Iranian Youth and Social Transformation:
Review of a Research

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is a brief review of a research conducted by the present author and his research team concerning the Iranian Youth and the experience of anomie as a by-product of rapid and conflicting social transformation. "Anomie indicates an anarchic state of crisis-prone uncertainty affecting a broad segment of the population. Cultural interpretative models lose their function. Social integration within a community ceases. Previously valid behavior norms as well as personal competence disintegrate. Goal-oriented action becomes more and more impossible for both individual and the collective. Results include general lack of direction and uncertainty in behavior. The intensity of social or cultural conflict increases" (Atteslander, 1999:9). Anomie also represents a condition of socio-economic structures experiencing very rapid change. Youth as a rule everywhere are more susceptible to anomie. Therefore, youngsters are more in danger when large-scale social transformation is in progress.

In Iran similar to other countries of MENA region, youth (15-29 years old) is the most important age group both quantitatively (presently population of youth based upon estimations is over 24 million) and qualitatively. In addition, youth everywhere is a social group with the greatest potentials in energy and mobility.

In the research conducted both quantitative and qualitative techniques of data gathering were used. At first, a random survey was completed in which 2500 youngsters were interviewed in ten major cities. In each city, the sample size was divided into three sub-groups representing upper, middle, and lower classes. In terms of qualitative techniques of data gatherings, focus group discussions were organized in five cities out of those ten where survey was conducted. Both males and females participated in focus group discussions separately. Based upon gender and social class 30 focus group discussion sessions were organized.

The findings revealed that all participants experience various degrees of anomie. Economic anomie was more critical than social and political anomie. The research clearly showed that in Iran, a youth subculture is emerging in which two distinct tendencies may be distinguished. The first tendency that is actually moving in the direction of an independent sub-group is deviation. A minority among the young in the country has been more and more alienated from the normative system and this is manifested in anti-social behaviors; and to a lesser extent, in crime and addiction. The second tendency again among a minority of youth that may be called functional or expediency assimilation. This group without believing in formal rules of conduct or what may be named formal acceptable behavioral patterns and norms consciously pretend as if they have genuinely internalized those rules, patterns, and norms. Members of such a group have mastered two distinct and at times opposing life styles; private and public life styles. The findings clearly show the need for a comprehensive youth policy that is lacking.

Introduction: Conceptual Framework

This paper is a brief review of a research conducted by this author and his research team which concerned the Iranian youth and the experience of anomie as a by product of rapid and conflicting social transformation. The term "youth" is usually defined as referring to those persons aged 15 to 29 years old; but, such a definition is not enough. Those ages 15 to 29 also have many other characteristics which justify their being the most important social group in all societies. As

Monique Marks (cited in Mishra, 1993, 1) has noted, "Young people are in the process of building, but for that very reason they are the incomplete. They are unknown quantities fraught with limitless possibilities. Young people bring with them the winds of change and reform, and they are the possessors of an enormous and irrepressible vitality. There is little that can equal the greatness of youth….we must realize that every young person that lives is to some extent fired by the youthful passions coursing through his veins. If only firm direction and purpose can be given to those passions, then there is absolutely no doubt that the young can learn to contribute to the welfare of society and live lives that are meaningful." (cited in Mishra: 1993:1).

This interesting quotation contains a number of qualities which makes the youth a distinguished social group. Moreover, it refers to conditions which are necessary if youngsters are to be made respected and useful members of their societies. When such conditions are absent or do not work properly, the use of the term "anomie" is justified. In fact, the above quotation implicitly identifies two opposing poles in a continuum. On one pole, a society is portrayed where young people are given firm direction and purpose; and thus, the passions and the irrepressible vitality of the youth are utilized for the welfare of that society. Consequently, the society undergoes change and reform constantly and smoothly. Finally, with all the positive qualities they possess, the young would live lives that are meaningful. On the other pole, a society is envisaged where there is no direction and purpose for the youth; so, the unknown quantities of the young which are fraught with limitless possibilities, youthful passions, and enormous irrepressible vitality are used for the destruction of both the young themselves and the society.

These two types of societies as described above are ideal types; and, ideal types by definition are theoretically arrived at by abstraction. According to Max Weber, ideal types are constructs which "expressly or tacitly, consciously or unconsciously, are selected, analyzed, and organized for expository purposes (Weber, 1949&Outhwaite, 1993:270). Such classifications are tools of scientific work. It is for this reason that in reality all the existing and living societies are somewhere between these two poles.

The "firm direction and purpose" which, as the quotation from Monique Marks connotes, are partially determined by what are called norms and values, are actually regulative mechanisms. Norms and values are also social constructs and they have been defined in many ways. For instance, Emile Durkheim in his famous book, Suicide (1897), emphasized the importance of norms and referred to them as the framework for human life. As for values, they are moral principles. Durkheim also defines them as "moral facts". And, all societies past and present gradually arrive at a set of social norms and values. They are "moral rules as they really exist in society, in all their complexity" (Giddens, 1977:3). These moral rules are the basis of laws and expectations in every society which should be respected and as laws should be obeyed. Otherwise, there will be sanctions or formal penalties. However, as societies change, there will also be corresponding changes in norms, values, expectations and laws. In what may be called the "normal condition" of any given society, the changes in society and the consequent changes in norms, values, expectations and laws happen in such a way to leave room for the individuals to adapt to the changes and internalize the new norms, values, expectations and laws.

