THE DYNAMICS OF IDENTITY AND THE GENERATION OF POST-MEMORY IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY IRAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses how post-revolutionary youth are dealing with the legacy of Iran's recent past (1979-1988), particularly through processes of remembering and forgetting. Drawing on Hirsch's (1997) concept of post memory, I will explore the memory of a generation that grew up dominated not by traumatic events, but by narrative accounts preceding their births. This is a form of memory not personally experienced but socially felt, mediated through imagination and creation, and in this way shape the post-generation's identity. Such memory works to bring together Iranian youth from a particular period in the past, while helping to create collective frameworks through which contemporary events can be evaluated. This includes the renewing of stories, histories, prejudices and suffering across generations, as well as the selective forgetting of a past that has been purposefully erased, denied or collectively ignored. This research aims to present a better understanding of Iranian society by constructing a new framework between memory studies and cultural memories, in this way attempting to shed light on the thoughts of youth in terms of remembering or forgetting the past. This dichotomy will illuminate the ways in which social change is proceeding.

Remembering and forgetting the revolution of 1979 and the Iran-Iraq war

Over time, the memories of selected social events have been forgotten; at the same time, new narratives were formed and discussed across generations. The generation after the group of people who will be educated and who will create their own memories regarding an event through communicative memory, will proceed to react to social dilemmas according to how they understand the past. In this way, history becomes a place of contest and discontent. In Iran, the youth are discovering the country's past by comparing their present lives with the lived experience of their parents, thereby evaluating their presence in the shadow of war memories and the lived experience of the generation before them at the time of the 1979 revolution in Iran. Additionally, a missing official narration of the 1979 revolution and its aftermath will steer them toward constructing a meaningful relationship between what remains untold and their everyday experiences of life. Therefore, the identity-making processes of Iranian youth have been oriented by memories of pre-revolution Iran and after-revolution war memories.

The dynamics of identity have been studied in various fields of social science and have shown to be crucial to the future of a nation. More importantly, nations that have experienced conflict and political turbulence or unrest are more at risk of including individuals who are uncomfortable in their daily lives. A sense of guilt and shame, or in opposition, satisfaction, will give rise to different feelings concerning the generation after and will affect the process of the latter's identity construction. Therefore, having knowledge of Iranian youth in terms of how they live and construct their identities, social relationships and practices by remembering or forgetting the past, will potentially assist in highlighting their hopes and needs as it concerns the future.

Halbawchs (1992, p.82) states that the individual calls recollections to mind by relying on frameworks of social memory. Concerning the importance of the continuity of the group, in terms of producing or preserving our personal memory, family is the greatest segment that affects our perspectives on the past. Post-memory Iranian generations gained an initial understanding of their lives at the time their parents or grandfathers and grandmothers experienced the traumas of the 1979 revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. For this reason, their personal understanding of life is not individually distinguished. As Jan Assman and Hirsch (2012, p.32) state, family is the most important unit in a social framework that work towards the transmission of [facts] to the generations after. Identity, like memory, is also determined according to its flexibility and ability to change, due to the malleable nature of social environments. Our social groupings, as well as our perceived memory, shape our identities. Bella and co-authors (1985, p.153) defines the mutually re-enforcing nature of memory and

social identity thus: "Communities… have a history – in an important since they are constituted by their past – and for this reason we can speak of real community as a ' community of memory', one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget that past, a community is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative."
The Islamic republic, like other newly created nation states, attempted to navigate its history through the 1979 revolution and the Iran-Iraq war in a bid to construct a well-reformed national identity. This national identity has seemingly been reconstructed through two main avenues, i.e., nationalism and Islamism. This approach has mainly been pursued via the official training of Iranian youth in the same manner. When investigating the official history taught in schools, as well as universities through compulsory courses, it can be seen that one of the main avenues for narrating history is to start with the Prophet Mohammad's birth and to end with the *ruhaniyat* victory of the 1979 revolution. Thus, although the ancient history of Iran has been primarily built on the importance of nationhood – similar to what the Pahlavi regime had in place – the contemporary Iranian regime begins its history in that of Islam and continues to represent the thoughts and practices of the *ruhaniun* and their national resistance strategies and social movement attempts. It appears that this narrative of history in schools and universities has had its own effect on how Iranian youth remember the reasons for the 1979 revolution and afterwards, the Iran-Iraq war as a result of the revolution's consequences. Foad, a 28-year-old in my studies claims:

