

DECOLONIAL INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

My Journey to Iran

An Essay on Three Revolutions¹

A Visit to a Revolution

A Visit to Iran

Two months ago I visited Iran from Friday, May 10, till Wednesday, May 15. It was a life-changing experience. I did not just visit a country. I visited a revolution. It was the third revolution I had visited in my life. My journey to Iran was not just a physical journey in May 2024. It was a spiritual journey that began more than fifty years ago, when I became a revolutionary Marxist. This journey took me from Marxism through decolonial theory to the concept of a new world civilization. It includes visits to revolutions in Grenada, Venezuela and Iran. The journey did not end when I left Iran on May 15.

On the morning of Monday, May 20, I was shocked to hear the news of the death of President Ebrahim Raisi and his companions in a helicopter crash. On August 30, 1981, a terrorist attack by the Marxist People's Mujahedin of Iran (MEK) on the office of the Prime Minister of Iran killed Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar, President Mohammad Ali Rajai, and six other Iranian government officials. The death of Raisi and his companions did not seem to be the result of a terrorist attack.

Normally, a news item like this would not touch me personally, but just five days before the crash, I was in Mashhad for the fifth global conference on Imam Reza (PBUH), where I was scheduled to speak. Raisi gave a speech at the closing ceremony of the conference. I wanted to give him a copy of my book, *Decolonizing The Mind*. Professor Ameli, who invited me to the conference, suggested that I present it to him personally, but the hectic nature of the press when he left the ceremony prevented me from doing so. The presenter of the ceremony, Hamid Reza Dashti, took the copy and gave it to Raisi's press secretary. In the copy, I wrote the following message: *"To the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Dr. Seyed Ebrahim Raisi. Thanks for supporting the struggle of the oppressed people of the world from Palestine to Venezuela."*

The inscription reflects my feelings about the Iranian revolution and its president. It also made me think about the three revolutions that I have visited. In a separate essay that I will publish later in this year I will analyse the connections between the 1955 conference in Bandung, Indonesia, the struggle for a free Palestine, and the role of Iran in the new world order.

In this essay, I will share my personal observations and feelings about the Iranian revolution and compare it with the Grenadian and Bolivarian revolutions.

The Iranian revolution started on January 7, 1978, with student protests in the holy city of Qum against the brutal rule of the Shah of Iran. It turned into a year-long uprising that left 60,000 dead out of a population of 36 million at that time. Iran now has a population of 90 million.

My Personal Background

I was a student in 1979 and a hardcore Marxist. I regarded the Iranian revolution as a backward reaction of medieval clerics against modernity, bypassing the socialist movement after the fall of the shah. My focus was on another revolution in 1979: the Grenadian revolution, a socialist revolution. The future was socialism, and any revolution that was not socialist was not modern and thus would not survive modernity. So there was no need for me to study the Iranian revolution, although it brought down one of the most brutal pro-imperialist regimes in the world.

I was born in 1955 in the former Dutch colony of Suriname in the Caribbean. In 1970, my family of ten children moved to the Netherlands in a period of mass migration from Suriname to the Netherlands. My eldest brother stayed behind. He had become a lawyer and did well in Suriname.

In the Netherlands I radicalized during secondary school, where the opposition against US war in Vietnam had brought many young people to the street. We sought justice for the people of Vietnam and identified with all the national liberation movements in the world, from Africa and Asia to Latin Abya Yala (formerly known as Latin America) and the Caribbean. However, We did not perceive the Islamic movement headed by Ayatollah Khomeini as a liberation movement.

Upon entering the university to study economics, I embarked on an in-depth study of Marxism. I collected all the works of Marx and Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg. Subsequently, I became a member of the International Communist League, which was the Dutch section of the Trotskyite Fourth International. At one point, I served on the Central Committee of the League.

The Grenadian Revolution and Marxism

The Rise of the Revolution

On March 13, 1979, the socialist New Jewel Movement (NJM) on the island of Grenada initiated a revolution that would inspire the whole progressive left within and from the Caribbean. Grenada was a small island in the Caribbean with a population of 95.000 people in 1979. It would fit in a suburb of Tehran with its population of nine million. We are talking about very different dimensions when comparing the Grenadian and Iranian revolutions.

The former British colony in the Caribbean, which became independent in 1974, was ruled by Eric Gairy, a dictator whose secret police, the Mongoose Gang, terrorized the population. He ran the island as if it were his private enterprise. The NJM, led by Maurice Bishop, organized the opposition against Gairy. In 1979, Gairy decided to eliminate leaders of the New Jewel Movement while he was out of the country. In response, the NJM overthrew Gairy in March of that year while he was visiting the United States. Revolutions are often very bloody, but this one was not. There was only one military barrack that was taken over by 46 NJM militants, 18 of whom were unarmed. Bishop became prime minister of the revolutionary government. In his radio address announcing the revolution, Bishop said: *"People of Grenada, this revolution is for work, for food, for decent housing and health services, and for a bright future for our children and great-grandchildren."*²

The Grenadian revolution was supported by Cuba. The revolutionary government of Cuba sent engineers to help with the construction of a new airport and medical staff to help upgrade the health system. The United States threatened to invade Grenada because it saw Grenada as a new area of Soviet influence in the Caribbean.

The Grenadian revolution served as an inspiration for numerous progressive movements among people of colour across the Caribbean. It stood as the first black revolution since the Haitian revolution of 1791 – 1804, during which black leaders of the revolution formally declared Haiti as the inaugural free black republic in the Americas on January 1, 1804. Race and ethnicity hold significant importance in the Caribbean region.

The Grenadian revolution was a socialist revolution. The NJM was a Marxist party. The Grenadian revolution had energized the left within and from the Caribbean. Caribbean communities outside the Caribbean were mainly in Canada, United States and Europe. International solidarity was high on its agenda, but not with Iran.

In the Netherlands I had established the Grenada Solidarity Committee, which mobilized both material and political support for the revolution. In July 1983, we coordinated a solidarity trip to Grenada, merely three months before the tragic events that ultimately resulted in the downfall of the revolution. This journey marked my inaugural encounter with a revolution. As we traversed the compact island, we engaged with various communities, conversed with members of the NJM, and participated in a mass gathering

where Maurice Bishop delivered an address. Little did we anticipate that, three months later, he would fall victim to an internal faction within his own party, precipitating the revolution's collapse.

The Demise of the Revolution

A faction in the New Jewel Movement, led by Bernard Coard, staged a coup d'état, resulting in the arrest of Maurice Bishop and part of the NJM leadership, subsequently executing them on October 19th, 1983. Coard believed that Bishop was not sufficiently aligned with Marxist principles and was steering the revolution in a wrong direction. This coup paved the way for the US invasion of Grenada. The US armed forces apprehended Coard and his gang, culminating in the collapse of the revolution.

My experience with the Grenadian revolution had a big impact on me. I was very well versed in all the key propositions of Marxism: historical materialism, philosophy of dialectic materialism, class struggle, Marxist economic, social and political theory. The road ahead for achieving a world of justice was clear. The Russian revolution had provided a model: foster a revolutionary vanguard party, build mass movements (including trade unions, women's, peasants' and youth movements) under the leadership of the vanguard party, and prepare for what Lenin termed a revolutionary situation- wherein the lower classes reject the old order and the upper classes are unable to maintain their previous dominance. This approach was rooted in a scientific analysis of society and world history.

How does this scientific analysis address a scenario wherein individuals who grew up akin to siblings exhibit no moral inhibitions against harming each other? Maurice Bishop and Bernard Coard shared a longstanding acquaintance from a very early age. They were intimate friends, with Bishop being charismatic and popular, while Coard was an introverted Marxist theoretician. How could Coard, at a certain juncture, orchestrate a coup d'état against Bishop, culminating in his arrest and execution? Was there no recollection of their camaraderie and collaborative endeavors? Or was Coard's action solely driven by a theoretical assessment of the optimal path towards socialism? These inquiries prompted contemplation on ethics and morality within Marxism. Where do ethics intersect with Marxism? How can one reconcile the justification for the deaths of millions of people by leaders such as Stalin, Pol Pot and Mao Zedong within a Marxist framework?

In 1988, five years following the collapse of the Grenadian revolution, I engaged in a lengthy discussion in Amsterdam with George Louison (1951-2003), a co-founder of NJM, an ally of Maurice Bishop, and a former minister of agriculture in the revolutionary government.³ We delved into the factors contributing to the revolution's downfall. According to Louison, sectarianism emerged as the predominant factor. In 1978, the party made the decision to transition its organization from a mass party into a vanguard party. Louison remarked, *"The sectarianism in our party was expressed in the fact that such strict criteria were used that only a handful of people formed the party. In retrospect, this is where the biggest mistake was made. The most striking example of how we went wrong is the story of the man I called to my side on the night of the takeover. I asked him to come quickly. I wanted him to do something for me. He had a small pickup truck. He came, but with his wife. He thought: oh well, we're friends, we'll chat a bit and then go grab a beer, so I'll let the woman come too. I called him aside, explained to him that he had to transport weapons, because tonight we were going to raid the army barracks. So he had to drop his wife home. He said in a nonchalant manner, "No problem, man!" He brought his wife home and came back. So I asked him to risk his life without prior consultation. But this man was not in the transformed party, but was a member of the old NJM. After the takeover, he worked like a horse, day in, day out. He was active in the militia, did all kinds of things for the party. He had two hectares of land. He later bought three hectares of land. He was excluded from party membership because he was a landowner and could become a large landowner."*

It brings the question to the fore: what is the root cause of sectarianism? Is it inherent in the theoretical framework of Marxism? If one employs the concept of class struggle as the driving force behind historical changes, then it becomes conceivable to divide society

into two distinct classes: the oppressed and the oppressor. An individual is situated within one of these classes, not both. Despite Louison's friend's dedicated efforts towards the revolution, he did not belong to the oppressed class. Being a landowner, he fell into the category of the oppressor. But where does this leave concepts like friendship, integrity, and morality? They find no footing within the Marxist theory of class. It broaches yet another vital inquiry. While we comprehend what we oppose—oppression, injustice, capitalism, and the like—what exactly propels us towards dedicating our lives to social struggle? What drives us to dedicate our life to social struggle? If our pursuit merely adheres to a "scientific" theory of socialism devoid of ethics, it risks descending into the horrors witnessed in Russia, China, Cambodia and Grenada. Conversely, a socialist revolution can be approached with humanity and compassion, showcasing an alternative path forward.

The Cuban revolution notably lacked the excesses witnessed in revolutions of Russia, China and Cambodia. It bore a profound humanistic quality throughout its course. When Fidel Castro addressed the events in Grenada, he highlighted how the Coard faction veered off course due to theoretical missteps. He pondered, *"Were those who conspired against him within the Grenadian party, army, and security forces by any chance a group of extremists drunk on political theory?"*⁴

This encapsulates the essence of sectarianism, as articulated by Louison. It is the result of actions guided by theoreticians who assume an almost divine authority. Their theories decide not only what is deemed true or false but also what is considered right or wrong.

Marxist Theory and Ethics

Marxist theory is not about ethics (right or wrong), but about science (true or false). And scientific socialism tells us that Marxists are on the right side of history, even if that involves killing millions of people. In fact, there can be a justification for these killings. *"The man who repudiates terrorism in principle - i.e., repudiates measures of suppression and intimidation towards determined and armed counterrevolution - must reject all idea of the political supremacy of the working class and its revolutionary dictatorship. The man who repudiates the dictatorship of the proletariat repudiates the socialist revolution, and digs the grave of socialism"*, wrote Leon Trotsky in 1920, three years after the triumph of the Russian revolution.⁵ Joseph Stalin, his adversary, practiced what Trotsky preached. Trotsky himself had used terrorist methods on numerous occasions in the Russian revolution, and most notably in the crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion of 1921. This rebellion was organized by Soviet sailors, soldiers, and civilians who initially fought for the revolution but became disillusioned and turned against the Bolshevik government in the Russian port city of Kronstadt.

Is it possible to have a modern revolution that is based on ethics rather than science? To answer this question, we have to look at the Iranian revolution that was based on an ethical framework: the religion of Islam. *"Islam is a religion of those who struggle for truth and justice, of those who clamor for liberty and independence. It is the school of those who fight against colonialism,"* says Ayatollah Khomeini.⁶

But at that time, Khomeini was not a reference point for me. As a Marxist, I was an atheist. I did not believe in a God. Science can explain every phenomenon of nature and life. Religion is opium for the people. It prevents them from seeing the class contradictions in life and leads them to accept their oppression, exploitation, and humiliation. The religious authorities were instruments of the ruling class, and that is why Marxism condemns religion.

The extreme consequence of this ideology is illustrated by a story that Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano (1940-2015) wrote. Galeano became famous with his classic study on the history of Latin Abya Yala *Open Veins of Latin America* (1971). In 2013, he published a book *Children of the Days: A Calendar of Human History*, which deals with a particular event on a specific day of the calendar. On January 17, 1918, Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, the first Bolshevik Soviet People's Commissar (Minister) of Education, who also wrote plays, convened a court to prosecute God. Lunacharsky presided over the court that judged God. Galeano writes: *"A Bible sat in the chair of the accused. According to the prosecutor, throughout history God had committed many crimes against humanity.*

*The defense attorney assigned to the case argued that God was not fit to stand trial due to mental illness; but the tribunal sentenced Him to death. At dawn on this day, five rounds of machine-gun fire were shot at the heavens."*⁷

There are more tolerant views of religion in Marxism, but, in general, this was the type of climate in which revolutionary Marxists like me operated.

Religion and spirituality have been sources of ethics, norms and values in all societies. They accompany rituals in significant events in our lives: birth, marriage, death. What happens when you discard all of that? It can open the door to a hedonistic lifestyle based solely on pleasure. This is aptly illustrated in the works of Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952). In the Russian revolution, Kollontai was a prominent Bolshevik who served as the People's Commissar for Welfare in the Soviet government from 1917 to 1918.

The Russian Revolution had liberated men and women from sexual restrictions. Church weddings were abolished, and civil partnership was introduced. Divorce became a matter of choice, and abortion was legalized. Homosexuality was decriminalized, and gay marriage was legalized. All of this implied a significant liberation of family and sexual norms.