In addition, in all past and present societies there have been, and are, people with adaptation problems in different degrees. Those who cannot adequately adapt to their environment experience varying degrees of anguish which are manifested through mental and psychological disorders. This maladjustment may also result in anti-social behaviors. But as long as those who have problems with regards to adaptation to their social environment are a minority while the rest of the population are considered normal, concepts such as moral vacuum, total moral deregulation, and total moral breakdown are out of the question. Problems arise when the number of maladjusted increases. In the

words of C. W. Mills, "the personal troubles of milieu 'change into' the public issue of social structure". When such a change or shift occurs, a sociological problem is formed which can no longer be explained in psychological terms. Therefore, the sociological problem is the issue of degrees and volumes. In this situation, explanation also shifts from personal characteristics and qualities to structural constraints and obstacles which prevent the fulfillment of goals for a large number of people. And, considering their characteristics and qualities, the youth would be more at risk.

The concept of anomie, just like alienation, is a concept which tries to explain both personal and collective problems by referring to the causes which are structural. "Anomie indicates an anarchic state of crisis-prone uncertainty affecting a broad segment of the population. Cultural interpretative models lose their function. Social integration within a community ceases. Previously valid behavior norms as well as personal competence disintegrate. Goal-oriented action becomes more and more impossible for both the individual and the collective. Results include general lack of direction and uncertainty in behavior. The intensity of social and cultural conflict increases" (Atteslander, 1999:9).

Thus, the main question is, "What causes, or what factors are responsible for anomie both at individual and at collective levels? To find the answers, it is necessary to examine the theory of anomie beginning with Emile Durkheim. As Evans noted, "Durkheim believed that individuals possessed an unlimited appetite for aspirations and it was up to society to regulate such an appetite. According to Durkheim, appetites were regulated through the 'collective conscience' of society; meaning people were bonded together by their common morals and beliefs. However, if this mechanism failed or was weakened significantly, anomie would occur." (Evans, www.criminology.fsu.edu/crimtheory/merton.htm).

"Collective Conscience" or morals and beliefs, may be replaced with more concrete concepts. But, the most important issue in Durkheim's theory is the fact that when regulative mechanisms (whatever they may be) fail to regulate social interactions, an individual's appetite for changing his/her status in any given society is suppressed,and as a result, individuals will face psychological problems which would have little to do with their own characteristics. Those characteristics may speed up or delay the process, or may have impacts on the severity and manifestations of the problems, but they will have nothing to do with the causes. Durkheim's answer is simple and direct. He believed that rapid change creates the appropriate grounds for the dysfunction of regulatory mechanisms in any given society. The end result is anomie. Its degree and intensity is directly related to the extent, speed, and severity of societal change.
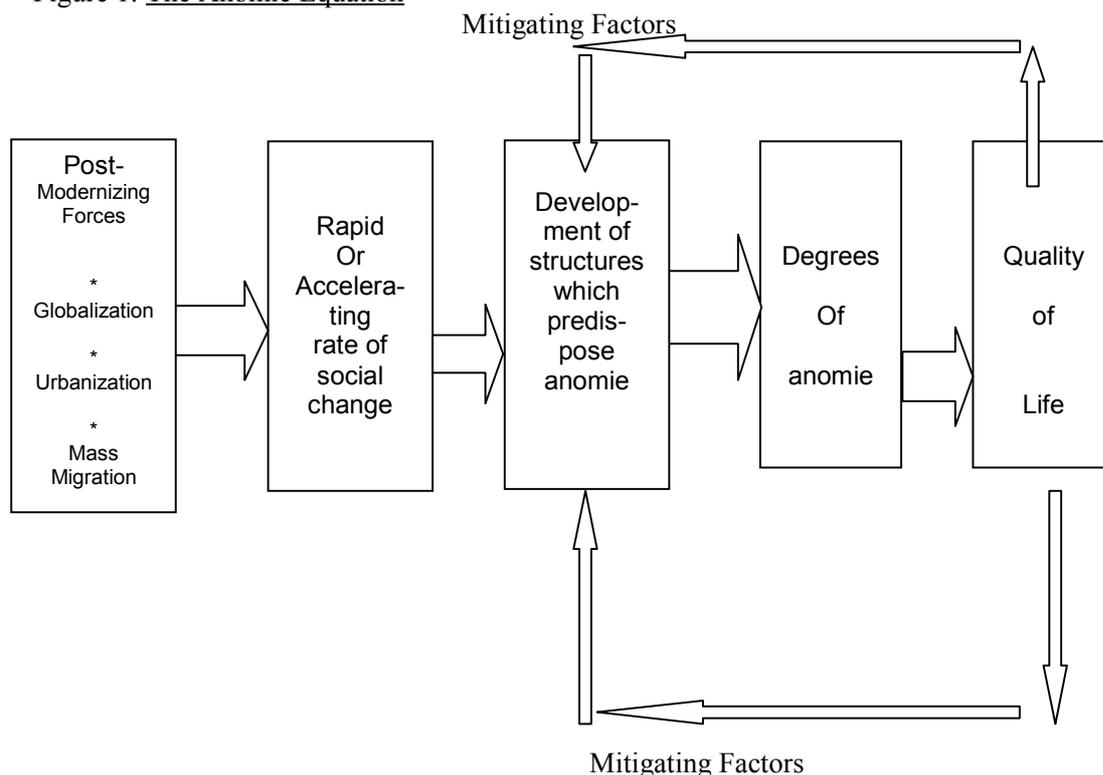
It was Robert K.Merton who transformed Durkheim's use of anomie into a theoretical model as it is known today. Merton also developed five possible reactions to the disparity between goals and means which has been regarded as the main cause of anomie. According to him, "The first and most common reaction is Conformity. The second possible reaction is Innovation. The third possible reaction is Ritualism. In the fourth reaction, Retreatism, both the goals and the means are rejected. Finally, the fifth and final possible reaction is Rebellion" (see Evans:4). Since the publication of Merton's first work on anomie (1938), he has constantly revised and expanded this typology of five possible reactions to the point that his theory became structurally different from that of Durkheim (see Passas%Agnew, 1997).