"Since childhood, I knew they weren't telling the truth… Nobody had told me anything…I felt [that they were] manipulating…historical facts and the truth…all of it… This government can't talk against itself…

Statements on the part of youth regarding facts about the past and their own recording of it indicate some confusion and consequently, disorientation regarding the past in their own lives. The youth included in this research identified history with the 1979 revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, yet their expressions and interpretations of these events were abortive and fruitless. Helia, an 18-year-old girl who would be graduating from high school in 2016 stated:

"Nobody has told me anything about the past… [They] thought [that a] revolution [would] benefit [them], but [instead] they encountered catastrophes…"

 Hessam, a 20-year-old boy stated:

"[W]hat I remember [about the 1979 revolution are] all [the lost] opportunities… [What needed] to be done never happened, promises that [were] never pursued… [Not] all revolutions [will be successful] but [the] 1979 [revolution] was the worst ever."

For Iranian youth, a connection to the current reality at first glance appears to have been expanded through media and the public sphere, rather than through family:

"I didn't hear anything from my family… I think people from low [economic] backgrounds, from…downtown…Tehran [instigated] the revolution…because they were poor."

Hirsch (2012, p.34) states that the "children of those directly affected by collective trauma [have inherited] a horrific, unknown and unknowable past that their parents were not meant to survive. Second-generation fiction, art, memoirs, and testimony are shaped by an attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma." Elnaz, a 25-year-old girl from a religious family stated:

"We never talk about [the] past in my family or…with our relatives… We have never been political…"
Yet, we also encounter in the way youth recall the past a seemingly non-compassionate animosity towards the lives of their parents, their parents' decision-making and toward revolutionary acts aimed at the old regime. This dislocation from reality post war and post revolution could see youth at the same time tightened with structuring the past not through the family and locality but as Fentress and Wikkam (1992, p.53) state, in a way more national. As Shabnam, a 21-year-old girl says:

"When they themselves regret what they have done as revolutionaries, why should I spend time…learning the history of that time…why should I care? They are suffering [because of] their attempts [to change] the regime."

Thus, remembering the 1979 revolution in young generation is bloating in the sense of denial of the past and establishing a form of resistance. Yet hesitation at interpreting the past as an actual historical event may have us believe, as Mannheim (1972) argues, that the memories we acquire during the process of personal development are real memories that we truly possess, and that serves as a basis for our generational identity, because this type of knowledge is generally better preserved in our memories and has real binding power. Thus, as my investigation into the thoughts of this generation indicates, they are not bound to interpreting the past according to the experience of their parents during the 1979 revolution or the Iran- Iraq war, but that somehow their understanding has been affected by their own experiences of daily life, as well their of their parents' current lives. As Nora (1996, p.526) states, generational memory develops from social interactions that are in the first place historical and collective, and which are later internalised in a deeply visceral and unconscious manner so as to dictate vital choices and to control loyalty. In addition to social interaction, an important part of the contestation of identities may arise from how this generation feel about victimhood and how this in turn affects feelings of animosity and the shaping of stereotypes.

Reimaging the Past
Places and spaces pervade mnemonic interest through narrative frameworks. Consequently, narratives change within different places or spaces, as specific surroundings will affect the form and context of narration. The generation after will also experience historical events that will shape new spaces and narratives. By constructing a new concept called post-memory, Hirsch (1997, p.22) attempts to emphasise post-memory as a powerful type of memory, as its originality lies in imagining and creating narratives of the past through mediation.