Kollontai took a more radical stance, arguing that sexuality is a human instinct as natural as hunger or thirst. That is true, but if that is all it is, however, then a hedonistic lifestyle beckons.

Kollontai's 1923 work, *"Love of Worker Bees,"* consists of a novel and two short stories.⁸ One short story, *"Three generations,"* explores how the Soviet Revolution impacted societal sexual mores. It centers around a letter Kollontai received from a female revolutionary, Olga Wasselowskaya.

Her mother, Maria Stepanovna, was also a revolutionary. Her daughter Genia was another revolutionary.

Grandmother Maria had been married to a Comrade, but fell in love with another man. Her old-fashioned morals of the time were clear: you have to choose between your marriage and your love. She chose love, only to end up finding her lover in an affair with his maid.

Mother Olga had also married a man, but fell in love with another. She considered her mother to be old-fashioned. As a revolutionary, she argued that one could love two men, and that one should not have to choose. Her husband and her lover could not live with this arrangement, and eventually both left her. She found a new love in Comrade Rjabkov.

Genia, the daughter of Mother Olga, came of age during the Russian revolution. Genia believed that the revolution has freed women from the restrictive boundaries of love. Free love, she argued, was the new norm. Sex, she asserted, was a physical need, and therefore one could sleep with whomever one pleased, without the necessity of a romantic relationship. She and Rjabkov, her mother's husband, had entered into a sexual relationship, but it was devoid of romance. Mother Olga, unable to cope with this new situation, sought advice from Kollontai. She wondered if she was old-fashioned, and if her daughter's morals represented the morals of the future. Kollontai concludes her story with the poignant question: *"Will the future show that the new class, the new youth with its new experiences and its new conceptions and feelings, is on the road to true happiness?"*

Hedonism may not be the inevitable outcome of a socialist revolution based on atheist Marxism. The Cuban Revolution provides a contrasting example. Che Guevara grappled with the question of ethics and morals in the post-revolutionary society. Drawing on the guidance and leadership of Fidel Castro, Che argued that socialism would foster a new ethical framework for men and women.⁹ This new human being would cast off the burden of egoism and selfishness, becoming a free person who viewed work as a social duty and solidarity in the struggle against injustice as a core value.

Revolutionary Love

Moreover, the basis of ethics and morals is a simple concept: love. Che on revolutionary love: *"At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this*

*quality. Perhaps it is one of the great dramas of the leader that he or she must combine a passionate spirit with a cold intelligence and make painful decisions without flinching. Our vanguard revolutionaries must idealize this love of the people, of the most sacred causes, and make it one and indivisible. They cannot descend, with small doses of daily affection, to the level where ordinary people put their love into practice.... In these circumstances one must have a large dose of humanity, a large dose of a sense of justice and truth in order to avoid dogmatic extremes, cold scholasticism, or an isolation from the masses. We must strive every day so that this love of living humanity is transformed into actual deeds, into acts that serve as examples, as a moving force."*¹⁰

If you had asked me at the age of seventeen, when I had just started to become a revolutionary in the anti-imperialist struggle, what I thought about love, I was not thinking about love for the community. I would have answered: "I dream of love, of marrying a beautiful girl, making love the whole day, living in peace and prosperity, enjoying art and music, living an intellectual life, having friends and family around you, having beautiful children and walking hand in hand with my beautiful girl in the journey of life till eternity." It a simple dream that is shared by everybody, so I thought.

Did my Marxist education change this dream? In some ways it did. In other ways it did not.

Marxism added a collective element to my individual dream. We fight for a better world, not just for our individual lives. We fight for a better world for everyone on the planet. We want injustice to disappear and love to reappear. It is about a simple world in which everyone lives in peace, prosperity, and happiness. It that too much to ask for?

The collective element did not replace the individual one. I meet a beautiful girl, Sitla Bonoo, when she was eighteen and I was twenty. We had two beautiful children. But I could not have stayed with her if she were not part of the social struggle I got involved in. She was heavily involved in the Surinamese feminist movement in the Netherlands. She co-founded the feminist journal *Ashanti*. I saw Sitla for the first time with her Palestinian keffiyeh around her shoulders at a public meeting and fell head over heels in love with her. At first, she was not convinced of my love for her, but when she finally came around, Marxism did indeed have an impact on our relationship.

Ten years after we made a solemn promise to grow old together, we were expecting our first child. We decided to get married, but because we regarded marriage as a bourgeois institution, we did not want the usual wedding rituals. We simply wanted to deal with the legalities of a marriage with a signature. We went to the city hall, signed the marriage register, and went back to our revolutionary meetings. Our respective families could not appreciate this. At that time, we did not care. Later, I lamented this choice.

When our daughter got married, her deliberate choice of a Hindu wedding ceremony struck a chord with me. Her spirituality resonated deeply, and I found myself enjoying the rituals that connected our families in a way I hadn't anticipated. The shared ceremony, steeped in tradition and symbolism, brought our families closer in a way that words alone couldn't. It brought a pang of regret for the decision we made years ago to discard rituals that could have sealed such bonds in our own lives. But then, I had already left Marxism and begun to appreciate the value of culture, spirituality, and rituals in our lives.

My break with Marxism was a theoretical and cultural one. In the Caribbean, Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) experienced a similar break. Césaire was a prominent black member of the French Communist Party. Césaire wanted Marxism and Communism to be placed in the service of black people, and not black people in the service of Marxism and communism. The doctrine and the movement should be made to fit men, not men to fit the doctrine or the movement. Césaire criticized the white French communists: "*Their inveterate assimilationism; their unconscious chauvinism; their fairly simplistic faith, which they share with bourgeois Europeans, in the omnilateral superiority of the West; their belief that evolution as it took place in Europe is the only evolution possible, the only kind desirable, the kind the whole world must undergo; to sum up, their rarely avowed but real belief in civilization with a capital C and progress with a capital P (as evidenced by their hostility to what they disdainfully call 'cultural relativism'). All these flaws lead to a literary tribe that, concerning everything and nothing, dogmatizes in the*

name of the party. It must be said that the French communists have had a good teacher: Stalin. Stalin is indeed the very one who reintroduced the notion of "advanced" and "backward" peoples into socialist thinking."¹¹

It was the start of another theoretical framework to deal with injustice: decolonial theory. It resonated with me. Césaire did not use the category of "decoloniality", but of Pan-Africanism, which is closer to a civilizational approach to world history than to class analysis.

Although I broke with Marxist theory, I still cherish the memories of socialist culture and struggle. A big part of our revolutionary life consisted of political meetings, public events and demonstrations. The demonstrations were often emotional, because we sang songs like "[Avanti Populo](#)," "[Bella ciao](#)," "[Un pueblo unido](#)," and "[The Internationale](#)."

"Avanti popolo," the anthem of the Italian Communist Party, ends with "Long live communism and freedom".

The anti-fascist song "[Bella ciao](#)" tells the story of a partisan who knows he might die in the struggle. He wishes to be buried up in the mountain, under the shade of a beautiful flower. Passersby would then say, "*What a beautiful flower!*"

"Un pueblo unido" was written during the electoral victory of the Chilean socialist movement led by President Salvador Allende, who was brutally murdered by a CIA-sponsored coup in 1973. It calls for marching together and building unity, because a people united will never be defeated.

"The Internationale" is the anthem of the socialist movement. It is about the last fight in the world: the fight for world communism. "The Internationale" will unite the human race. I especially like the modern Chinese pop [version](#). We sang "The Internationale" on the first of May, with our fists clenched in the air.

I left Marxism, but I always carried with me the emotions of joy and militancy that these songs instilled in my heart. Even today, they bring back the emotions and memories of the demonstrations that ended with scuffles with the police - especially in the ultra-left circles of Trotskyism and anarchism - where we had to run for our lives from the police who were chasing us and trying to beat us up or arrest us. With hindsight, there is something romantic in those memories, because they speak about love for humankind. At that time, there was nothing romantic about it, because there was a lot of stress in street confrontations.

The songs were part of a socialist culture, in which you addressed each other as "comrade," a fellow member of the community who fights with you for a socialist future. In the French Revolution, the revolutionaries addressed each other as "citizen." Before the Revolution, French society was divided into different classes in which titles such as "Monsieur" or "Madame" were used to denote social status and hierarchy. The French Revolution abolished these distinctions, because all individuals were equal citizens with equal rights and responsibilities. "Citizen" is connected with formalities. In the socialist movement, "Comrade" has a connotation of joint engagement in struggle.

The Grenadian revolution was firmly based on classical Marxism when Sitla and I visited the island in 1983. After the October crisis, I drew away from Marxism. It took me years to find another narrative of liberation: decolonial theory. When we visited Venezuela forty years later, we witnessed a revolution that combined socialism with decolonial theory.

The Bolivarian Revolution and Decolonial Theory

Decolonial Theory

After the collapse of the Grenadian revolution in 1983, I continued to fight for social justice, focusing on the struggle against racism in the Netherlands and the anti-imperialist struggles worldwide. This led me to connect with the trade union movement in Suriname in their fight against a military dictatorship. Through my prolific writings (25 books, numerous columns and articles), I became a public intellectual within the Surinamese community, both in Suriname and the Netherlands. Iran, however, was not initially on my radar.

In 2010, I met Ramon Grosfoguel, a scholar who introduced me to decolonial theory, and the concept of decoloniality. He also connected me with Venezuela, a country where decolonial ideas were gaining traction. Decoloniality challenges the idea that Western knowledge production is the only objective and universal truth. The European Enlightenment claims that its knowledge production of modernity is universal and objective. Decoloniality analyses the bias in Eurocentric knowledge production and locates this in the colonial system of domination. Furthermore, it offers a fundamental critique of Eurocentric knowledge production by pointing out that its epistemology (the theory of knowledge which is at the basis of every knowledge production) is not objective, but influenced by the position from which the knowledge producer acts. Decoloniality acknowledges the importance of race and racism in social relations and the impact of colonialism on these relations, including in the field of identity formation. It is also a critique of the nation-state as the centre for social analysis and it looks at colonialism from a global perspective.

I appreciate the critique of Eurocentrism by decoloniality. However, I see weaknesses in their approach. Decoloniality is not comprehensive. There is no decolonial economic or political theory. Many other disciplines of knowledge lack decolonial theory. Decoloniality is not a monolithic concept. The variety of its contributions can lead to contradictions. Some thinkers argue that Eurocentric theory is biased, but then recommend economic theories that hark back to Marxism, a major school of the European Enlightenment. Similarly, some see feminism and intersectionality as complementary to decolonial theory, while others offer a decolonial critique of these very concepts. Decoloniality, therefore, is not integrated. It remains unclear what the foundational category for decolonial theory is, from which it could reconstruct a whole new (decolonial) knowledge system. In Liberalism, it is individualism; in Marxism, it is class. What is the corresponding concept in decoloniality? Decoloniality is largely a critique, but to endure it needs to evolve to the stage where it provides practical answers to real-world problems. The lack of tangible solutions for contemporary global issues is a major shortcoming of decolonial theory. Decoloniality does not offer organizational frameworks for social struggle. How do we organize for social struggle? Marxism proscribes building political parties to lead socialist revolutions. What does decoloniality suggest? For twelve years, I have studied Eurocentric knowledge production across various disciplines. I contend that we must develop a comprehensive, cohesive, and unified theoretical framework as a counterpoint to the European Enlightenment. In my 600-page [book](#) titled *Decolonizing the Mind*, I propose some building blocks for such a framework, collectively termed DTM (Decolonizing the Mind). The Bolivarian revolution takes a serious look at decoloniality. The government is organizing courses on decolonial theory.

History of the Bolivarian Revolution

Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution did not erupt through an uprising, but rather emerged from the electoral process. In 1977, Hugo Chávez founded the Revolutionary Bolivarian Army (RBA). After years of organization and planning, the RBA attempted a military takeover of the government in 1992. The failed plan resulted in Chávez and his companions being imprisoned. However, this event served as a catalyst for his popularity, as the Venezuelan people came to view Chávez as a champion against the country's corrupt ruling class.

In 1994 he got amnesty from a new government ruled by a rightist president who had made alliances with some leftish parties. In 1997, Chávez formed a political party, the Fifth Republic Movement, to contest the presidential elections. With the backing of other leftish parties Chávez won the election with 56% of the vote. In February 1999, he was inaugurated as President of Venezuela. This marked the beginning of the Bolivarian revolution, which would have an enormous impact on Latin Abya Yala.

In the same year, Chávez held a referendum for a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. The referendum received 81.9% in favour. On July 25, 1999, an election was held to elect 131 deputies to the Constituent Assembly. Chávez's party secured 95% of the seats. The Constituent Assembly drafted a new constitution, which was

subsequently submitted to a referendum in December 1999. It secured the approval of 72% of voters.

The new constitution officially changed the name of the country from the Republic of Venezuela to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The old constitution was based on a three-branch system of government: executive, legislative, and judicial. The new constitution introduced a five-branch system: the executive branch (the president), the legislative branch (the National Assembly), the judicial branch (the courts), the electoral branch (the National Electoral Council), and the citizens branch, which is composed of the Defender of the People, Chief Public Prosecutor, and the Comptroller General, who are responsible for defending citizens state. It enshrined the idea of popular sovereignty through frequent referendums. It also emphasized social responsibilities, the right to rebel against injustice, and the eternal independence of the republic from foreign domination. The constitution enshrined certain human rights, such as free education up to the tertiary level, free healthcare, access to a clean environment, and the rights of minorities (including indigenous peoples) to uphold their own cultures, religions, and languages. It increased the presidential term from five to six years. It established a presidential recall referendum, allowing the people to remove the president from his or her term ended. The opposition triggered such a referendum in 2004, but it failed as 59% of voters chose to keep Chávez in power. In 2009, a constitutional amendment was passed that abolished term limits for elected officials, including the President.