Merton's theory of anomie caught the attention of American sociologists like Talcott Parsons, Robert Dubin, Richard Cloward, Lloyd Ohlin, Albert Cohen, Richard Rosenfeld, Steven Messner, Robert Agnew, and Stephen Pfohl. All of them criticized Merton one way or another but they accepted his theoretical model and have even tried to expand on it. Dubin, for one, extended

Merton's five typologies to fourteen. Generally 'though, Merton's theory has remained as a source of inspiration up to this day.

In spite of the changes that the concept of anomie has witnessed since its first use in the ancient world (5th century Greece, in the Greek old testament, in 8th century poems of Hesiod), during the renaissance, in the 17th century (see Merton, 1999:XV), and up to the present, its relationship to change, particularly rapid change, has remained intact. John Western and Andrea Lanyon (1999:78) have attempted to show this relationship in a diagram as depicted below:

Figure 1: The Anomie Equation

Mitigating Factors

| Post-Modernizing Forces *Globalization *Urbanization *Mass Migration | → | Rapid Or Accelera-ting rate of social change | → | Develop-ment of structures which predis-pose anomie | → | Degrees Of anomie | → | Quality of Life |

Mitigating Factors

An important and positive point which makes the above diagram different from other many (in fact, too many) attempts to portray anomie in a graphic way is its emphasis at both positive and negative impacts of anomie. In reality, anomie for both Durkheim and Merton, just like for many others, was and still is a negative concept conveying negative impacts and outcomes. Merton was specifically criticized for such a negative approach. This negative connotation became widespread and eventually reached the ears of officials as well as lay people; and this, by itself, has very negative consequences. When officials of some of the developing countries are told of the concept of anomie, even without a perusal of the context in which the concept is used and the purpose it aims to serve, they would immediately think that someone is about to criticize them or their policies and they would react swiftly and harshly.

Nevertheless, as Western and Lanyon have noted, anomie may very well act as a catalyst to bring about positive structural changes.

Youth and Anomie

As has been mentioned, the youth is a social group in any given society with the greatest potentials in energy and mobility. Young people are everywhere and as a rule; they introduce new elements

into the system and are the first to be mobilized. Moreover, the young are in the process of becoming; thus, they are more in danger of becoming the victims of social malaise. In addition, these young people, wherever they may be, have similar ambitions which to them are highly important. They expect to raise a family, get a decent job to ensure a modest lifestyle for themselves without conflicts, to be able to maintain friendships, and to be left alone in peace. Furthermore, the youth, more than any other social group, are curious and desire to take risk in new experiences and to live different lifestyles.

All these traits mentioned above are general and true across cultures and at all times. Yet at the same time there are specific factors which are novel. Today, due to globalization from above i.e. economic globalization, the generation gap which has always been in existence has widened in an unprecedented scale. The young are familiar with a new language; the dot com language which gives them access to information shared globally. Consequently, they get exposed to numerous types of lifestyles and experiences. However, many youngsters, especially in less developed societies, are still subject to "the dictatorial attitudes of the father, the lack of acceptance of the young person as someone with opinions and feelings, the absence of discussion and consultation" (Marks, 1992:5). And, the obvious reaction of the youth would be "the rejection of authority and a lack of respect for adults".