Shabnam, a 20-year-old-girl stated:

"University for me is [like] experiencing the revolution… I remember [how I once] sat on a chair [that] had [signatures belonging] to [people living in] pre-revolution Iran… [Our] university [was built] before the revolution [and was called] 'Melli'… Sometimes my [fellow students] find places in [the university that] reminds us of [the] past."

This process may have a dual effect on the formation of new identities and distinguishing or connecting them to an understanding of a specific traumatic event. According to Hirsch (1997, p.6), knowledge of the event produced by the post-generation is therefore the consequence of traumatic recall and constitutes "a platform of activist and interventionist cultural and political engagement, a form of repair and redress" that will provoke new lines of thought and movements.

Aryana, a 20-year-old-girl, recalled the revolution of 1979 and found similarities between it and the more recent Green movement, a movement against the outcome of presidential election in two thousand nine:

"We don't know anything about the revolution of 1979… We experienced a more recent movement, I mean 88 the movement for election."

Tina, a 25-year-old-girl stated:

"[The] revolution [of] 1979 [is similar to] the movement in year eighty eight…how [is] it…different… [The] same thing might have happened…people [people gathering] together in [an area] and so on."

The peaceful movement at eighty eight undertaken by the post-generation was an echo of the 1979 revolution, where visual landscapes were divided between the acts of parents and their children. For example, Azady Square, a symbol of the 1979 revolution, became prominent space for social movements like eighty eight. In this way, the younger generation was able to experience the same events as their parents in terms of gathering to commit revolutionary acts. Foad states:

"Revolution is like eighty eight…it should be like that…people gathered together…in a place [from where they] walked all the way to Azadi Square."

By using Lyon's model in Breakwell's identity process and overlapping it with the study of generational memory, the post-generation are likely to construct, sustain and reconstruct memories in such a way to indicate continuity, collective self-esteem, distinctiveness, efficacy and cohesion (Lyons, 1996).

Post-memory, as Hircsh (1997, p.25) argues, "is a generational structure of transmission embedded in multiple forms of mediation. Understanding the Iran-Iraq war and the 1979 revolution as has been reviewed seeming charechtrized itself in the narrative of family. Consequently, the collective imaginary of youth are well presented by shared archives and stories that deliver familial remembrance. Commemoration, rather than enforcing or eradicating, or simply reforming memories, will help the post-generation to reimagine facts and historical events. Shabnam, describing the importance of movies and series that clearly depict the events of the 1979 revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, states:

"[If a] movie or series shows and narrate…life before [the] revolution I won't be interested [in watching it]… Yes, we are a religious family but we do not believe what these people say."

Reimaging the 1979 revolution or Iran-Iraq war as two related events in the history of Iran and in the thoughts of people is more directed to the dark side. Such a reimaging has been affected by sorrow and pain. Looking towards the Iran-Iraq was as an apparent reason of Revolution 1979 made the young generation less critical about it. *Shahid* or martiyers seemingly have less representative of the sacrifice but stupidity.

Elnaz, a 22-year-old-girl stated:

"[I will not] let my husband…go to war…I [don't know how the previous] generation [allowed] their families to be involved in these [types of events]... [However], I can't deny that sometimes, I [am] affected by series [shown on] television… [Then] I think, maybe I…have let him to go...it looks that some people did this towards the real goal."

"What I remember from war…what I have heard is that we were really happy…because of bomb down falls my family…settled in another city…they said they [had] many gatherings there [that] were full of joy."

CONCLUSION
This paper presents how the lives of Iranian youth are affected by their feelings of the past. The aim of the paper was not to present a coherent view of compromising and contesting identities; however, research with such a focus will no doubt be illuminating. It is necessary to evaluate how contested identities are transferred and maintained through memory processes. This would be a good start for discussing if the resolution in understanding Iranian youth in the process of remembering.

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