In 1999, Chávez launched his own Sunday radio show, *Aló Presidente* (Hello, President), which became a Sunday national TV show in 2000 and was an important instrument of political education for the Venezuelan people. In line with the constitution, Chávez attempted to implement deep-seated political, social, and economic reforms. These reforms provoked strong opposition, funded and directed by the American government. Under the new constitution, it was legally required that new elections be held in order to re-legitimise the government and president.

Chavez's first presidential term lasted from 1999 to 2001. In July 2000, presidential elections were held, resulting in a 60% vote for Chávez, a four-percent increase from the 1998 elections, which inaugurated his second presidency. In 2006, his third term in office was confirmed in elections that brought him 62% of the votes. His fourth term was confirmed in 2012 with 55% of the votes. In 2013 Chávez died after a two-year battle with cancer. New presidential elections were held, and his successor, Nicolás Maduro, won the 2013 elections with 51% of the votes. In 2018, Maduro was re-elected with 68% of the votes. The next presidential election will be held on July 28, 2024.

Unlike other socialist revolutions in history, the Bolivarian revolution is founded on elections for the president, parliament, and all its administrative divisions, including 23 federal states and 335 municipalities.

In 2007, Chávez's administration brought many leftist parties together to establish the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela - PSUV), which contested all subsequent elections. There have been 30 elections in the past 25 years: 2 for constituent assembly, 7 for mayors, 4 for parliament, 4 for president, 7 referendums, 5 for governors, and 1 mega-election (renewal of every post after the approval of the constitution in 2019). The PSUV has won 28 out of 30 elections, but this does not negate the fact that the opposition has secured some posts. In 2013, the PSUV won 255 municipalities, with the opposition winning 75. In 2021, the opposition secured victories in five gubernatorial races. All of these victories were recognized by the government. In 2015, the PSUV suffered a defeat in the parliamentary elections. This opened the door for claims of a US-orchestrated coup d'état involving Juan Guaidó, the then president of the National Assembly. Guaidó contended that the 2018 presidential elections were rigged, declaring Maduro illegitimate. Despite lacking a presidential mandate, he asserted his own claim to the presidency, backed by a majority in the parliament. The US and its allies formally recognized him as president. This bizarre demonstration of abuse of power that enabled the US and Europe to seize Venezuelan assets abroad. A crippling economic boycott resulted in empty shelves and food rationing. However, the government ensured

that every family received a monthly food box distributed through a network of local organisations.

Visits to Venezuela

I visited Venezuela for the first time in 2018 for a conference on solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution. The country was in the throes of the fight against Juan Guaidó and the US campaign to install him as the president. He held demonstrations with tens of thousands of followers. Venezuela, with a population of almost 30 million, saw a counter-demonstration in support of the government. I participated in that demonstration that drew an estimated one million people in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela. It was so massive that you could hardly move. Caracas, situated in a valley, saw people descend from the surrounding hills to fill every square of the city. The people who participated in the demonstrations were predominantly from lower socio-economic backgrounds, yet appeared well-educated. Their political education had evidently raised their political awareness, allowing them to understand the complexities of the situation in their country and in the world. The opposition demonstrations received extensive coverage in the Western press, while the pro-government demonstrations were largely ignored.

The Simón Bolívar Institute for Peace and Solidarity among Peoples (SBI), which is part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with the Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research (IVIC) regularly organize week-long courses on topics relevant to social movement activists in the country. The institute also invites foreign lecturers to contribute. I had the honor and pleasure to delivering such lectures in 2019 and 2023. In 2019, I was invited to deliver a series of lectures on reparations. Reparations for slavery and colonialism for Black and Indigenous peoples is a significant issue in Venezuela and the Caribbean. In Venezuela, Black and Indigenous communities are heavily involved in shaping government reparations policies. In the Caribbean, many countries have joined forces to form a united front against European colonizers in demanding reparations. I have written a [book](#) on reparations that places the topic in a decolonial framework. In 2023, my focus was on the theoretical framework of DTM. I was joined on this trip by Sitla.

My counterpart at the Simón Bolívar Institute SBI is Guillermo Barreto, the director of education. He is a professor of biology and ecology, having served as Venezuela's Viceminister of Environment (2014-2015), Minister of the Popular Power for Ecosocialism and Waters (2015-2016), and Viceminister of Science and Technology (2016-2017) under the Maduro government.

In 2019, Guillermo took me to the tomb of Hugo Chávez. Two things resonated with me during this visit. Upon entering the compound, we were greeted by a young woman, a member of the militia that serves as part of the country's defense structure in case of an invasion. She enthusiastically educated me about Chávez. Unaware of my identity or my work on decolonization, her entire commentary throughout the tour focused on explaining how our minds are colonized and how Chávez empowered the people to decolonize their thinking.

Another powerful moment was Guillermo's visit to Chávez's tomb. His voice filled with emotion as he explained what Chávez meant to him and Venezuela. It was as if Chávez's influence had grown even stronger after his death, a testament to his enduring legacy as a source of inspiration. Guillermo's words evoked a genuine sense of loss in me as well. In 2023, Guillermo introduced me and Sitla to a commune, a grassroots organization functioning as a combined administrative unit, educational center, and community mobilization hub. One of the commune's leaders was a young woman who adopted the name Anacaona. Her birth name is different. Anacaona was the name of a princess of the Taíno people that inhabited Haiti, when the Spanish invaders occupied the island and called it Hispaniola. The Taíno people fiercely resisted the Spanish conquest, with Anacaona emerging as one of their leaders. Captured by the Spanish, she was presented with a brutal choice: execution or becoming a concubine. Had she chosen the latter, her story would likely have been lost to time. She chose death with dignity over humiliation, becoming an enduring symbol of resistance for women in Venezuela, even five centuries

later. This exemplifies how the Bolivarian Revolution draws inspiration from both historical struggles and the rich tapestry of Venezuelan identity.

Anacaona is a staunch communist. We had discussions with her on many issues: how they organize the commune in order to counter the effects of the economic boycott and how to get people involved in running the commune. Our conversations also delved into feminism and the revolution's impact on gender roles. Anacaona, demonstrating her awareness of socialist history, brought up Alexandra Kollontai and the debates surrounding gender during the Russian revolution. She even mentioned the controversy regarding Lenin's potential romantic involvement with Inessa Armand, a Bolshevik revolutionary who collaborated closely with both Lenin and his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya. What implications does this have for gender relations within a socialist revolution? Does it herald free love as the new norm?

Venezuela's connection to the Russian Revolution stems from its longstanding. My week-long lecture series in 2019 culminated in a lively closing session. The organizers brought in a music band, their infectious Caribbean rhythms drawing everyone to the dance floor. The discussions throughout the week were invigorating, weaving together Marxist propositions with decolonial theory. At times, I couldn't help but be reminded of scenes from Warren Beatty's 1981 film *Reds*. Warren Beatty's epic historical drama, *Reds* (1981), chronicles the life and career of John Reed (1887-1920), a journalist who immortalized the October Revolution in Russia in his seminal 1919 book *Ten Days That Shook the World*. Beatty stars as Reed, alongside Diane Keaton as Louise Bryant, his partner who accompanied him to Russia. The film features a stirring scene depicting of a gathering of revolutionaries, in which Reed gives a fierce speech and everybody is excited. The mood is jubilant. As Reed steps off the podium, the music of The Internationale erupts. Back in the crowd, Louise watches him, their eyes meeting in a silent exchange. Amidst the revolutionary fervor, the film portrays the human dimension: the joy of liberation, the yearning for a better world, and the enduring power of love and friendship. These emotions intertwine with scenes of daily life – playing in the snow, reveling in the music's beat. It is a reminder of the experience I had at the end of my course, the Caribbean band's music filling the Caracas meeting hall, uniting us all.

A Socialist, Christian and Decolonial Revolution

There is a revolution unfolding in Venezuela. It is described as socialist, Christian, and decolonial. Hugo Chávez introduced the concept of "*socialism of the 21st century*" in Venezuela. Its core values are liberty, equality, social justice, and sustainability. This revolution was not achieved through a violent uprising. It emerged from democratic elections. Chávez famously stated: "*The only way to save the world is through socialism, but a socialism that exists within a democracy; there's no dictatorship here.*"

He elaborated: "*Let us remember what happened in the Soviet Union: in the Soviet Union there was never democracy, there wasn't socialism, it was diverted and the leaders did not realize it, or if they did realize it they were incapable of changing things and it became a beaten empire. The fault does not lie solely with Soviet Union, the blame also lies with all of the external aggressions, economic sabotage, biological and bacterial wars, bombings and explosions in the Soviet oil industry, as well as the contradictions, the divisions, the culture. That is why the socialism of the XXI century, which has resurfaced here as if from the dead, is something new; it has to be truly new, and one of the things that is fundamentally new in our model is the democratic character, a new democratic hegemony which obliges us not to impose, but rather to convince, and that is where we are coming from: the subject of the media, communications, of our arguments, so that the whole country is aware of what we are presenting today; of how we can achieve it, of how we can make it happen. A change in culture. An impact on a cultural level is vital for the revolutionary process and for the construction of a XXI century socialist democracy in Venezuela.*"¹²

This presents a distinct view from the one-party system. It grapples with the question of how to construct socialism within the parliamentary framework. Chávez, a devout Catholic and socialist, frequently speaks of his religious inspiration. In a 1999 address to the United Nations, he referenced Jesus while discussing his 1992 attempt at a military

revolution. He compared his actions to those of Jesus: *"Jesus took up a whip and burst into the temple to drive out the merchants who had defiled the holy temple of his Father, our Father."*¹³ Chávez consistently draws upon the Bible when addressing issues of injustice. As he famously declared: *"The Bible says the same thing in various places and the wisdom of history, that other holy book, carries the same message: as long as there is no justice in the world there will be no peace."*¹⁴

The religious element in the Bolivarian Revolution extends beyond Chávez. Article three of the statutes of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela outlines its values and principles. Here, it identifies Christianity and liberation theology as a source of inspiration. Article 3 states: *"The party is constituted as a socialist party, and affirms that a socialist society is the only alternative to overcome the capitalist system. It assumes as ideological sources the thoughts and works of Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez and Ezequiel Zamora. The party values in the same way the principles of scientific socialism, Christianity, liberation theology, all critical and humanist universal thought, gender equity and equality, and the ethical obligation to build a political model respectful of life and mother Earth that guarantees human survival.*

*As a multiethnic and diverse party, it nurtures its roots of Afro-Indianism bequeathed by Guaicaipuro and José Leonardo Chirino, all inspired by the fundamental leadership and revolutionary ideas of Commander Hugo Chávez, aimed at creating the new man and woman in a melting pot of hopes and dreams that make our socialism a mestizo socialism, loaded with Africanity, the elements of the indigenous peoples, and with the international vision that has had Francisco de Miranda as its greatest proponent."*¹⁵

The Bolivarian revolution, while rooted in socialism, extends far beyond it. It grapples with issues of colonialism, race, class, gender and ecology. It champions an ethical approach to politics, promoting the creation of a new man and woman. It draws inspiration from the ideologies of the philosophers and educators who collaborated with Simón Bolívar in the struggle for Latin Abya Yala independence from Spain.

I encountered this spirit in all my visits to Venezuela, and even more so in the intensive discussions I have with Guillermo Barreto. Guillermo is a biology professor. Through my work on DTM, I argue that we need to move beyond a general critique of Eurocentrism and instead focus on reconstructing academic disciplines from a decolonial perspective. This extends beyond the social sciences, as my book I also deal with decolonizing mathematics, physics and biology. Guillermo, for his part, informed me that for thirty years he had taught Darwinian theory, specifically the principle of survival of the fittest, as the most advance scientific theory in biology. Upon familiarizing himself with decolonial theory, Guillermo began to view Darwin's work through a new lens. We discussed how the theory of survival of the fittest could be interpreted as an application of liberal ideology to the animal kingdom. This perspective portrays animals as isolated individuals locked in a perpetual struggle for resources. However, numerous animal species operate in social groups, with members demonstrating a willingness to sacrifice themselves for the collective survival of the group. We discussed other elements of decolonizing the discipline of biology: the Eurocentric classification of the animal kingdom by the founder of Eurocentric biology, the Swedish biologist Carl Linnaeus; whether there are animals that operate not only on instinct, but also on knowledge that they produce; whether there is an epistemology of animals; the Eurocentric separation of the bond between humans and nature; how colonialism has affected the climate and ecology, and many other topics in science and biology.

Revolutions can undoubtedly suffer from revolutionary fatigue. Imperialist powers often aim to undermine and sabotage such movements through propaganda and economic boycotts, placing immense stress on the daily lives of citizens. This stress can, in turn, lead to burnout and fatigue. However, neither Guillermo nor many others I met in Venezuela exhibited this. Instead, a consistent determination to fight for a better future pervaded. This unwavering spirit motivates me to remain committed to the struggle. The Bolivarian Revolution demonstrates an openness to engaging with other ideologies, including Islam. This aligns with my own interest in the Iranian Revolution, as Venezuela has fostered ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Iranian Revolution and a New World Civilization

Connection with Islam

My own journey to connect with the Iranian Revolution necessitated engaging with Islam. Raised Hindu, I participated in numerous family religious ceremonies, listening to tales from the Ramayana or the Vedas recounted by the Hindu priests. Even upon becoming a Marxist, I continued to participate out of respect for my family. Similarly, Sitla, from a Christian background, maintained her faith in God despite her involvement in the socialist and feminist movements, though church attendance lapsed. Yet, neither of us possessed a deep understanding of Islam.

My first encounter with Islam was as a consultant. Fresh out of university, I launched my career by establishing a private consultancy specializing in social research and project management. In 1996, I secured an assignment conducting an anthropological study of the Turkish Alevi community in the Netherlands. This project, commissioned by an institution seeking to create a resource for non-Muslims about Alevi religion and culture, provided my first opportunity to delve into Islam, particularly Shi'ism. I saw that there were two schools of Shi'ism in Turkey: The classical school following the life and teaching of the Prophet Muhammad (570-632) and the fourth caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib (600-661), and the Bektashis, followers of Haji Bektash Veli (1209-1271), a mystic from Khorasan (Iran) who lived and worked in Anatolia (Turkey). During my fieldwork in Turkey and with Bektashi communities in the Netherlands, I discovered a unique aspect of their faith. Unlike mosques, Bektashis utilize cems, ritual spaces where men and women participate together in singing and dancing. This research provided me with a foundational understanding of Islam.