The same gap exists between the young and their teachers to the extent that they seemingly belong to two entirely different worlds. School and University curricula have not changed much and have lost touch with reality; thus, educational institutions are alienating the young more and more (Piran, 2004:8-12).

Meanwhile, again due to economic globalization, class polarization has become a painful reality in almost all societies. So, for the first time in human history a new dual society within each society is emerging which is entirely different from previous dual societies with regards to tradition and the acceptance of modernization. A small extremely affluent minority capable of living a lifestyle of excessive and conspicuous consumption of goods is living alongside a huge majority which continuously struggles to meet their basic needs. Hence, there are at least two distinct social groups among the youth; poverty, in the midst of affluence and plenty. The result is the rise of animosities, hatred and class conflicts.

Based upon what has been said so far on the youth, it can be inferred that this social group more than any other group experiences anomie for various and, at times, conflicting reasons. Under such societal conditions as described above, identity crisis would be an obvious end result. It is from this observation that Krystyna Szafraniec noted, "…the feeling of anomie is the sum total of the convictions and feelings of an individual facing an identity crisis and losing any further motivation to defend it."

But it should be kept in mind, however, that an individual's reactions to anomic conditions take many forms which are the consequences of the dialectical interactions between structural characteristics common to all and the place of individuals in society as well as their unique life experiences and histories. It is for this reason that anyone who uses anomie as a construct capable of providing meaning is forced to speak of a typology of personalities. To ignore such an important fact would lead to unfounded and bold generalizations, and culturally and politically charged claims about youth in any given society. Seemingly, Iran's case is an ideal type of misunderstood generalizations and misrepresentations, conflicting portrayal of realities, and charged (politically, socially, and culturally) statements. This justifies the need for a truly unbiased and scientific research. Value-free and without any prior agenda, such researches are valuable means for arriving at a youth policy and the programming, planning and formulation of feasible projects.

The Youth in Iran

Before going into a discussion on the available information about the youth in Iran, a few preliminary comments seem necessary. The need for these comments stems from the fact that the youth in Iran is an unknown social group; a safe claim based on the limited number of research available. The situation is made more complicated considering that despite the poor availability of dependable and scientific research on the Iranian youth, almost everybody feels free to make judgments on any aspect and any issue somehow related to the youth. Furthermore, most daily discussions on the youth, one way or another, are negative. Nevertheless, statements referring to the youth as "the neglected generation….the forgotten generation……the lost generation……the burned generation……a generation without cause….." and the likes, are made alongside positive statements such as "the builders of the future….hope of the nation….intelligent generation….powerful and energetic generation…happy generation…etc."

But most of the said statements are not correct. First of all, there is not just one youth group in Iran. Second, no generalization concerning a social group is scientifically correct. The research which will be reviewed in this report does not present any preemptive judgment about the Iranian youth. It has taken into account the fact that Iranian society, for various reasons, is very complex; thus, any judgment or generalization about such a complex context should be based upon a thorough and well-thought out research on the different and conflicting aspects of such a society. Third, the Iranian youth is in the process of constant change. It is enough to know that in the past three decades a number of profound changes, including a major revolution and an encompassing social movement, have occurred in Iran with far reaching consequences on many aspects of social life. Finally, contrary to what is usually common among discussions on the Iranian youth, the research has not attempted to search for the responsible factors or persons to blame for their adverse conditions.

From the start of the research it was firmly assumed that the present condition of the youth in Iran is the by product of so many factors; some historical and some contemporary, interacting with one another in a rapidly changing environment. All events are happening at a time when a deep-rooted economic crisis is unfolding in a period when the country has not that many friends. Moreover, it should be taken into account that powerful internal and external oppositions are also actively at play. Add to that an outdated old-fashion educational system and suspicious parents who have all but forgotten the times when they were young themselves. To make matters worse, there are officials who understand very little about what it is to be young and for years have thought that by using force they will be able to change the youth of the country in any way they desire.

Iran is a young society. Based on the last census (1996)* the population of those 15 to 29 years old was 17.8 million. Tables 1 and 2, which follow, show the populations of youth sub groupings.

* The figures and information presented herewith in this section have been taken from the following source: Zanjani, Habibolah, "Socio-economic Picture of Youth, 2002"

Table 1: *Population of Youth Sub-groups in Iran*

Sub-group	Percentage(%)
15-19 years old	41.7
20-24 years old	31.9
25-29 years old	26.4

Total	100 (17.8 million)

Table 2: *Youth Population in Urban and Rural Areas*

Location	Percentage(%)
Urban	61.7
Rural	38.3
Total	100

Based on the national census, the urban gender ratio was 1.09 while the rural gender ratio was 1.02 thereby depicting the migration of males from the rural areas to the urban ones. Another point of note is that indicators of literacy among the youth have shown a steady increase and interestingly, the increase has been noted more in the rural areas. And because the migratory trend indicates that there is more migration of literates from the rural areas to the urban centers, it follows that there would be an increase in demands for housing, employment, services, and others.

