and Ali ibn Abbas al-Majusi (d. 982) wrote of a personality disorder in which the “victim behaves like a rooster and cries like a dog, the patient wanders among the tombs at night, his eyes are dark, his mouth is dry, the patient hardly ever recovers and the disease is hereditary” (see Youssef,

Youssef, & Denning, 1996). Ibn Sina (Avicenna) in the eleventh century identified phobias and paranoias associated with the melancholic mood disorder.

The “Karbala paradigm” and Persian passion plays have been analyzed as, in many ways, parallel to the Lutheran Baroque theater as analyzed by Benjamin; and more generally Persian cultural politics over the course of the twentieth century turned upon the struggle between public rituals that emphasize melancholy and those that emphasize happiness, optimism, and future orientation (Fischer, 1973, 1980). The rituals of Muharram, memorializing the death of Imam Hossein on the battlefield of Karbala, also include rhythmic chanting, chest beating, marching, drums, and high theatrical and gender-charged emotion.²⁵ High-ranking clerics would routinely dismiss this display of emotion and the preaching that went with it (*rouzeh-khani*, sermons that always begin and end with stories of Karbala and weeping) and emphasize instead the philosophical realism and sadness of living in this corrupt world. Reza Shah Pahlavi in the 1930s and 1940s pursued an explicit national goal to rid Iran of excessive sadness rituals, replacing them with civic rituals of joyousness, emphasizing the optimism and happiness in the ancient Zoroastrian heritage of Iran.²⁶ After the Islamic revolution a counterideology attempted to repress music and color, expanding the Karbala paradigm as an all-encompassing stoicism for a regime feeling itself embattled and claiming to fight for justice in a corrupt world. Khomeini used his own public unsmiling visage as an emblem of gravitas and anti-Western consumer capitalism (Fischer 1983). Culturally, the Iran-Iraq War provided new venues and forms for reinforcing the Karbala theme, from rituals to put soldiers into a *hal*, an ecstasy of willingness to sacrifice themselves running through minefields or facing the fire of Iraqi mortars; to “sacred defense films” showing footage from the front to citizens at home framed in Karbala terms, focusing little on the Iraqi enemies, but rather on the struggles over the self, to conquer fear, to become strong, to regard death as incidental to one’s spiritual trajectory (Sorabi, 1995; Varzi, 2006).

But clinicians have noticed since the 1980s, despite the effervescence of many aspects of Iranian life, that all too many young people, especially among the religiously committed, present signs of dysphoria (Sanati/MF2007). “Everyone is on Prozac,” say doctors in Iran (Behrouzan, 2010b). One says, “In my psychiatric rotation, I had at least two to three successful suicide admissions per night. I cannot say there is an epidemic of clinical depression, but there is an epidemic of dysphoria, of social hopelessness” (B, Tehran, 2008/OB). A

33-year-old doctor turned filmmaker who is on antidepressants says his generation’s depression is not existential, but “I have very simple reasons to be depressed: my best friends have left the country one after another; there is no public space we can meet new friends or girls, and of course there is our intergenerational struggles with our parents and their values – isn’t that enough to drive you crazy?” (AA, 2008/OB). The stresses of long years of pressured study for the *konkur*²⁷ and living double lives radically different in private and in public take their toll. Calculated use of drugs is often a “rational” strategy in a setting where there is “no solution: I can’t change the society, I can’t change my parents, I can’t change this government, and if I don’t want to leave my country, I have to make a decision how to cope with all of this, that’s what the pill does for me.”²⁸