My second assignment was unexpectedly linked to both politics and Islam. Following the signing of the Oslo Accords (Oslo I in 1993 and Oslo II in 1995) between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Palestinians needed a practical plan for the future of Jerusalem. In the 1980s and 1990s, Orient House in East Jerusalem, the PLO's headquarters led by Faisal Husseini, hired international consultants to develop a vision for the city. A friend from Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands, Atem Ramsundersingh, was involved in assembling a team of consultants to collaborate with Palestinian counterparts on this project.

The end result was a report titled *Envisioning the Future of Jerusalem*. Together with my Palestinian counterpart, the economist Dr. Samir Hazboun, we wrote the economic chapters of the report. I made three visits to Palestine for this project: to Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. The report was published in 2003.¹⁶

The Oslo Accords proved to be a disastrous failure for the Palestinian people. The hope for peace seems dashed. Having witnessed the daily harassment of Palestinians by the Israelis, I now hold the firm belief that the occupation cannot be indefinite. In my book, I dedicate a paragraph to the argument that Israel may cease to exist within two to three decades. The occupation's oppressive nature is simply not sustainable in the long run. During my trips to Palestine, I visited Al-Quds (Jerusalem), the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the Dome of the Rock, and was impressed by their beauty and historical-cultural significance for the Islamic world. I travelled to both the West Bank and Gaza. My travels led me to realise that the entire region is steeped in religion, being the birthplace of the Abrahamic faiths. The Palestinian struggle, I came to understand, is not solely about land; it is also a struggle for religious freedom. While I had studied literature on Islam, I now recognise that I had not truly engaged with the religion itself.

Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC)

My engagement with Islam began fourteen years ago, when I met [Arzu Merali](#) and Raza Kazim of the Islamic Human Rights Commission ([IHRC](#)) at a conference organized by Ramon Grosfoguel in Barcelona. It necessitated a slight cultural adjustment on my part. I was accustomed to greeting friends with a hug, not with a handshake. Arzu greeted me with a gracious smile and her hand resting on her hearth, a custom observed by many Muslim women. There are many ways of greeting in the world, and I have learned to respect them all, all, receiving greetings in any form with gratitude.

The IHRC is staffed by Muslims. During my visits to the IHRC in London, I've often observed staff members departing for the prayer room at designated prayer times. They perform their prayers and then return to work. It's important to note that their work extends far beyond preaching Islam. Their core mission is the fight against injustice, not just for Muslims, but for all who face it. Islamophobia, racism, reparation, slavery, Venezuela are just a few of the many issues on their agenda.

The experience with the IHRC has had a profound impact on my understanding of Islam. The IHRC's anti-colonial stance resonates with Islam's own anti-colonial spirit. Through their campaigns, I learned that they draw inspiration from Islam's principles in every anti-colonial struggle they are involved in. This compelled me to take a closer look at Islam and its history. The equation of Islam with backwardness is a grossly unfair, orientalist, and racist one. This misconception extends far beyond the extreme right, pervading the views of many progressive secular individuals and organizations, including Marxists.

My work with the IHRC marked a significant shift from Marxism to decolonial theory. During this time, I embarked on developing Decolonizing The Mind (DTM) as a comprehensive, cohesive and integral theoretical framework. The IHRC significantly facilitated this work by inviting me to deliver DTM course within their network. The discussions held during these courses proved instrumental in refining the framework. While I delivered numerous courses outside the IHRC network, those offered within it were specifically embedded in a structure designed to build the Decolonial International Network (DIN). The IHRC's commitment to building this network has been truly remarkable. They have generously invested their resources – time, money, and staff – without ever seeking anything in return. Their unwavering support stems from their deeply held religious beliefs, a testament to their principled approach. If, in the future, a scholar were to chronicle the history of the decolonial movement, the IHRC's role would undoubtedly be prominent.

Massoud Shadjareh, chair of the IHRC, and Arzu Merali have been pivotal figures in building the Decolonial International Network (DIN). We hold monthly meetings via WhatsApp and Zoom, with additional sessions convened as needed. Our discussions encompass a wide range of issues, including: how to analyze international politics and the role of various actors, how to construct practical campaigns around issues of injustice, questions of organization and networking, and how Islam informs our perspectives on these issues. Massoud, who is originally from Iran, introduced me to the discussions on the Iranian revolution.

All these works have significantly impacted my thinking. Compelled by this new perspective, I began a serious examination of the Iranian revolution. Three key questions emerged:

1. What became of the Marxists in Iran during the Iranian revolution?
2. What ideological foundation underpinned the Iranian revolution? What kind of liberation philosophy informed the Islamic revolution?
3. How does the Iranian revolution connect to my previous experiences with revolutions like those in Grenada and Bolivia? Can I approach it through the same lens?

Marxism in Iran

My first interest was in the Marxist movement in Iran. Many Western books on Iran are very biased. I found one book that was particularly balanced. It is titled *"Going to Tehran. Why the United States Must Come to Terms with the Islamic Republic of Iran"* and is written by Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett. They worked for the US administration and had personal dealings with the Iranians. Their approach was to get an understanding of the Iranian revolution, without the need for demonization. They argue that the United States must come to terms with the Islamic Republic of Iran. They have listened to and taken seriously the perspectives of Iranians who support the Islamic Republic. They have been very factual in their approach.

The most important Marxist organization in Iran was the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), also known as Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) or Mojahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO). It was founded in 1965 by leftist Iranian students. They participate

in the struggle against the Shah. But after the revolution, they turned against the Islamic government.

Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett writes about them: *"The MEK - with support from Saddam and perhaps the United States - launched a campaign of terrorist bombings intended to 'decapitate' the IRP [SH: Islamic Republic Party that supported Khomeini] ; well over a hundred leading figures in the fledgling Islamic Republic were killed. At Behesht-e Zahra, a mausoleum on the fringes of the section devoted to the Iran-Iraq War dead holds the remains of more than thirty of these victims, including prominent politicians, military commanders, and religious leaders. Ayatollah Khamenei, the current supreme leader, was the target of one of these attacks on June 27, 1981, after speaking at a mosque near Tehran's main bazaar; his right hand was permanently damaged. The personal impact - both emotional and physical - of MEK terrorism on the Islamic Republic's political elite comes through in Khamenei's subsequent account of the 1981 terror campaign:*

*'By stealing arms and ammunition and explosive matériel - not a difficult job in those chaotic days of revolution - and through the assistance of certain foreign governments, terrorist groups who lacked any form of popular base established a vast network in Iran. Individual and group assassinations, colossal bomb explosions, the hijacking of aircraft, kidnapping, horrible incidents of torture, indiscriminate shootings, and the deliberate slaughtering of people were among the measures carried out with the support and encouragement of our Iranian society's infamous enemies. Their victims included important leaders and authorities of the revolution, as well as ordinary men and women and, of course, innocent children and passersby.... In one act alone, some seventy-two leading figures of the revolution, including several cabinet ministers, a score of parliamentarians, and other irreplaceable personalities...died inhuman deaths. In another incident the president and the prime minister were both killed in a bomb attack.'*¹⁷

In 1980, the year following the revolution, Saddam Hussein invaded Iran with the support of the West and even the Soviet Union. The MEK participated alongside Saddam Hussein's forces in the war against Iran. According to the Leverett's, *"more than 200,000 Iranians had been killed and almost 400,000 injured. More than 10,000 Iranian victims of Iraqi chemical weapons attacks died; 60,000 to 90,000 continue to suffer - in many cases, acutely - from the effects of their exposure. Beyond the human cost, the war inflicted extensive damage on Iran's economy and infrastructure."*¹⁸

The assessment of the Leverett's on MEK is as follows: *"MEK agents placed and detonated inside one of Shi'a Islam's greatest shrines, the tomb of Imam Reza (the Eighth Imam) in the Iranian city of Mashhad, on June 20, 1994, killing at least twenty-six people (mostly women and children) and wounding more than two hundred. In 2012, U.S. intelligence officials said that the MEK is cooperating with Israel to assassinate Iranian nuclear scientists. The disclosure is ironic given that the United States has itself provided clandestine military training and support to the MEK - even after Washington designated it as a foreign terrorist organization in 1997. While the MEK is beloved in some parts of Paris, Washington, and Beverly Hills, it remains widely detested in Iran."*¹⁹

This is the legacy of Marxism in Iran. I have visited the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad. It attract an estimated 25 million domestic visitors and five million foreigners every year. Iran is deeply religious. With MEK, Marxism got a negative reputation within the country. Many Western leftists who criticize the Islamic government for going after socialists, conveniently leave this history out of their narrative, so that it seems as if it is about the socialist ideology and not about the terrorism committed in the name of socialism.

The ideological basis of the Iranian revolution

The second topic on my agenda with Iran is a proposed study of the ideological basis of the Islamic revolution. The Western propaganda against the Iranian revolution has an intimidating effect on people. If you were to say to your neighbour, *"Let's study the life and thought of the leaders of the Islamic revolution in Iran"*, she or he would probably report you to the police and security services, exclaiming, *"Are you out of your mind? Have you converted to Islam? Are you going to get involved in terrorist activities?"* You

would probably never get a response like, *"Good to broaden your mind by studying other perspectives of life and struggle in the world. Keep me posted. I might join you."*

This is intellectual terrorism and a form of colonization of the mind. The demonization of anti-imperialist leaders and movements is the most crucial instrument in this colonization. It limits the scope of your intellect and compels you to neglect the lives and philosophies of these leaders and movements. Consequently, it narrows your view of reality and impairs your understanding of what is truly happening in the world. You are effectively coerced into supporting imperialism, because dissent invites the risk of being demonized yourself. That is how the intellectual climate within the West operates.

There are numerous resources available in English on the Iranian Revolution. Explore these links to delve deeper into the subject. Two key figures of the Islamic Revolution are [Ayatollah Khomeini](#) and his successor, [Ayatollah Khamenei](#). Notably, in 2021, Khamenei published a significant book titled "Islamic Beliefs. Reclaiming the Narrative". While predating the Islamic Revolution's victory, the book lays out his theological views on faith and religion, which remain highly relevant in contemporary Iran.²⁰

A fascinating intellectual is Ali Shariati (1933-1977). In his book, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies. An Islamic Critique*, he offers a comparative analysis of Islam and Marxism.²¹ It is philosophical critique. Shariati shares the anti-imperialist stance of many socialists and was actively involved in anti-colonial solidarity movements. Notably, he translated Frantz Fanon's work into Persian. In 1961, he was arrested during a demonstration in Paris honoring Patrice Lumumba. Shariati exemplifies the revolutionary intellectual in Iran, one who bridges Islamic philosophy with anti-colonialism. This is not merely a personal characteristic of Shariati; it's a recurring theme among many Iranian Islamic intellectuals.

I follow the daily news about Iran from English-language websites that present the news from an Iranian revolutionary perspective, such as [Farsnews](#) and [PressTV](#). I also follow two Persian-language media outlets, [Tasnim](#) and [Almaydeen](#), though I rely on Google translate to understand their content. If you are interested in following the Islamic Revolution in Iran, there are sufficient resources to get you started.

My studies of the Iranian Revolution have led me to conclude that we need a new theoretical framework for understanding world history and social struggles. Liberalism, with its emphasis on individualism, limits our comprehension of the world. Marxism, with its focus on class, also restricts our understanding. Decoloniality, while valuable as a critique, does not provide a comprehensive alternative.

The leader of the Iranian Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei, speaks about the concept of civilization. He declares: *"Today, the Islamic world has a responsibility to reinvigorate this world – just as Islam and the Holy Prophet (s.w.a.s.) themselves did – to create a new environment and forge a new path. We refer to this anticipated phenomenon as 'the new Islamic civilization'. We should be striving towards this new Islamic civilization – for the betterment of humanity."*²²

I define civilization as a collection of societies united by a common cultural foundation. The cultural foundation is the most distinctive feature of a civilization, for it articulates a vision for the future of humanity: what kind of societies this civilization aspires to build, where it stands presently, and where it strives to go. This foundation shapes the identity of that civilization. On the basis of these shared values, it establishes institutions for knowledge production and dissemination, alongside others in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres.

When Ayatollah Khamenei speaks about striving for a new Islamic civilization, he sees it as dramatically different from what Europeans think about humanity and civilization. He provides a sketch of what Western civilization is about. Khamenei argues: *"Once, by drawing on the knowledge and philosophy of Muslims, the people of Europe managed to build a civilization for themselves. Of course, this civilization was primarily material. Since the 16th and 17th centuries of the Christian era, the Europeans began to shape a new civilization. Because it was focused on the material world, they used different instruments ruthlessly. On the one hand, they pursued colonialism and the conquest of nations, plundering their wealth. On the other hand, they strengthened themselves internally through knowledge, technology, and experience. This is how they helped this*

civilization come to dominate the human world. This is what the Europeans achieved over the course of four or five centuries.

The civilisation they presented to the world offered alluring reflections of technology, speed, comfort, and various amenities for the people. However, it failed to deliver happiness or administer justice. On the contrary, it undermined justice, captivated some nations, impoverished others, and humiliated yet more. Furthermore, it harboured inherent contradictions. Morality became corrupted, and spirituality waned, leaving a sense of hollowness.

Today, Westerners themselves are corroborating this. A prominent Western politician remarked to me that their world feels hollow and empty. He is correct. This civilization possessed a flashy exterior, but its underlying nature was perilous for humanity. The contradictions within Western civilization are now becoming apparent. These contradictions manifest in various ways across America, Europe, and the regions under their global influence."²³

Khamenei highlights three elements:

1. Western civilization took basic knowledge from non-Western civilizations, notable the Islamic civilization.
2. Western civilization is based on colonialism, oppression and injustice.
3. Western civilization is based on materialism, which creates societies that are hollow and empty in their spiritual life.