The table below which shows the predicted youth populations in Iran from 1996 to 2021 indicating medium and low population growth rates, may be helpful.

Table 3: *Predictions on the Youth Population in Iran1996 – 2021*

Year	Medium Growth Rate (in millions)	Low Growth Rate (in millions)
1996	17.888	17.888
2001	22.120	22.120
2006	24.769	24.769
2011	24.060	24.060
2016	23.040	21.472
2021	23.996	20.626

Methodology

In the research study conducted in Iran, attempts were made from the beginning to follow the requirements of any scientific inquiry. First of all, both quantitative and qualitative techniques in data gathering were used. From among the quantitative techniques, the survey was selected since it is capable of hypothesis testing and by its definition was believed to be the most appropriate technique considering that the research aimed to study the correlations among a number of independent variables with a dependent variable, i.e. anomie. Moreover, it was necessary to generalize the findings of the survey to that of the entire population of urban youth in Iran (the rural areas were not covered) so a random sample was needed.

To arrive at the sample size, the Cochran formula was used and basing on the urban youth population, it was calculated that 1964 respondents were required. But in order to leave room for the possibility of disregarding some answered questionnaires which would not meet the minimum requirements like control questions and both internal and external controls of each questionnaire completed by interviewing the respondents, it was decided to complete a total of 2500 questionnaires.

The next step involved dividing the sample size into 10 sub samples representing 10 urban areas selected for the study. Samples sizes for each sub sample were based upon the youth population of each selected area. In other words the total sample size (2500) was divided into 10 sub-sample sizes taking the youth population of each of the cities chosen for the study into account. It was at this point that the total number of questionnaires for each of the 10 cities was determined. Next, the method of selecting respondents was determined. In relation to this, each city was divided into three parts based upon social class (areas predominated by the upper class, by the middle class, and by the lower class). Then the youth population of each area was calculated and the total sample size from each city was again divided based upon the ratio of the youth population of each area to the total youth population of the city. This way, the portions of each social class from the sample size of each city was derived.

Through the application of the cluster sampling technique the final respondents from each city were determined. In other words the area occupied by each socio-economic class was divided into a number of clusters and then among those clusters a number of clusters were selected randomly. By doing so it is safe to claim that the selected clusters in each area within a city were representative of that area. When clusters needed for the survey were determined, the selection of city blocks in those selected clusters was completed. The number of city blocks required is determined based upon the size and the number of households within each block. Fortunately, availability of sampling framework, used in National Census which includes basic information on all cities each of which is divided into city blocks, made the selection of those blocks required in each cluster relatively easy. At the same time, for random selection of youth (both male and female) in households within each city block, information gathered in a number of national surveys carried out recently was used (see National Youth Organization, 2005 and Office of National Projects, Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance).

In order to construct the questionnaire based on the theoretical framework of the research which in turn is partially based upon the Geo-strategic and Geo-political Theory of Iranian Society, youth researches conducted by SAD in a number of countries and the questionnaires used in these researches were taken into account and then an initial questionnaire was constructed to be used for the pre-testing phase. But before completion of the pre-test questionnaire, 15 scholars experienced in both survey research and the youth situation in Iran were asked to serve as referees, to review the questionnaire and give their suggestions for modification of the questioner. Only then was the questionnaire ready for the pre-testing phase where fifteen youngsters were selected to complete the same questionnaire. After the questionnaires were completed, the rest of the steps in the survey were followed to simulate an independent research.

Passing upon the tables of results as well as the results of cross tabulation, the questionnaire was once more reviewed and finalized. When the 2500 questionnaires were filled up completely, each questioner was reviewed in regard to internal, external controls as well as those control questions which were added to the questioner at the preparation phase to control the adequacy of each participant's response to the questioner. Based upon those control mechanisms, 2050 questioners were considered acceptable; and then, by using SPSS the rest of the steps were carried out after which frequency tables and cross tabulations were made available.

It should be noted that the questionnaire was designed in such a way that the measurement of a number of variables became possible. These variables include discontent, pessimism, distrust, detachment, power impotence, loneliness, disorientation, and dissatisfaction. Moreover, attempts were made to determine the degrees of intensity of personal anomie, social anomie, economic anomie and political anomie. Independent variables, in addition to gender, age, educational

attainment, income and the like, were social class, social status, level of participation, patterns of leisure time, participation outlook, and system evaluation. Economic anomie, political anomie, individual anomie, and social anomie were considered as dependent variables while discontent, pessimism, distrust, detachment and disorientation were regarded as intervening variables.

Furthermore, apart from the Geo-strategic and Geo-political Theory of Iranian Society which proves that Iran, historically, has always been anomie prone, other environmental or contextual elements were taken into consideration due to their speed, intensity, and scope which have made adaptation difficult or even impossible for individuals; or, have contributed to feelings of being left out, being victimized, being distrusted, in addition to values and norm confusion. These environmental or contextual elements include rapid modernization and the rush to westernization during the era of the Shah, the Islamic revolution, the 8-year war and the succeeding economic adjustment policy, and finally class polarization and the corruption that goes with it.