NOTES

- 1 The date 1360s in the Iranian Shamsi calendar corresponds to the 1980s in the Common Era calendar.
- 2 Gholam Hossein Sa’edi (1936–85) was a renowned writer, trained as a psychiatrist in Tabriz (where he wrote his dissertation “Social Causes of Psychoneuroses in Azerbaijan”) and Tehran, where he did his residency at Ruzbeh Hospital. His monograph on the zar cult among pearl divers in the Persian Gulf (*Ahl-e Hava*, “People of the Air”) is a classic study of ritual and mental health; his screenplay for the celebrated film *Gav* (“The Cow”) is a study of grief gone awry in a village after the death of a cow, used as an allegory for conditions of repression in Iran. But the reference here is also to his exile, when he first wrote a sarcastic play, *Othello in Wonderland*, in which Islamic censorship in a step-by-step fashion turns Shakespeare into a religious passion play, and then eventually fell into depression and drank himself to death.
- 3 They podcasted six programs between January and May 2009: <http://stillness-radio.blogspot.com/>. Each podcast opens with a replay of the sirens of city bombings in the 1980s.
- 4 *The Complete Book of the Medical Arts (Kitab Kamil as-Sina’a at-Tibbiyya*, also known as *The Royal Book (Kitab al-Maliki)* and known in Europe as *Liber Regalis* or *Regalis Dispositio*.
- 5 “Its victim behaves like a rooster and cries like a dog, the patient wanders among the tombs at night, his eyes are dark, his mouth is dry, the patient hardly ever recovers and the disease is hereditary.” Technically this is a description of clinical lycanthropy (delusion of becoming a dog or wolf or other animal). The dog is a contested symbol in Iran. In Zoroastrianism the four-eyed dog is used in funerary rituals to see into the next world, to discern whether the body is in fact dead, and to ward off the demons of impurity. Zoroastrians take care of dogs, while in many Islamic communities the dog is ill-treated. In the Shi’ite compendia of ritual rules put out by anyone claiming to be an ayatullah, the

dog is *najes* (unclean), as are Jews and Zoroastrians. But in the Qur'an (18:9–26) the good dog guards the seven sleepers in the cave (a fragmentary transformation of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus). The dog was made a powerful modern symbol of urban repression and abandonment by the writer Sadegh Hedayat in his famous short story “Sag-e Velgard” (“Abandoned Dog”). The duality of al-Majusi’s rooster-dog image resonates well with the contemporary feelings that there are “colorful clothes but our insides are all black” (and inversely memories of learning to dress in black or drab colors for school, but lie to teachers about how one lives at home, and what one really believes) and the constant, wearying friction between public/private, *zahir/batin*, “having no voice, we want a voice.” But, as we will argue, over the past decades there has been a dramatic change from philosophical, poetic, or parable indirection of expression to psychiatric and self-help psychological address of the wounds of revolution, war, and emigration.

6 MF interview with Dr. Muhammad Sanati, 2007.

7 The imagery of the Twelfth Imam withdrawn into a well and into metaphysical occultation draws on the ancient Iranian motif of the Saoshyant, the Zoroastrian eschatological savior who is withdrawn into a sacred lake. The press circulated the story of the boy. Whether true or not, it is always already infiltrated with traditional religious imagery in a revolution that traded on such imagery. The Islamic Republic of Iran still employs such imagery in weekly sermons (*khutbeh*) and political discourse, particularly that of Ayatullah Mesba-Yazdi, of the imminent return of the Mahdi from his well of occultation, and of his follower and enabler President Ahmadinejad.

8 Blog URL is available on authors’ files.

9 It also repeats the public memory of the death of Samad Behrangi, the author of the children’s story for adults from the late Pahlavi period before the revolution, *Mahi Siah Kuchilu* (*The Little Black Fish*, 1968). The story is of a fish who leaves the security of his local stream to explore the world down to the sea. It was read as an allegory of breaking out of the parochialism and ideology of Iran. An Azeri, Behrangi preferred writing in Turkish but translated his work into Persian because state law forbids publishing in Azeri. An educational reformer, Behrangi taught for eleven years in rural schools in Azerbaijan, introducing village children to books and the idea of libraries. He often crossed out words in textbooks that referred to objects and concepts from abroad that were unavailable to the children’s experience, or were archaic, replacing them with ones that were more appropriate. Behrangi is said to have died in a swimming accident in the Aras River between Azerbaijan and Armenia. A famous poem of the time mocks the official story: Why would you voluntarily swim, Samad, in the freezing river? It was widely believed the accident was arranged by the secret police. He, too, like his fish, dies for his curiosity and openness to the world. He too, like the 1990s writers’ bus, is on the way to Armenia, or betwixt and between Armenia and Iran. The Aras River flows from Erzerum in Turkey along the borders of Turkey, Armenia, Iran, and Azerbaijan. It became the border between the Persian and Russian Empires by the Treaties of Gulistan and Turkmenchay. A number of Iranian communists escaped to the Soviet Union during the Cold War across the Aras.