His view of an Islamic civilization is markedly different. Khamenei asserts: "*This does not entail the conquest of lands. It does not signify the violation of the rights of nations. It does not mean imposing one's beliefs and culture upon other nations. Rather, it signifies offering a divine gift to nations such that they may choose the right path of their own accord, through their own choices and decisions.*"²⁴

The DTM theoretical framework is based upon the concept of civilization. The Global South has produced many civilizations that still exist today, some for thousands of years. Islamic civilization is such example. Colonialism undeniably destroyed some of these civilizations, as was the case in Abya Yala. However, many others were repressed but have nevertheless survived and are re-emerging today, including Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism.

From a DTM perspective, the key question for the future is how we can transcend the current colonial world order and usher in a new global civilization. What will this new global civilization look like?

Let us return to fundamentals: knowledge production. Western colonial world civilization is underpinned by the knowledge production during the European Enlightenment. The social and natural sciences, as we understand them, were established by the thinkers of that era. Their theories continue to be taught at universities worldwide. To effect a transition towards a new global civilization, a critical reassessment of the Enlightenment's legacy, particularly within the scientific disciplines, is imperative. Following our critique, must then embark on the development of alternative knowledge frameworks: the reconstruction of the disciplines. What would a decolonial economic theory look like? What are the foundational concepts of decolonial sociology? How can we achieve the decolonization of mathematics? Many civilizations, including the Islamic world, have already made significant contributions upon which we can build to reconstruct these disciplines.

The final step is to bridge the gap between theory and praxis. What are the practical implications of decolonial theory?

International Solidarity and the Iranian Revolution

When I studied the Islamic Revolution in Iran, I examined its theories and practices. A genuinely liberatory revolution will always be internationalist in scope. Following its victory, the Iranian Revolution began vigorously supporting liberation movements in Palestine and South Africa. Mandela visited Iran in 1992, two years after his release from prison and two years before his election as South Africa's president. He declared in [Tehran](#): "*We are here to thank the Iranian government and nation for their support in the black people's struggle against apartheid.*" He met with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali

Khamenei, deferentially addressing him as "[my leader](#)." South Africa is not a Muslim-majority country. The solidarity of the Iranian revolutionaries extends beyond the Ummah, the global Muslim community.

Many secular activists now engaged in organised resistance against the Zionist genocide in Gaza are puzzled by the Iran's role in the Palestinian freedom struggle. Western propaganda and ideological campaigns by secular Iranians living abroad portray Iran as a reactionary state. How can such a state consistently support this crucial battle for human civilization? Why is the vehement opposition to Iran from the US and its European proxies? The secular left opposed to the Islamic Revolution seeks a nefarious motive behind the Iranian support for Palestine. However, there is none. Studying the leaders reveals that long before the revolution, they had already analyzed why the struggle against Zionism is vital for a better world. As early as 1963, Ayatollah Khomeini placed the Palestinian cause on the political [agenda](#) of the liberation movement. He emphasized the importance of Muslim unity in confronting Zionism.

When the revolution triumphed in 1979, it inherited a dire situation. A year later, the entire world, led by the West and backed by the Soviet Union, applauded Saddam Hussein when he launched a devastating war against Iran. Iran survived. Saddam Hussein and the Soviet Union did not. An economic boycott crippled the economy. Terrorist attacks claimed the lives of 17,000 Iranians, including nuclear scientists. Yet, Iran triumphantly rebuilt its society, military and economy. It laid the foundation for an unyielding anti-imperialist struggle. It established a Resistance Front and a support infrastructure to combat Zionism and imperialism. The resistance we witness today in Western Asia would have been impossible without Iran's role.

If you are a non-Muslim anti-imperialist, how do you relate to Iran with all this knowledge? If you are pro-Palestine, but anti-Iran, then something is wrong in your analysis of both Palestine and Iran.

On May 30, 2024, Ayatollah Khamenei penned a letter addressed to American university students who are organizing protest against the genocide in Gaza. He writes: *"As the pages of history turn, you stand on the right side of it. You have now formed a branch of the Resistance Front and have begun an honourable struggle in the face of your government's ruthless pressure—a government that openly supports the usurper and brutal Zionist regime."*²⁵

US congressman for the Republican Party, Brian Mast, [reacted](#) to the letter, saying: *"If the Ayatollah of Iran is praising you, you are definitely on the wrong side of history."* This highlights just how cynical the defence of the Zionist genocide in Gaza has become, by claiming that a defence of the Gaza genocide puts you on the right side of history. Some activists in the Palestine solidarity movement may be confused, because they de-link Palestine from Iran. But then the question arises whether they truly understand the Palestinian liberation struggle.

How to Connect with an Islamic Revolution?

My connection with the Grenadian revolution was both theoretical, rooted in Marxism, and practical, fuelled by anti-imperialism. My connection to the Bolivarian revolution was two-fold: theoretical, influenced by Decolonizing The Mind, and practical, motivated by anti-imperialist convictions. How, then, can I connect with an Islamic revolution, given that I am not a Muslim?

For me, it was through my engagement with the IHRC, DTM and Imam Reza (PBUH). I witnessed the dedication and commitment to building a decolonial international network inspired by Islam but also inclusive of secular activists like myself. We share a common analysis of injustice: and how colonialism has created a civilization of death. Yet, in working together, I have come to see that a simple value, friendship, is crucial for building relationships in social struggles.

The term "comrade" denotes collaboration towards a shared objective. Friendship, however, transcends mere cooperation; it signifies a bond of mutual care and support, even beyond the confines of a specific project. Friends, chosen as family, forge a deeper connection than blood ties alone. This, in essence, is the cornerstone of collaborative

efforts. In my experience with the IHRC, it has formed the bedrock of working alongside those inspired by Islamic principles.

Over the decades of struggle, I have been fortunate to make many friends—people I care about and who care about me. I have also worked with others who share my analysis of social struggles, but friendship was not there. These collaborations felt more like business partnerships: functional as long as things ran smoothly. However, problem-solving is a process built on dialogue, trust, and good faith. True friends are those who stand by you in good times and bad—through thick and thin. Friendship transcends mere analysis or religion; it's rooted in shared values and genuine connection.

I have witnessed countless examples of people I considered friends vanishing when the going gets tough. These individuals were seemingly present during good times, but fair-weather friends don't weather hardship.

Unlike friendships, business partnerships lack the foundation of dialogue, trust, and good faith. Disagreements inevitably lead to a dissolution of the association, with each party pursuing their own interests.

The Preparation for the Visit to Iran

I have had the pleasure of collaborating with Massoud Shadjareh and Arzu Merali for many years, and they've become dear friends. In January 2023, following the publication of my DTM book, I embarked on a tour of universities and social movements around the world.

There seems to be a misconception about my background. While I've written 25 books, I never pursued an academic career. I worked as a private consultant until retirement. Despite this, I'm often addressed as "Dr. Hira" or "Professor Hira." While I appreciate the sentiment behind such attributions, I do occasionally find myself correcting the mistake. One insightful person offered, *"We know that you don't have academic titles, but we don't care. If you produce knowledge as you are doing, then you are a Dr. or a Prof."* That encounter made me realize the futility of further explanation.

There is a misconception that university speaking engagements solely serve to elevate one's profile. This misses the crucial distinction between building a movement and inflating one's ego. The ego-driven approach prioritizes accumulating speaking engagements to bolster a CV and enhance prestige. While academics should certainly engage in intellectual discourse through publications and presentations, this pursuit shouldn't overshadow the importance of movement building. The problem arises when academics position themselves as intellectual leaders without taking on the responsibility of organizing and fostering a movement.

When building a movement, you enter a distinct process. Before the speaking engagement, there are discussions with various stakeholders about our desired outcomes and potential follow-up actions. Following the engagement, we assess the anticipated short-term and long-term impacts of our involvement.

In essence, our objective is to establish a new global civilization grounded in a knowledge base that empowers governments and activists to build a new social order. This is an ambitious undertaking, to be sure. Our speaking engagements serve as instruments to cultivate a network of intellectuals and activists who can contribute to this goal.

We require intellectual brainpower to develop the DTM theoretical framework, deconstructing and reconstructing disciplines as needed. Equally essential is activist power that can bridge these analyses with strategies for political, economic, social, and cultural change.

Building this network is no easy feat. Everybody is stretched thin by various engagements. Patience and diligent effort are crucial. I have encountered many university affiliates eager to contribute, but academia's demands don't equate to an abundance of free time for knowledge production. The weight of teaching, student coaching, and administrative tasks leaves many of my colleagues with scant time for reading, let alone contributing to new knowledge.

But I do not lose hope, because in the eighteen months that have passed since the DTM book's publication, I witnessed a steady growth of our network and the emergence of impressive contributions. Let me share one example.

In Argentina, I connected with Gustavo Paccosi from the University of General Sarmiento, a mathematician specializing in multifractality analysis in natural phenomena and synchronization of coupled oscillators. While Gustavo explained his field, it remains above my head, I am afraid. However, he has a well-established network of Argentinian mathematics and hard sciences experts who convene every two weeks. Having read my chapter on decolonizing mathematics, Gustavo initiated a conversation with me. Remarkably, not only is he a math expert, but he also follows decolonial theory literature. He even authored an article exploring the decolonization of mathematics through the DTM framework and the work of Enrique Dussel. I see him and his network as potentially taking decolonial mathematics to heights beyond my own reach. Looking ahead, I anticipate that a growing number of experts across various disciplines will contribute to the development of the DTM framework, propelling it to new heights. In my regular conversation with Massoud and Arzu, we brainstorm how the DIN networks can flourish and expand. One discussion we recently had centered on the potential role Iranian intellectuals can play in constructing a new global civilization. The most prominent Iranian intellectual I knew, from the media, thanks to following him on YouTube, was [Mohammad Marandi](#), a professor of English Literature and Orientalism at University of Tehran. Marandi's composure and incisive interview style on mainstream media impressed me. He skillfully deconstructs their narratives about Iran, his interviews serving as real-world examples of decolonizing the mind. Massoud suggested translating the DTM book into Farsi to engage the Iranian intelligentsia with DTM. The IHRC publishes a quarterly journal, [The Long View](#), edited by Faisal Bodi and Arzu Merali, featuring in-depth analysis of world politics. It is translated in Farsi and Spanish. Ebrahim Mohseni Ahooei is their Farsi translator. He enthusiastically offered to do the Farsi translation. Ebrahim is a faculty of University of Tehran. The intricacies of translating into a language like Farsi never ceased to amaze me. There is no word in Farsi for university. There is a word for a place of knowledge: *daneshgah*. Is that the same? No. University is a place where they teach you only one (uni) truth (versity). I argue that such an institution is of low quality. We should move to institutes of higher education that teaches you multiple (pluri) truths. We should transcend from uni-versity to pluri-versity. How do you translate pluriversity in Farsi? That is quite a challenge. Eventually Ebrahim ingeniously proposed 'Kesrat-Jahani,' combining 'Kesrat' (plurality) with 'Jahani' (world). This is just one of the many problems a translator in a non-Western language has to deal with. My respect for translators has grown throughout this process. The Farsi translation is going to be published by University of Tehran, Iran's premier university. Boasting 45,000 students and 2,100 academic staff, the university houses the Faculty of World Studies, led by Professor Saied Reza Ameli. The Faculty focuses on regional and international studies, with a focus on North America, Britain, Russia, France, Latin America, India, Germany, Arab countries (including Egypt, Iraq, and Palestine), Japan, and select African countries. Their research and courses provide students with a comprehensive understanding of these regions.

Imam Reza (PBUH)

I had a brief encounter with Professor Ameli at a conference in London, but our paths didn't cross for a substantive discussion. On January 27, 2024, however, an opportunity arose when I was invited to a webinar on the civilizational thoughts of Imam Reza (PBUH) and their contemporary relevance. This event, co-organized by Astan Razavi (an Iranian religious foundation) with University of Tehran and Sharif University of Technology, and supported by the IHRC, sparked my interest in Imam Reza (PBUH). In response, I prepared an introduction on *Imam Raza's Thought and Social & Political Activism*.

In May 2024, Astan Razavi collaborated with University of Tehran and Sharif University of Technology to host the Fifth Global Congress of Imam Reza (PBUH) in the holy city of Mashhad. Professor Ameli kindly invited me to speak on the topic of Imam Reza (PBUH) and its connection to DTM.

Imam Reza (PBUH) is a revered figure in Shia Islam and culture. Born Ali ibn Musa al-Rida (766-818), in Medina, Saudi Arabia, he is the eighth Imam in Twelver Shia Islam. Twelver Shias believe in twelve descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUHAHF) known as the Twelve Imams. They hold that the last Imam, Imam al-Mahdi, lives in hiding and will reappear as the promised Mahdi (Divine Guidance) at the end of time to rid the world of evil and injustice.

Following the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUHAHF) death (570-632), various caliphates governed the Islamic world. A caliphate is a form of Islamic government led by a caliph, who functions as both political and spiritual leader. The Abbasid Caliphate (750–1517) was founded by Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib (566–653 CE), an uncle of the Prophet (PBUHAHF). Harun ibn al-Mahdi (763–809), the fifth Abbasid caliph, was a contemporary of Imam Reza (PBUH). Harun's death, his son al-Ma'mun (786-833) invited Imam Reza (PBUH) in 817 to become caliph. However, the Imam, adhering to the Twelver Shia tradition of separating spiritual and political leadership, declined the offer. Al-Ma'mun then pressured him, and tragically, Imam Reza (PBUH) died in Mashhad the following year, by poisoning. He is entombed in the Imam Reza Shrine, located in Mashhad, which also houses the tomb of Harun al-Rashid.

What made Imam Reza (PBUH) so special is that the vast body of literature that emerged around his life and thought, exploring themes of governance, leadership and social justice. Professor Ameli invited me to examine Imam Reza (PBU) from a DTM perspective and present my findings at the Fifth Global Conference of Imam Reza (PBUH). Dr. Zohreh Kharazmi, the key organizer of the conference, dealt with all the practical matters. She compiled all the English-language books and documents on Imam Reza (PBUH) for my reference. Following an in-depth study of these materials, I compared DTM with Imam Reza's (PBUH) life and thought on the relationship between religion and science, the concept of racism, social and economic justice and his political theory. I then discussed my analysis with Professor Amelia and Dr. Kharazmi, who provided valuable feedback. The resulting essay will be published by the organizers. If it is available, I will share it in my network.