In terms of qualitative techniques in data gathering, focus-group discussions (FGD) were organized in major urban centers in Iran namely: Tehran, Mashad, Isfahan, Tabriz, and Shiraz, fewer cities from those selected for the survey. These focus-group discussions were conducted separately for males and females, and also for various social classes. Hence, there were six FGD sessions all in all in each city which gives a total of 30 sessions throughout the country. Methodologically it is required that those who participate in a survey should not participate in FGD sessions organized for the same study, for the fact that as a rule those who participate in any survey became familiar with the issues and variables in question and such a familiarity makes their discussions during FGD sessions biased. For this reason those youth who participated in FGD sessions were not among those chosen randomly to take part in the survey.

In the FGD sessions, two major areas of interest, sports and economy, were very much emphasized; these, in addition to discussions on the main variables concerned, the causes of various types of anomie, and the environment in which the Iranian youth are living in. At the end of each session, a questionnaire consisting of 21 questions was completed by each participant. This questionnaire was considered a questionnaire of a non-random survey; and, this survey was likewise treated completely and its frequency tables and cross tabulations analyzed. Finally, it should be noted that a thorough review of the available documents along with an internet search on subjects concerning the Iranian youth were part and parcel of the activities conducted and completed for this youth study.

Main Findings

A review of all the findings on the Iranian Youth and Anomie would, without a doubt, require the writing of a few volumes; which, in this case time and space would not allow. But it is possible to point out some of the most interesting ones in passing. Thus, the following:

One of the most important findings clearly indicates that in Iran, a youth subculture has been formed in which two distinct tendencies has been observed. The first tendency which is actually moving in the direction of an independent sub-group is deviation. A minority among the young in the country has been more and more alienated from the normative system and this is manifested in anti-social behaviors; and, to a lesser extent, in crime and addiction. The second tendency again among a minority of youth which may be called functional or expediency assimilation. This group without believing in formal rules of conduct or what may be named formal acceptable behavioral patterns and norms consciously pretend as if they have genuinely internalized those rules, patterns and norms. Member of such a group have mastered two distinct and at times opposing life styles; private and public life styles.

A review of the existing literature on the youth clearly shows a visible mystification of the youth. Mass media, particularly web logs, are aggravating the existing confusion and extended mythologies surrounding the youth subculture. The present study shows that youth being aware of such a mystification act in ways which exaggerate the mystification and further aggravate the existing confusion. The end result has been the widespread clichés about youth life and behavior which according to the youth have very negative impacts on officials especially police and those in the judicial system when they approach youth. As one of the participants in FGD session; a middle class male 22 years old, noted "without any trial we are found guilty".

A treatment of the spectacular features of youth life in Iran has led to bold generalizations and unfounded statements about the Iranian youth.

Data gathered through survey and FGD sessions show that there are three distinct young groups in Iran which, in Merton's terms, may be classified as the rebellious, the conformists, and the totally indifferent. However, the conformist group in itself may be further classified into the real conformists and pretending-to-be-conformists groups. In a number of answers to the questions concerning personal characteristics, those pretending to be conformists clearly indicated their acceptance of their situation; but, when answering questions concerning their general and indirect evaluation of the situation, their answers, contrary to their previous ones, were radically negative. (Such a classification does not include the case of functional or expediency assimilation mentioned above. Those youth who have arrived into two distinct and at times opposing life styles answer all questions after well thought out calculation. Thus they never criticize the existing situation in Iran). The existence of all types of anomie studied has been proven to be true, albeit in varying degrees, among the sample groups.

Economic anomie seems to have the major role in the development of all other anomies.

Despite the formation of a youth subculture, the societal culture has maintained its hegemonic status; however, it seems that this hegemony is weakening at a rapid pace. The reform movement which led to the more relaxed environment clearly has positive impacts on youth approach toward life. Therefore it is expected that the intensity of all types of anomie will be decreased.

Extensive discussions with the young clearly indicate their firm belief that all adults, including official authorities and parents, do not understand them and that their evaluations of the youth are based upon a number of myths. Such a belief has had very negative impact on youth attitude toward both parents and officials. As a lower class female 19 years old has put it; "our parents treat us as if we are their worst enemies in a battle field".

The major sources of pessimism among the youth of the country include anxiety over their future and losing all prospects of attaining a bright future in terms of job, marriage, and having a shelter of their own. Such a pessimistic outlook is regarded by a number of youth who participated in the survey as the main source of youth anti-social behaviors especially vandalism".

The evaluation of the youth on the present conditions in the country is based on their strong belief that having a satisfactory life in the future is not possible through legal channels. Most of them have accepted the fact that whoever is above the lower and middle class has gained such status through illegal activities. Since almost all of the participants clearly desire to have an affluent lives in the future, it has led to the belief at least among some that everything no matter how unethical is justifiable.