- 10 See, for instance, Shahram Khosravi’s 2007 ethnography of youth culture in the Shahr-e Garb neighborhood of middle-class Tehran, and also for an earlier generation Taghi Modarressi’s essay on émigrés, “Writing with an Accent” (*Chanteh*, 1992), quoted in Rahimi (2012).
- 11 See also the discussion of the term *avareh*, this emotional purgatory of being able to go neither back nor forward among exiles in the 1980s in Fischer and Abedi (1990).
- 12 See <http://maktabpanah.com>; http://www.farhangsara.com/fnamdaran_iran_khajehnorih.htm.
- 13 See the M.A. thesis by Talieh Rohani, which differentiates (i) generations of migrants and of children of migrants, (ii) double migrants (first to Europe or Canada, then to California) versus direct migrants, and (iii) local media contexts in San Francisco versus Los Angeles or Washington, D.C. She focuses on the difference between the young Iranian-Swedish migrants to California in San Francisco (who have a playful, open, and somewhat cavalier attitude toward authenticity) who staff Bebin-TV, on the one hand, and the LA based culture, on the other hand (more concerned with purity of Persian culture, nostalgia for modernist Iran, and concern with material wealth). A third underexplored contrast is with the Washington, D.C., community, on which, however, see also Nahal Naficy’s 2007 dissertation.
- 14 The secret police under Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was called Sazeman-e Ettela’at va Amniyat-e Keshvar (Intelligence and Security Organization of the Country, or SAVAK). After the 1979 revolution, it was called Sazman-e Ettela’at va Amniyat-e Melli-e Iran (Information and Security Organization of the People of Iran, or SAVAMI).
- 15 See <http://zebelkhan.wordpress.com/2008/12/07/chagholaqharism/>.
- 16 Manufactured in Iran in a joint venture between Citroën and Iran National until 1979, when it was continued by a nationalized Iran National without Citroën. Designed as a low-cost, reliable, simple to maintain, and off-road car, the *deux chevaux vapeur* or “two steam horses” (the horsepower taxable rating) was produced in France from 1949 to 1990. The prototype, TPV (Toute Petite Voiture, “Very Small Car”), with a Bauhaus inspired body, was built before World War II and was hidden from the Nazis during the wartime occupation. It was originally designed for farmers to drive goods to market on unpaved roads or even across plowed fields, and to encourage the French to adopt cars. Redesigned after the war, it became phenomenally popular as well as the butt of many jokes.
- 17 Morteza Avini, the filmmaker of the Sacred Defense war films, sent back weekly clips of the battlefield to be shown on television during the Iran-Iraq War. He carefully edited and framed them in the mystical terms of self-sacrifice for God. See Naficy, 2007; Sorabi, 1995; Varzi, 2006; Zeyadabadinejad, 2009; see also for more recent films Danesh, 2007, on how war and spiritual films are inflected under the presidencies of Khatami and Ahmadinejad.
- 18 The references are to the genealogy of leftist struggles from the *nezhat-e jangali* (forest movement) led by Mirza Kouchak Khan (1914–21) to the 1971 Mujaheddin attack on a police station in the Caspian village, Siakhal,

that signaled the beginning of a small guerrilla activity against the rule of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. The verses continue:

In the mountains
 his heart is alive and awake
 he carries in his hands
 flowers and wheat and a gun
 in his heart
jaan, jaan, jaan, [life, soul; full of life, zest for life]
 he carries a forest of stars
 his lips are the smile of light
 his heart is all flames of love
 his voice is a spring in the mountains and
 his memory is like the *ghazal* of the farthest forests.

- 19 This was followed by violent repression of objection, including forced confessions in front of television cameras of intellectuals and reform leaders (many originally revolutionaries thirty years ago), all under the self-fulfilling allegation that a “velvet revolution” was developing against the regime. Initially meant as a reference to U.S.-supported democratic movements in Ukraine, Serbia, and Georgia, it gradually expanded to orders that all academics should cease any interactions with scholars abroad, that degrees earned abroad would not be recognized, and that intellectuals and reform leaders could be punished for introducing into Iran books by Max Weber, Jurgen Habermas, and Talcott Parsons.
- 20 *Qahr-ashti*: *Qahr* is the state of a fight when neither side is talking to the other and often requires a third party to help them reconcile (*ashti*). In this case, it is not so much that they did not talk at all, but that the shared experiential referent points were missing. Parents often expressed displeasure at how much time the younger generation spent on the Internet, seeing it as frivolous. After the Internet and cell phones proved their worth in getting images and information about the June–February 2009 demonstrations out of the country around government efforts at censorship, the parental generation embraced the skills of their children. Inversely revolutionary songs that seemed inappropriate nostalgia for aspirations long denied by the revolution, these songs of hope and defiance gained salience for the younger generation in ways they could never have known previously.
- 21 For example, former People’s Mujahedin member Iraj Mesdaghī’s four volume *Memoirs of Prison 1981–1991* (published in Stockholm, 2004), and his collection of prison songs about the massacres of 1988, *Bar Sagehi-e Tabieda-ye Kanaf* (2007).
- 22 *Khab gong-e didam* (glossed as “mute dreams” in the title of *Mute Dreams, Blind Owls and Dispersed Knowledges* [Fischer 2004]) refers to (a) that moment of bewilderment when waking from a dream and attempting to decipher the images of the dream and separate the present feeling of the dream from the waking sense of presentness; or to (b) prophetic vision images or divine language that the prophet feels cannot really be translated to ordinary people, who hear but do not listen, who look but cannot see. The filmmaker Mohsen