Reading about Imam Reza (PBUH) is certainly a valuable introduction, but it offers only a limited grasp of the profound impact of his life and thought. To truly understand how deeply Imam Reza (PBUH) is embedded in the spiritual life of the Shia Muslims, a visit to his shrine in Mashhad is necessary.

The Visit to Tehran

Professor Ameli very kindly offered to write a preface to the Farsi translation of the DTM book. HeTehran also extended a warm invitation for me to visit Tehran before traveling to Mashhad. This would allow me to deliver a lecture for his faculty and staff, and to become acquainted with them. The itinerary would involve arriving Friday morning, presenting the lecture on Saturday morning, and departing for Mashhad on Sunday, where the conference would be held on Monday and Tuesday.

I seized the opportunity to see if I could arrange a meeting with Mohammad Marandi. Prior to COVID, I had contacted Marandi to explore a potential book collaboration on DTM, Iran, and geopolitics. He is very well versed in deconstructing the Western narratives about Iran and geopolitics. We attempted to set up a meeting in Iran, but COVID thwarted those plans. While he was in Vienna as an advisor to the nuclear negotiations for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), our schedules proved too hectic to coordinate. Then, a potential meeting in Venezuela also fell through due to the cancellation of a conference we both planned to attend. Finally, hoping to connect in Tehran, I sent him a message via app. However, his response revealed he was currently in Damascus, Syria. I concluded that a meeting was not in the cards at this time, and the book project had to be shelved.

But then later, to my delight, he sent me an app message saying he would be back on Saturday. We could arrange a dinner for Saturday evening and lunch on Sunday. I was glad. My Muslim friends would surely say 'Inshallah' (God Willing).

I arrived in Tehran at 1:00 am on Friday. Saeed Mohammadi, a PhD candidate at the Faculty of World Studies, Tehran met me at the airport and acted as my guide throughout Tehran.

Saeed dropped me off at the hotel. I had a good night rest. Tehran In the afternoon, we had planned a sightseeing tour of Tehran.

In Western countries, Saturday and Sunday are typically observed as weekend days, designated for leisure and rest. However, in Iran and some other Muslim-majority nations, the workweek follows a Saturday-Sunday schedule, with Thursday and Friday designated as the weekend. This difference caused some confusion for my internal clock and biological rhythms.

Saeed wanted me to see both the northern part of the city, which is more westernized, and the southern part, which is more traditional. We had lunch in the southern part in a family-restaurant. We traveled with a rideshare service similar to Uber- Iran has its own domestic equivalent. We also used the metro. The metro has carriages designated for women only and carriages for both men and women. Women have the choice of which carriage to use, men, however, do not.

Tehran is a clean city, and Mashhad is equally so. I have visited many major cities around the world, but only a handful a few are as clean as Tehran or Mashhad. This suggests that they must have a large workforce dedicated to street cleaning, coupled with a public mentality that prioritizes cleanliness.

Saeed brought me to the National Museum of Iran, which houses two distinct museum: the Museum of Ancient Iran and the Museum of the Islamic Era. Iran boasts a rich history, being the birthplace of one of the world's oldest civilizations. In 539 BC, the armies of Cyrus the Great, the first Achaemenid king of ancient Persia, conquered Babylon. He is credited with issuing one of the earliest known declaration of human rights. It proclaimed the freedom of slaves, the right to choose one's religion, and racial equality. These tenets were inscribed on a baked clay cylinder in Akkadian cuneiform script. I purchased a replica of the cylinder as a souvenir. On Friday evening, I took a well-deserved rest after my travels.

On Saturday morning, I visited the Faculty of World Studies of University of Tehran. Professor Ameli extended a warm welcome, which I found deeply humbling. The lecture was chaired by Zeinab Ghasemi Tari, the wife of Mohammad Marandi who works at the Faculty of World Studies.

After the lecture, I hurried to the IRIB News Network studios, the national television broadcaster in Iran. They conducted a lengthy interview with me, covering my work, world politics, and the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Notably, I was invited to provide a one-minute live commentary at six o'clock on the reasons behind my belief that Israel's existence will be short-lived. In my book, I posit that Israel will cease to exist within a few decades, drawing historical parallels with oppressive states like the Soviet Union or the German Democratic Republic, which collapsed in the 20th century. However, I now believe that this timeline may be significantly shorter, perhaps only a few years after October 7th. I will elaborate on this argument in an essay titled "*Bandung, Tehran and Palestine: Connecting the Dots*," to be published later this year.

Later in the evening, I enjoyed a dinner with Marandi and his wife, Zeinab. This was the first opportunity we had for an extended conversation. We covered a wide range of topics, exchanging personal experiences and political views. The following day, we continued our in-depth conversation over lunch with him and Zeinab. It was a thoroughly enjoyable experience that laid a strong foundation for our future collaboration.

Marandi kindly drove me back to my hotel on Saturday evening and collected me again on Sunday. Tehran's traffic can be a daunting experience for visitors. Traffic lights seem to be viewed as suggestions rather than mandatory instructions, similar to what my friend Guillermo Barreto described in Venezuela. Cars don't keep a safe distance. Every driver is testing the other one, bumper to bumper, to see who dares to make an accident. By the time Marandi dropped me off, I had three near heart attacks.

On Sunday evening, I received a visit from [Marzieh Hashemi](#), an African-American journalist with Press TV. The US government harassed her because of her journalist work for the Iranian media outlets. Marzieh conducted a lengthy interview with me, during

which we discussed a wide range of issues, including the pro-Palestine protests in the United States.

My flight to Mashhad left on Sunday at 23.55. Saeed brought me to the airport. Saeed is a very intelligent and funny guy. He speaks many languages: Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, English, and Farsi. He studied Spanish for four years. We talked about our favorite writers. He knew all my favorites, including the Cuban writer Miguel Barnet. Barnet wrote a wonderful book titled *Biografía de un cimarrón (1966)*, about the life of Esteban Montejo, a former slave who was 103 when they met. He had escaped and lived as a marroon before slavery was abolished in Cuba. Barnet recorded his life history. Saeed's PhD is about social movements in the United States, with a particular focus on anti-government movements. He concentrates on two prominent organizations: the [Oath Keepers](#) and the [Three Percenters](#). These are far-right groups in the US. Saeed is studying the evolution of these organizations and the response of the US government. He has never visited the US. In fact, he has never been outside of Iran. He was in the running to go to France, Germany, Jordan, Vietnam, South Korea, UAE, and recently China. Yet every time something went wrong. His passport was not issued on time. His visa was not approved. His mother fell ill and he wanted to take care of her, and so on and on. He said: *"If my China trip does not come around, then it is clear to me that a higher force does not want me to leave Iran. I think I will write a novel in the style of Gabriel Garcia Marquez about my travels that were meant to be, but never materialized."* I wished him good luck in his endeavours.

The Visit to Mashhad

Mashhad is an hour flight from Tehran. As part of a 100-strong delegation comprising representatives from 30 countries, we were accorded VIP treatment throughout our visit. Upon disembarking from the airplane, we were ushered into a VIP lounge and later transported to a very pleasant hotel situated near the shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH). The vast area encompassing the shrine, estimated to be roughly the size of 111 football fields, is centered on the tomb of Imam Reza (PBUH). A dome was constructed atop the tomb in the late ninth century. The tomb directly faces the tomb of Harun. The shrine complex encompasses several grand buildings that house various function rooms of different sizes, a library, and dedicated study rooms. Notably, the Goharshad Mosque, built in 1418, is located within the shrine and can accommodate thousands of worshippers.

The shrine is visited by 25 million people every year, five million of whom come from abroad, and not only Shias. The shrine is also visited by Sunnis. It is open 24/7. At every hour of the day, there are massive numbers of people at the shrine. Yet the atmosphere is serene. At night, the colourful lights create a magical atmosphere. There are families sitting on carpets: mothers, fathers, children, and grandparents. They sit and enjoy the tranquillity and spirituality.

Inside the dome, there are people crying, lying on the ground, and praying. At the tomb, everybody wants to touch the iron bars of the tomb of Imam Reza (PBUH). This is a place not for casual tourists, but for devout pilgrims seeking spiritual solace and relief from life's tribulations.

On the first day, the organizers hosted a welcome dinner for guests in one of the grand halls. The following day, a welfare dinner was held. These halls are architectural marvels, boasting exquisite carpets and captivating mosaics adorning the walls and ceilings, which contribute to the enchanting atmosphere.

Mashhad serves as a vital center of spiritual life in Iran. The sheer number of pilgrims – 20 million Iranians out of a population of 90 million visiting the shrine annually – speaks volumes about the importance of religion in the country. For those accustomed to secular societies, the depth of religious devotion in Iran can be profound. My experiences in Mashhad have offered a multifaceted perspective on the centrality of religion in Iranian life.

In Mashhad, I was fortunate to be joined by Seyfeddin Kara. He holds a PhD in Islamic Studies. Seyfeddin is my expert guide on Islam. Whenever I sought factual information or insightful perspectives, he was readily available to provide me. Our paths first crossed

in London at an Islamophobia conference in 2023. We subsequently met again in Baku, Azerbaijan, at a major Islamophobia conference held in March 2024. This reunion in Mashhad proved to be most fortuitous.

Seyfeddin is like a younger brother, who is always looking after me, making sure that I am all right, that I know in which hall I should be for the panel sessions and explaining to me the cultural and religious meaning of things we come across. Apparently, he is a well-known specialist in his field, with connections in Mashhad as well.

When the theological faculty of the [Ferdowsi University of Mashhad](#) heard that we were coming to the city, they arranged with Dr. Kharazmi for him to give a lecture there. He asked me to join him.

His lecture was in a conference room with very advanced technology. The attendants sat at a long rectangular table, each with a screen and a microphone at their seat. He used a PowerPoint that they see in their private screen. At each seat, there was a thermostat on the table with hot water, tea bags, milk, and coffee, and some sweets and fruits. I have visited many conferences and lectures, but this was really the top of the top when it comes to facilitating a lecture.

His lecture addressed the question of missing verses in the Quran. I thought that the Quran was complete, but apparently, there is a discussion among scholars on this question. There was keen interest in his lecture. The forty attendants (50% women) listened with great interest. They had an engaged lively with the lecturer.

Ferdowsi University bears the name of [Abul-Qâsem Ferdowsi Tusi](#), an 11th-century Persian poet revered as the national poet of Iran. This prestigious university boasts twelve faculties, thirty-eight research centers, seven centers of excellence, and eight hundred and twenty faculty members, half of whom hold professorships or associate professorships. The student body flourishes at over thirty thousand strong, supported by a staff of more than one thousand and fifty. Ferdowsi University consistently ranks among the top three universities in Iran.

Ferdowsi University's mission centers on cultivating citizens and citizen-leaders imbued with Islamic values and equipped with expertise fostered by its distinguished centers of excellence. The university complex integrates mosques within its grounds, reflecting a philosophy that transcends the artificial separation of science and religion.

Following the conference's conclusion on Wednesday, Dr. Kharazmi kindly arranged a visit to [Imam Reza International University](#) in Mashhad for myself and two other conference participants. The university bears the namesake of Imam Reza (PBUH). We were received in an auditorium by a distinguished audience of three hundred students and faculty, with women in chadors constituting the majority (75%). The discussion centered on the relationship between science and religion. The visit also coincided with the launch of the journal's third issue (Spring 2024): *Journal of Imam Reza (as) and Science of the Day*. While we received a copy, the publication is in Farsi; however, the title page helpfully includes an English list of article titles. Here are a few:

- Examining the theory of Gordon Allport's value system from the perspective of Imam Ali bin Musa al-Reza (peace be upon him) and explaining the human valuing index from his perspective by Ali Tahani.
- Thematic analysis of economic components in the network of narrations of Imam Reza (peace be upon him) by Soraya Qutbi, Fatemeh Baghani.
- Interactive system of sustainable environment and family economy based on Razavi's thought and way of life by Zahra Talebzadeh, Fatemeh Rezae Pirzaman, Hamidreza Sodagar.

Here we see again how religion and science are connected and not separated as in Westernized universities. They go even further by attempting to reconstruct a discipline based on the thought of Imam Reza (PBUH), diverging from the European Enlightenment.

Another example is my conversation with Shaykh Dr. Mohammad Saeed Bahmanpour. I sat down with him at the dinner table. He is one of the most influential intellectuals in the Shia world. He studied sociology at the London School of Economics and Allameh Tabataba'i University. He was a visiting fellow at the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Cambridge between 2001 and 2002 and a lecturer and director at the

Islamic College in London from 2003 to 2020. He is both a social scientist and a religious scholar.

A final example of the significance of religion in Iran emerged during my visit with Seyfeddin to the [Imam Ali library](#) in Mashhad. According to Seyfeddin, well-versed in the institution's history, this is the most extensive library dedicated to the first Imam of the Twelver school. Director Muhammad Mojtahedi elaborated on the library's history and operations. His father founded the library twenty-five years ago. For the next twenty-five years, with unwavering dedication, the father scoured every bookshop and book fair in the world that might hold volumes on Imam Ali (PBUH) and his wife Fatima (PBUH). The library boasts a collection of 30,000 books, primarily in Farsi and Arabic, but also encompassing Western languages. It houses 400 books dedicated to Fatima (PBUH) and a further 2,000 children's books. The library is funded by the family through their own capital.

An Assessment of the Iranian Revolution

The Purpose of the Assessment

In 1979, my vantage point did not allow for a considered assessment of the Islamic revolution in Iran. After dedicating the past few years to studying the revolution and a visit to the country in May, I am now better placed to offer such an analysis. The central tenet of my argument is this: we must foster engagement between the anti-imperialist left and the Iranian Revolution, forging a united front against imperialism to facilitate the transition towards a new world civilization. I will base my argument on an exploration of the following topics:

- Iran's position within the emerging new world order.
- A comparison between the revolutions in Grenada, Venezuela, and Iran.
- The cultural challenges facing the anti-imperialist left.
- The intellectual contributions from Iran.
- Envisioning elements of a new world civilization.