The youth concept of life has been reduced to material aspects. Even sex is reduced to mere numbers; the relationship by itself does not count. Among boys, it is the number of girlfriends which is of value, at least among the better off. In reaction the girls are led to believe that they do

possess something valuable which should be protected and it is their sole prerogative to let go of when the price is right. Thus, love, respect, being together and the like is transformed into a cat and mouse game; a type of relationship built on distrust and suspicion.

The poverty-stricken youth is the one with the lost youth-hood. They work from a very early age and permit themselves to only have small desires: a permanent job, bread on the table, and a warm room when it is cold outside. The girls around him vie to enter the gatherings of the rich and they do not notice the poor around. This picture is true everywhere these days; but, two things make it different here. Pretending to be something else and doing everything in secret then lie about it.

FGD sessions revealed similarities between the rich and the poor youth. Both groups spoke of absent parenting. The poor are used to not seeing their father or both parents because of the latter's long hours of work outside the home. As for the rich young, they receive the fruits of their parent's long hours of work; plenty of money. However, their parents seldom have time to sit and talk with them. They merely nag constantly about how they worry while their children party at each other's houses until the early hours of morning. Research clearly points to the existence of a generational gap which can not be compared to previous generational gaps which to some extent were normal.

One of the participants of an FGD session, a 19-year old male, told the group that "my mother and father constantly advise me on norms and values, but both engage themselves in different activities which are illegal and socially unacceptable."

A major finding of the research from an over-all view is the fact that economics is steadily gaining ground at the expense of the social, spiritual, and the cultural to the extent that it occupies a critical position in all spheres of life. In essence, it is the worst type of anomie.

Another finding indicates that the Iranian young people are experiencing an identity crisis because of the many conflicting labels used to describe them. They are no longer able to comprehend their daily routines and the rationale for their lives as they are constantly bombarded by emphases on ethics and spiritual regulations through the mass media on one hand; yet regularly experience widespread violations of laws, norms, and values and are constantly struggling for material gains at all cost in addition to having crooks as their role models because of the "successes" they have in acquiring comfortable lives and being constantly confronted with the huge gap between words and deeds.

One important issue on the country's youth which has always been ignored is the emergence of a minority who, for various reasons, has digested in the environment where they live and just focus on their own real progress. They now speak two languages, are experts in the dot com fever, have received university degrees from respectable institutions of higher education, and constantly update their knowledge and enhance their awareness.

One major finding of the survey backed up by FGD sessions is the fact that Iranian youth as they themselves put it have acquired "a few faces or masks" which are put on in various situations and for various reasons. An extremely interesting part of the research findings is the youth descriptions concerning the application of those "a few faces or masks" in different life situations. In a number of FGD sessions they in a theatrical manner replayed the ways in which they approach certain groups and individuals and how they search for appropriate words, gestures, symbolic communication and proper behaviors and reactions. As has been noted elsewhere Iranian youth has learned to invent, evaluate, define and redefine every single life condition and do not react automatically (see, Piran, 2004).

Also, the research revealed the tactics they have used for recapturing public spaces, to the point that in Tehran and all other major cities presently there are spaces known as" youth spaces". At first the youth consciously chose various occasions acceptable to the government and took part in ceremonies traditionally defined for those occasions. Then gradually introduced changes into various actions taken in those ceremonies redefining rites, manners and rituals. Winning important football matches by the national team created the opportunities for youth to pour into streets and act in ways never allowed regularly

Finally Iranian youth played an important role in an encompassing social movement which clearly points to the fact that youth may be regarded as pioneers of change and their mobilization may be byproduct of various types of anomie.

To sum up, all of the Iranian young, just like all other young people everywhere, are experiencing a major transition which is extremely painful. But what makes them different from other youth in the world is the fact that on top of everything all the young around the world have to face and cope with, they also have to live under constant fear of arrest, humiliation, and at times excessive punishments for the most trivial matters. Moreover, they feel the presence of the government everywhere; whether in public or private domains. However in recent years those feelings have decreased drastically. But the past negative experiences already have led to adaptation problems.

It is, therefore, a reality that a large number of youth in Iran have experiences unique to them while simultaneously being theoretically subjected to negative experiences which has led to constant fear. Although reactions to environments such as this may differ, it has definitely caused high rates of anxiety, depression, hopelessness, power impotence, pessimism, hatred and anti-social behaviors; all of which are signs of anomie. The realization of how deep-rooted anomie is in Iran comes from an analysis of the environment as described above and from taking into account the history of the Iranian people punctuated by having to live under centuries of authoritarian political rule as an outcome of the conscious decision of social forces in the country, having to undergo 1200 major wars, being occupied for more than 1100 years, and being constantly controlled and monitored by various institutions and groups both formal and informal for many centuries in every single aspect of their lives. Those issues are well documented in another research conducted by the present author in the past twenty years which led to the formulation of the Geo-strategic and Geopolitical Theory of Iranian Society (see Piran, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006). It is no surprise that Iran is regarded a land of collective schizophrenia which has served as a defense mechanism.