Makhmalbaf uses the phrase as the title of his early collection of stories and essays on film, and indirectly it also underlies Abbas Kiarostami’s philosophy that he does not care whether you fall asleep during his films as long as days or weeks later the film is still resonating and its puzzles are being worked out by the viewer. In a famous poem, Farrokh Farroghzad opens with a wish for deliverance, *khah didam ke khah mididam* (“I dreamt that I was dreaming”), but in her poem there is less reflexivity than a form of the type 3 dream. A better, simple example of a metastructure, is in Makhmalbaf’s film *Arusi Khuban* (1989), about a shell-shocked war photographer, whom camera shutter clicks toggle between seeing the promise of social justice of the early days of the revolution and the 1980s decay of the ideals and practices of the revolution into legitimation for injustice, inegalitarian practices, and outright corruption. *Arusi Khuban* (a marriage made in heaven) refers to the photographer’s marriage to the daughter of a wealthy high-living merchant, for whom the photographer’s revolutionary purity is a badge of respect and protection in the corruption of the early postwar period, and whose hypocrisy exacerbates the derangement of shell shock and posttraumatic stress disorder.

- 23 *Khoft* is a colloquial form of *khah* (dream), and *-u* and *-tak* are diminutives; *bakhtak* has an even stronger connotation than the etymologies of *kaabus* and nightmare; *faranjak* (perhaps from *faranji*, foreigner, Frenchman). The diminutive may refer to the ephemerality of these acute, severe, and recurring frights, which nowadays we try (not very successfully) to track in rapid eye movement versus non-REM sleep).
- 24 Particularly in Shahrak-e Gharb (see later discussion), Meidan-e Mohseni, Andishah, and certain other neighborhoods, such fun making on a central day of the annual ritual cycle commemorating the death of Imam Hussain at the Battle of Karbala, is, of course, rebellious. But its status as real parody as opposed to just finding an occasion to have fun is ambiguous. Above all, it is an intensification of the fine line of acknowledging religion and objecting to its being turned into a policing mechanism by those in power to maintain power, and to attempts, as Khosrovi puts it, to criminalize youth culture.
- 25 It was often remarked in the 1970s that when the authorities wished to prevent Ashura *dastehs* from using knives on flagellation chains or for cutting their foreheads, if they prevented women spectators from lining the street, the men would not engage in these ecstatic, but also macho, blood-letting rites.
- 26 See Fischer 1973 and 2004 for analyses of the dialectic between happiness and sadness in the ways Zoroastrian and Muslim sensibilities are deployed. The former provides an account of the 1930s under Reza Shah. The latter provides an account of how Muslims and Zoroastrians use the stories of the *Shahnameh* differently, and how mystical Muslims and fundamentalist ones read those stories.
- 27 The path to higher education starts with an intense competition held once a year, with more than ten applicants for each seat available, and the competition to be admitted into the best schools much more intense. Many spend a year or two in near-isolation preparing. Male candidates work under the

additional pressure of having to serve in the military if they are not admitted to university. Exam preparation has become a marker of class divisions as well with expensive private tutorial businesses promising to prepare students for the exams.

- 28 On the calculated use of antidepressants and other mood drugs to remain “high-functioning” in the United States, see Kramer (1993) and Greenslit (2007); for use more generally to be “dependent-normal” see Dumit, (2012). Valium, of course, was widely prescribed for suburban housewife anomie in Canada and the United States in the 1950s and 1960s.

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