The Position of Iran in the New World Order

Iran has come a long way since the Islamic Revolution triumphed 45 years ago. It has become a key player in world politics, not only in West Asia. The growing alliance between Russia, Iran, and China makes Iran a part of a global power struggle. Iran plays a pivotal role in the struggle for a free Palestine from the river to the sea. The wars in Gaza and Ukraine are linked through Iran.

In Ukraine, the US and its European proxies are waging a full-fledged war against Russia. Click [here](#) for my decolonial analysis on the war in Ukraine. Initially, Iran adopted a neutral stance on the war. But as the war dragged on, and it became clear that the US sought a strategic victory over Russia, meaning a military defeat, the chessboard changed. A military defeat of Russia could lead to the disintegration of the Russian Federation into several republics and the loss of its independence. The US would become the preeminent imperial power, able to impose its will on any country. Iran became more vocal in its analysis of the causes of the Ukraine war. In a meeting with President Putin in July 2022, Ayatollah Khamenei said: *"War is a violent and difficult issue, and the Islamic Republic is in no way happy about civilians being caught up in it. However, concerning Ukraine, had you not taken the initiative, the other side would have, and caused the war."*²⁶

In Palestine, the Zionist regime of Israel is waging a genocidal war in Gaza, with the support of the US and its European allies. If successful in militarily defeating Hamas, they would likely move to attack Hezbollah in Lebanon and ultimately Iran with nuclear weapons. The Zionist regime cannot achieve this without the backing of the US military machine. A strategic defeat of Iran would signify the destruction of the Iranian revolution. The US would then become the preeminent imperial power, able to impose its will on Russia and China and Palestinians, meanwhile, would face even greater difficulty in regaining their land.

This is what is at stake in these two conflicts. Defeating the US in Ukraine would bolster the cause of a free Palestine would, however, only serve to bolster Russia's efforts to maintain its independence .

A new world order appears to be taking shape, with Iran playing a pivotal role in this process. Having joined the BRICS grouping in January 2024, Iran finds itself aligned with a powerful economic bloc initially formed in 2006 by Brazil, India, Russia, and China (known as BRIC at the time). South Africa's accession in 2010 solidified the BRICS acronym. The West currently wields limited influence over the BRICS nations. For nearly two decades, BRICS remained on the sidelines of world politics. However, with the West's intensifying use of aggressive economic sanctions, BRICS is assuming a new role: that of an economic entity shaping a new world order from the perspective of the Global South. Boasting a population of 3.3 billion and a combined GDP accounting for 32 percent of the world's total, it surpasses the G7, which previously positioned itself as the preeminent economic and political bloc. At the upcoming BRICS summit in Russia this October 2024, dedollarization is certain to be a key topic. The US dollar currently reigns supreme as the currency for international trade and a reserve currency held by central banks, granting the US significant economic and financial leverage. By promoting the use of alternative currencies in international trade and as reserves, BRICS is aiming to weaken the economic dominance of the American empire.

In July 2023, Iran became a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. This is another intergovernmental organization of the Global South that deals mainly with security matters.

Iran will be a major anti-imperialist player in world politics in the coming decennia. The anti-imperialist left should come to terms with this fact.

If your news about Iran is based on Western media, you might think the system could collapse any moment. After the death of Mahsa Amini, there were mass protests in Iran against the government. Western media saw this as the beginning of the end of the Islamic Republic, believing the whole system would soon crumble. It did not.

There have been mass protests in Iran: in 1999, 2009, 2011–2012, 2017, 2019 and 2020. However, the system did not collapse. It's important to note that people in Iran do have the right to protest. *"An Islamic government cannot be totalitarian or despotic, but is constitutional and democratic,"* says Ayatollah Khomeini.²⁷ An Islamic government is a government is built upon the rule of law. Khomeini elaborated: *"In an Islamic government, all people are under the protection of the law. No one may endanger their safety, break into their houses, arrest them, imprison or exile them, or summarily execute them on the basis of a simple accusation or suspicion."*²⁸

After the Iranian revolution, the population overwhelmingly voted for a new Islamic constitution (with 99.5% approval) that guarantees these rights. Iran is not a dictatorship. The population participates in elections for both the president and the parliament. Elections are held on various levels, including provincial, county, district, city, and village. The head of state, the Supreme Leader, is elected by the Assembly of Experts, which is itself elected by the people. Therefore, ultimately, the people elect their head of state.

In many European countries, the heads of state are not elected by the people. These countries have monarchies, led by unelected officials such as kings and queens. Examples include the United Kingdom, Denmark, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, and many more.

Iran has antagonist political movements engaged in contests for power within the elected institutions. The Western terms "left" and "right," "hardliners" and "softliners," or "conservative" and "progressive" do not necessarily translate directly to the Iranian context, as they are rooted in secular ideologies. In Iran the term "Principlists" refer to those who prioritize upholding the principles of the Islamic Revolution. "Reformists," on the other hand, are religious figures who advocate for an Islamic Republic but favor reform within the system.

Both political movements enjoy popular support in Iran, evidenced by mass demonstrations on the streets. This is not dissimilar to France or the UK, where political movements hold demonstrations that express their views and mobilize supporters

without fundamentally challenging the legitimacy of the system. The key difference lies in the external response to Iranian protests. When demonstrations erupt in Iran, some foreign actors readily mobilize resources – financial aid, intelligence, media attention, and even militant groups – to destabilize the government. These tactics aim to sow unrest, inflict casualties on civilians and law enforcement, and ultimately topple the regime. In contrast, imagine large-scale environmental protests in London. We wouldn't expect Iran to funnel resources into these demonstrations, aiming to overthrow the British monarchy and establish an Islamic Republic of England. However, even a minor climate change protest in Iran might attract significant external support aimed at regime change and the establishment of a secular state.

The anti-imperialist left should recognize that the Islamic system of governance holds legitimacy for the majority of Iranians, regardless of their political affiliation, be they Principlist or Reformers.

A Comparison Between Three Revolutions: Grenada, Venezuela, and Iran

I would love to go in more details into a comparison of the Iranian revolution with others in modern history. However, I will restrict my observations to the three revolutions that I have visited.

In Grenada and Venezuela, the narrative of liberation is centered on socialism. Socialism itself emerged from the intellectual currents of the European Enlightenment. However, the Enlightenment also emphasized progress and modernity as being linked to secularization – the separation of church and state – and a growing emphasis on reason and scientific inquiry. This emphasis on reason was seen as essential for human advancement and overcoming superstition and religious dogma.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran diverges from the European Enlightenment in its core tenets. It posits that ethics and science are fundamentally intertwined, rejecting the separation championed by Enlightenment thinkers. Furthermore, the revolution emphasizes the need for an Islamic ethical foundation for the state. This emphasis on Islamic ethics is seen as crucial to address the most significant challenge facing humanity: injustice. It is from this perspective that Islam is viewed as an anti-colonial religion.

The concept of injustice offers a key to reconciling these narratives of liberation. Professor Ameli aptly titled the Fifth Global Congress of Imam Reza (PBUH) "*The Civilizational Thought of Imam Reza (PBUH): Justice for Everyone, Injustice for No One*". In discussing Imam Reza (PBUH) and his concept of Divine Theodicy (DTM), he emphasized that the Imam (PBUH) believed injustice should be eradicated for everyone, not just Muslims. My own essay on Imam Reza (PBUH) and DTM explores the relationship between theology and knowledge. Here, I use the following quote attributed to the Imam (PBUH): "*Wisdom is the believer's lost belonging. So, seek it even if it is with the polytheist; because you are more deserving and competent for it.*"²⁹

At the welcome dinner held at the shrine, Professor Ameli revisited this theme, stating about the shrine: "*This not only a house for Muslims. It is a house for the world.*"

My message to the anti-imperialist left in both the Global North and South is this: If Islamic revolutionaries, like yourselves, are dedicated to fighting injustice and are willing to open a dialogue with non-Muslims, why not embrace this opportunity for engagement wholeheartedly?

The Grenadian revolution may be over, but the Bolivarian Revolution continues to thrive. There seems to be an openness in Venezuela to engage with Iran, not just on a political level, but also ideologically. This is evidenced by the invitations extended to Marandi and Zeinab. Zeinab's separate discussion with Bolivarian feminists, where her presentation impressed them, exemplifies this potential for connection. Such encounters between Islamic revolutionaries and socialists can lay the groundwork for future collaboration. The concept of injustice can serve as a foundation for this common ground.

The Grenada revolution offers a cautionary tale for both Iran and Venezuela: revolutions can be undermined from within. While external forces may exploit these internal divisions, the most significant threat comes from a splintered revolutionary leadership. As

long as leaders can prioritize the revolution's goals over personal feelings and establish mechanisms to address public dissent, the revolution has a greater chance of survive. A distinct feature of the Islamic Revolution in Iran is the pre-existing infrastructure of the Islamic movement. Following the death of Imam Reza (PBUH) in 818 CE, the Astan Quds Razavi foundation was established to manage the shrine. Over the centuries, and particularly since the revolution, the foundation has blossomed into a vast economic entity, boasting an annual revenue exceeding US\$200 billion. The state is not the sole governing structure within an Islamic society. While challenges regarding how these structures interconnect will undoubtedly arise, it's important to note that even in the highly improbable event of the state's collapse, these alternative structures would likely endure. This resiliency contrasts with socialist revolutions.

The Cultural Challenge for the Anti-imperialist Left

The distrust between the anti-imperialist left and the Islamic revolutionaries stems from more than just the philosophical differences between the European Enlightenment and Islam. A significant cultural gap also exists, and bridging this gap is crucial. It's important to remember that a lack of understanding doesn't imply a cultural failing; it might reflect shortcomings in our own perspective.

When we did our DTM trip in South Africa last year, I had a strange experience. I went into the elevator of the hotel in Cape Town, where a man was standing.

He said: *"How are you today, Sir?"*

I answered: *"I am fine. Thank you."*

His gaze flickered to me, as if I had said something bad. But then he realized, that I am a foreigner, so he explained: *"You know, Sir, in our Ubuntu culture we reply our greeting by asking "And how are you today?"*

So I rushed to say: *"Oh I am so sorry, sir. How are you today?"*

He replied: *"I feel better now. I am glad that I have explained our culture to you."*

The greeting was not a formality for him, as it was for me. In the Ubuntu culture, greetings are seen as a form of showing respect . They expect an honest answer and a return of respect.

This is similar in Islam. My Muslim friends use Arabic greetings in their English communication: Salam, As-Salaam Alaikum, Al-Hamdilillah, Inshallah. To what extent should one, as a non-Muslim, use these words? Are they simply Arabic slang that can be used in English? Or is it cultural appropriation, since for Muslims these words have a religious meaning? If used by a non-Muslim, is it cultural appropriation and thus disrespectful?

Salam means peace. It is a common form of greeting among Muslims. If you were to greet your colleagues at work in English with "Peace, John and Mary," it would sound awkward and out of place. In the 1960s, hippies used to hold up the peace sign and exclaim "Peace!" However, using the Arabic word Salam with Muslims would sound perfectly acceptable.

"As-Salaam Alaikum" means "Peace be unto you." In Arabic, the reply is Wa-Alaikum-Salaam, which means "And unto you peace." How do you greet a Muslim as a non-Muslim? Do you say "Good morning Mo and Fatima" or do you say "As-Salaam Alaikum?" On the surface, greetings may seem trivial. You can choose whatever you like, but there can be social consequences to consider.

Take another topic: abbreviations. Muslims often use phrases like "Peace be upon him" (PBUH) or "Peace be upon him and his family" (PBUHAHF) to show deep respect for the Prophet Muhammad and other figures. When they address the Twelve Imams, they use PBUH. Should non-Muslims use these abbreviations? Is it appropriate for a scholar to use them in a formal essay? Is using them a sign of respect, or is it cultural appropriation since you are not Muslim and the abbreviations stem from religious reverence? I use the abbreviations myself, but I am still unsure if it is the right decision.

Sometimes you have to learn and appreciate the different ways cultures show enthusiasm and respect. Here is an example: The plenary session of the conference in Mashhad was held in a building across from the tomb of Imam Reza (PBUH). The audience faced the podium, with the tomb behind them. I recall that at socialist events

we used to shout "*Long live the revolution!*" At this conference, whenever the name of the Prophet (PBUH) was mentioned, the audience responded with a chant called the *Salawat*. It praises the Prophet (PBUH) with a long text: "*Allah, sanctify Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, as you have sanctified Ibrahim and the family of Ibrahim. Truly, You are Praiseworthy and Glorious. Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, as you have blessed Ibrahim and the family of Ibrahim. Truly, You are Praiseworthy and Glorious.*"

That is indeed much longer than "Long live". I heard it recited regularly during the speeches. And when the name of Imam Reza (PBUH) was mentioned, the audience stood and turned to face the tomb while performing the *Salawat*. In that context, I participated in the *Salawat* by turning around to face the tomb. It would have been rude not to do so. Let's turn to how a non-Muslim might engage with Muslim women. In the holy city of Mashhad, women often wore the chador, a garment that covers the whole body except the face. Normally, during conversation, what someone wears would not affect my approach. I would engage with them in the same way I would with a man. However, if I met a Muslim woman wearing a chador for the first time, I might hesitate to initiate conversation unsure of how the garment influences interaction. There may be boundaries, or perhaps not. So I would not take the initiative for a conversation. In Mashhad, I found myself sharing an elevator with a woman in a chador. She inquired about my work. I explained that I work on DTM, but to my regret, did not extend the conversation as I was already on my floor. In another situation, I likely would have proposed a longer conversation, However, the chador, in that instance, subtly influenced me to keep it brief.