On the positive side, two issues also should be mentioned. First the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran has led to a positive cultural transformation in which youth especially the enlightened and more educated ones have a major role. An important aspect of such a transformation is a genuine search for a new identity, an identity which is not simply going back to the roots rather is a search for a synthesis, synthesis which is based on an understanding of the importance of modernity for less developed societies and at the same time is critical of what has taken place in those societies in the name of "modernization" since a few decades ago. The importance of such a search lies in the fact that today youth in other societies are very rarely capable of dealing with such a complex and at the same time paradoxical issue, due to changes which have occurred under the name of globalization. To put it differently, segments of youth in Iran have set for themselves the impossible task; modernization with a human face. This is in sharp conflict with youth experience in other lands which passively witness the integration of their societies into the world capitalist market under the guidelines of what is known as the Washington consensus model mistaken for globalization.

The second positive issue concerns the widespread politicization of the entire population especially youth in Iran, to the point that many foreigners who visit the Irans have expressed their astonishment for the very close involvement of the lay people with politics. This has led to the emergence of a very deep rooted consciousness concerning Iran's Geo-strategic and geopolitical position both in the region and worldwide. Such a consciousness also has given birth to an unwritten allegiance to Muslim world in general; a phenomenon unknown to Iranian before the Islamic Revolution which has contributed to the radicalization of Islam all over the world. A type of radicalism which due to the western countries' unjustified treatment has led to unacceptable practices (See Piran, 2006: 254).

A Few Suggestions

The most critical issue in Iran is not only the lack of a clear youth policy arrived at through involving the youth but more important the implementation of such policy after putting aside individual decisions, various interpretations, and individual interventions based upon their own judgments. The problem in contemporary Iran is the fact that, at least as far as the youth is concerned, it seems to be a country of a hundred sheriffs. A youth policy should be realistic. In fact, hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent on the preparation of policies but almost all of them have been drawn up without involving the youth themselves. The same people who think that the Iranian youth is a "lost generation" or are "deviants….anti-religious…..sinful…." have prepared youth policies. Needless to say, a participatory youth national policy project is needed.

The Iranian young people lack many things; but, since a number of things that are favorites of the young worldwide are banned, they are left to the mercy of a black market mafia. Hence, the Iranian youth are bombarded with false information, manipulation, and the lack of safeguards. Most parents do not even have an idea of the lifestyle of the present Iranian youth. So, a targeted awareness package which would include various programs is needed.

Life skills' programs are likewise extremely important. The young acquire knowledge mostly from their peers; not from their parents nor from schools. It is critical that life skills be transferred to the youth through well-thought out projects designed and implemented with the participation of the young themselves. At present it is unfortunate that public awareness programs on drug abuse, youth problems, or any other social problems aired over Iranian television channels have negative impacts. For instance, after weeks of watching a heroin addict injecting heroin into his veins in a TV show, what captured the attention of the young is what was shown of the addict turning into a sportsman after spending one night locked in a room. The young whose curiosity has been aroused would think that it takes only one night in a room to overcome addiction; thus, the addiction would be worth the hardship and the pain. In a society where addiction is the number one social problem with the rate of rehabilitation negligible, such misinformation is disastrous.

Finally, another important project would be a Youth Innovation Fund (YIF). This is very important not only for job creation but also as an incentive. Based on the main idea behind this project, an elected YIF council would have to be formed. Then, it will be announced that all interested professionals regardless of their field of expertise should come together to form a Volunteer Experts' Committee in any locality they choose, to help their own youngsters and all others. NGOs should also register to help. Another announcement will then be made to call on the young people to come together to form Young Innovators Working Groups which will eventually arrive at an idea for a project which has potentials for implementation. The idea will be evaluated by the Volunteer Experts' Committee and when approved, the National Youth Organization and the Ministry of Cooperatives will then allocate the funds for the projects. For a few years they would not be

expected to pay back but once they start the money will not go back to the government but will be used to multiply the number of innovation groups.

It should be kept in mind that Iran is a resourceful country and Iranian youth should be viewed as an asset. On other occasions, the present author has called youth in every society a time bomb. It can be used either for construction removing barriers or in a wait and watch game where it would lead to disasters. During various phases of the research it became clear that Iranian youth strives to be seen, recognized and be accepted. In many cases when youngsters are engaged in actions causing self destruction or harming others and destroying properties, they only try to be seen and recognized (see, Piran, 2003). Fortunately, in more recent years government's approach toward youth has witnessed many positive changes. Today youngsters are more respected, violations of their basic rights are reduced drastically and the overall environment is more relaxed. Arriving at policies aimed at improvement of youth conditions are urgently needed. In formulating those policies governmental agencies should be present and act as facilitators. A social mobilization is also needed to address the main problems that youth are facing today. Youngsters themselves should be viewed as main actors in such a mobilization.

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