It is a pity, because on the last day, I was walking back to the hotel from the shrine with a group. A woman in the group, Fariba Alasvand, started a conversation with me. She is a faculty member at the Women and Family Center in the holy city of Qum and a scholar of gender studies. She holds a PhD and is well-versed in feminist theory. Fariba believes it's possible to construct gender theory from a concept other than patriarchy, specifically the concept of family. Working at the Women and Family Center, she's interested in organizing a webinar on this theme and would like to invite me to speak about DTM and gender. We planned to continue our conversation via email.

I reflect on my initial hesitation during our first encounter. In my work, I argue for a reconstruction of the field. My critique of patriarchy centers on its inadequacy in capturing the complexities of gender relations. While oppression undeniably exists, it's not the sole factor. Love also plays a part. Omitting this crucial aspect leads to an inaccurate picture. So, having laid out the critique, what alternative can we propose? We encounter a scholar of gender theory here, proposing a reconstruction of social theory from a distinct Islamic perspective. Is it not a wonderful contribution to decolonial theory? Reflecting on my initial hesitancy, I wonder whether there was an element of prejudice about women in Iran.

Women played a crucial role in the Islamic revolution in Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini spoke of their significance, saying: "*You ladies have proved that you are in the vanguard of the movement, you have proved that you lead the men, men get their inspiration from you, the men of Iran have learnt lessons from the honourable ladies of Iran and the men of Qum have learnt lessons from you dear ladies. You are in the vanguard of the movement.*"³⁰

The revolution brought about fundamental changes for women in Iran. The old 1906 constitution was replaced by a new one in 1979. The old constitution made no mention of women. The new constitution includes a short history of the revolution that led to the constitution. It specifically acknowledges the role of women: "*Especially the women were actively and massively present in a most conspicuous manner at all stages of this great struggle. The common sight of mothers with infants in their arms rushing towards the scene of battle and in front of the barrels of machine-guns indicated the essential and decisive role played by this major segment of society in the struggle.*"³¹

It also includes a paragraph titled "*Woman in the Constitution.*" This section argues that "*Women are entitled to a significant expansion of their rights, given the heightened*

oppression they endured under the Shah's regime."³² For context, "Taghuti" refers to the oppressive Shah regime.

Article 21 focuses exclusively on women's rights. It states: "The government must uphold the rights of women in all respects, in accordance with Islamic principles, and achieve the following objectives:

1. To create a favourable environment for the flourishing of women's personalities and the restoration of their rights, both material and intellectual.
2. The protection of mothers, particularly during pregnancy and childcare, and the protection of children without legal guardians.
3. Establishing competent courts to safeguard and preserve the family unit.
4. The provision of special insurance for widows, elderly women, and women without financial support.
5. Granting guardianship of children to suitable mothers, to protect the children's interests, in the absence of a legal guardian."³³

Many Western constitutions do not make any reference to women at all, including the United States Constitution.

The progress Iranian women have made in education is remarkable, acting as the key to unlocking opportunities across society. [PressTV](#) has compiled the following data: Female adult literacy rates in Iran have nearly tripled, rising from 24 percent in 1976 (pre-revolution) to 81 percent in 2016. The proportion of females completing primary education has surged from 36 percent in 1971 to 99 percent in 2017. The Islamic Republic of Iran has virtually eliminated female illiteracy. According to official data, the literacy rate for Iranian women reached an impressive 99.30 percent in 2017. The representation of females in tertiary higher education (universities) has increased by almost twentyfold. In 1978, only 3 percent of women were enrolled in Iranian universities. By 2018, this figure had risen to 59 percent. Today, the number is believed to be significantly higher. Data from 2006 suggests that women comprised over half of the total university student body in Iran, with a staggering 70 percent representation in science and engineering fields. The number of female faculty members at universities has witnessed a thirtyfold increase since the revolution began. Currently, women constitute 33.3 percent of faculty across Iranian universities. Notably, around 40 percent of the country's nuclear scientists are women.

There is still much work to be done in the emancipation of women in Iran, but the general picture is that the revolution has significantly improved the position of women.³⁴ A challenge for the revolution is how to deal with secular women who choose not to wear the chador. This is an ongoing debate within Iranian society concerning Islamic dress code.

In Iran, General Qasem Soleimani has offered his opinion. He has been demonized in the West, but for many Muslims in and outside of Iran, he is an anti-imperialist hero. He succeeded in building the axes of resistance and paid for this with his life. A comparison can be drawn to Che Guevara, an iconic figure of the Cuban Revolution who gave his life in the fight against imperialism. Soleimani said: "One wears a hijab, another does not. One is like this, another is like that. One leans left, another leans right. One is a reformist, another a 'hardliner'. What is the point of these divisions? I fundamentally disagree with traditionalists who say we should criticize people's appearances. That girl whose hijab is considered inadequate is also my daughter, she is our daughter, she is your daughter. She is not just an individual daughter, but the daughter of our society. Our society is our family. These are our people. These are our children."³⁵

I had to study these facts about the position of women in Iran in order to come to understanding that the chador is a cultural and religious attribute within an Islamic society and not necessarily an expression of the oppression of women. There was no longer any need for me to be hesitant in my engagement with women dressed in a chador.

The most challenging topic in the relationship between the anti-imperialist left and the Iranian revolutionaries concerns the LGTB question. Homosexuality is criminalized and prohibited in Iran. The underlying factor is the Quran's explicit condemnation of homosexuality.

I grew up in a social movement that explicitly supports LGBT rights. I wrote a book on LGBT in Dutch, with the translated title *"Forbidden love. Family and homosexuality in the Surinamese community."* I interviewed family members of gay and lesbian people and documented their experiences in dealing with their loved one's homosexuality, while the family members themselves often held anti-LGBTQ views. These are heartbreaking stories.

How do I reconcile an Islamic revolution that is anti-imperialist and fights for social justice, yet adheres to religious interpretations that are anti-LGBT? There are four elements to my position.

First, unwavering honesty is essential, regardless of the consequence. I firmly believe that homosexuality is not unnatural, and I continue to support the right to same-sex love. I have written on this issue in the past, and my position will not waver in the future.

Second, I consider combating imperialist wars and safeguarding the planet to be the paramount priorities in the struggle for social justice. I am willing to work with anyone who shares these priorities, regardless of disagreements we might have on other issues, including LGBT.

Third, I acknowledge that feminism and LGBT movements are being used in pro-imperialist narratives and policies to promote the racist notion of superior Western culture versus backward non-Western cultures. It is not only the narrative. The policy of war in Afghanistan has been justified with these narratives.

Fourth, for me, building friendship is the foundation for long-term collaboration in the pursuit of social justice. Once I understand the sensitivities my friends navigate due to their religious background, I would consider it disrespectful to pressure them into discussing such issues with me. I believe I lack the right to do so, as it would violate the very trust upon which our friendship is built. After all, experience has shown me that friendship forms the strongest bond for forging long-term partnerships in the struggle for justice.

In studying the Iranian revolution, I was surprised by the [story](#) of Fereydoon Molkara (1950-2012), a man who underwent gender-affirming surgery and became known as Maryam Khatoonpour Molkara. The Iranian government supports sex reassignment surgery for transgender individuals. These individuals can receive a new birth certificate, a new identity card, a new passport and access to other facilities for their operations. This policy stems from a meeting between Ayatollah Khomeini and Molkara, where Khomeini heard Molkara's story and struggles. This case demonstrates a more nuanced approach to complex social issues than I had previously considered.

The Iranian Revolution stands as a challenge to simplistic notions of progress. While many Western observers perceive it as a reactionary movement, Michel Foucault (1926-1984), a prominent French philosopher of the 20th century, saw it differently. He visited Iran during the height of the revolution in September and November 1978. Critics argued that the revolution represented a crisis of modernization, with traditional elements resisting the path of modernity and seeking refuge in a conservative clergy. Foucault, however, countered that modernization itself had become outdated. In his view, the revolution was not *"a shrinking back in the face of modernization by extremely retrograde elements, but the rejection, by a whole culture and a whole people, of a modernization that is itself an archaism. The shah's misfortune is to have espoused this archaism. His crime is to have maintained, through a corrupt and despotic system, that fragment of the past in a present that no longer wants it. Yes, modernization as a political project and as a principle of social transformation is a thing of the past in Iran."*³⁶

The Intellectual Contributions from Iran

The anti-imperialist left stands to gain significantly from engaging with Iranian intellectuals. The Iranian university system boasts a very high standard of education, a fact I mention not to flatter my Iranian colleagues, but because it is demonstrably true. Over the past fourteen years, I lectured on DTM in a variety of countries, including Belgium, Curaçao, England, Finland, France, Ireland, Malaysia, Mauritius, Portugal, Scotland, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Suriname, Venezuela, and the United States.

These experiences, including visits to universities and discussions with academics, have equipped me to compare the quality of academic education across these nations. Iran boasts a long [tradition](#) of high-caliber university education, with University of Tehran ranking as the nation's premier institution. During a recent tour of the city with Saeed Mohamaddi, he mentioned co-authoring an article on measuring orientalism. The article was co-written by Shaho Sabbar and Zeinab Ghasemi Tari. It was published in the *Journal of World Sociopolitical Studies*.³⁷ Finding the topic particularly fascinating, I eagerly read the article he sent me on Friday evening. The abstract, which I quote below, outlines the article's purpose: *"While Iran was never formally colonized by Western powers, it's governing regimes before the Islamic revolution were loyal to both the East and the West; the country was therefore more or less a de facto colony of Russia, Great Britain, and the United States. One of the most pernicious consequences of such presences can be described as the "colonization of the mind," which has subtle and lasting manifestations. Using Edward Said's four major characteristics of Orientalism (i.e., binary opposition, over-generalization, fear and control, and depicting the Orient as stuck in past primitiveness), the present paper attempts to analyze the self-perception of the Iranians toward themselves to see whether the way they perceive themselves is similar to the Western discourse of the 'Orient.'"*

The concept is straightforward. Respondents are asked to choose from five options in questions like "I am proud of the history of my country" or 'Eastern countries are perceived to be morally and culturally more backward compared to western countries'. The answer choices range from 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neutral', 'agree', 'strongly agree,' which can be assigned a numerical value from 1 to 5. Using advanced statistical techniques, the researchers then calculate a score that reflects the extent to which an individual's responses align with Edward Said's four characteristics of Orientalism. I informed Saeed via a messaging application that I intended to write a commentary on the article and proposed a discussion on Sunday morning, before the lunch with Marandi and Zeinab. I submitted my commentary on Saturday.

Our Sunday meeting yielded a stimulating discussion on the potential applications of their research. Could their method be adapted into a tool for gauging the extent to which a university's curriculum and approach reflect decolonial principles? Existing methods assess university quality in various ways. Can we develop a decolonization-focused metric that allows us to quantify a university's progress in this area, perhaps expressing it as a percentage?

Harvard University consistently tops global university rankings. This prestige arguably stems from its role in training future leaders who contribute to the US administrative state. However, critics argue that this focus translates into the production of unsubstantiated theories across various disciplines. A prime example is Francis Fukuyama, a Harvard graduate who rose to fame with his book *The End of History*. Fukuyama's central thesis, emerging from the context of the Cold War's conclusion, is as follows: *"What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. This is not to say that there will no longer be events to fill the pages of Foreign Affairs's yearly summaries of international relations, for the victory of liberalism has occurred primarily in the realm of ideas or consciousness and is as yet incomplete in the real or material world. But there are powerful reasons for believing that it is the ideal that will govern the material world in the long run."*³⁸

Human civilization boasts a rich history spanning seven millennia. In contrast, American imperial dominance has flourished for roughly the past seven decades. Given this vast disparity in timescales, it seems remarkably short-sighted to suggest that the next 700,000 years will see little change beyond personnel shifts in the leadership of a specific US journal titled *Foreign Affairs*. Surely, common sense compels us to acknowledge the significant transformations likely to occur over such an extended timeframe. Yet, Francis Fukuyama's argument in *The End of History* and Harvard University's enduring prestige continue to be lauded by Western media outlets.

We need a different method of measuring the quality of universities. During the discussion Zeinab raised an important question: shouldn't a decolonial approach to measurement consider not just factual data but also ethical dimensions? If, as critical theory posits (including DTM), knowledge production is inherently ethical, then wouldn't evaluating a university in an Islamic nation like Iran necessitate factoring in Islamic ethical principles?

These types of discussions are intellectually rigorous exchanges that necessitate a well-educated participant base. Iran, fortunately, boasts a wealth of such individuals, as I have witnessed on numerous occasions.

At the conference, I delivered an introductory presentation exploring the historical development of knowledge production during the European Enlightenment. Dr. Elaheh Nouri, a young scholar and Assistant Professor of Latin American Studies at the University of Tehran's Faculty of World Studies, ably chaired the session. She specializes in Latin American politics, economics, and history, and she impressively facilitated the discussion by translating my speech from English into Farsi for the audience. She specializes in Latin American politics, economics, and history, and she impressively facilitated the discussion by translating my speech from English into Farsi for the audience. My presentation outlined a six-step process by which ethics became separated from knowledge. The fifth step involved the contribution of French sociologist Auguste Comte (1798-1857), who famously proposed a three-stage classification of knowledge production in societies. In the theological stage, all phenomena are attributed to the action of supernatural being (gods). In the metaphysical stage replaces these supernatural explanations with abstract concepts like karma. Finally, the positivist stage emphasizes scientific knowledge obtained through reasoning and observation. Dr. Nouri's interjections during my talk were particularly noteworthy. As I began to discuss the first stage of Comte's classification, she anticipated the remaining stages and inquired about their accuracy, demonstrating a remarkable depth of knowledge that extended beyond her primary areas of expertise in Latin American studies. This exceptional facility likely reflects the strengths of the Iranian educational system, which cultivates a well-rounded intellectual foundation in its students.

Following Seyfeddin Kara's lecture at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, I had another enriching encounter. The Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Islamic Studies, Dr. Abbas Javareshkian, and Dr. Abbas Aghdassi, Assistant Professor in the Department of History and Civilization of Muslim Nations, kindly hosted us for lunch. Apparently he knew about DTM, because very soon he began a discussion on my proposition that you can decolonize mathematics. He thought decolonizing knowledge is only about the social sciences. Ferdowsi University has strong departments on the hard sciences.

The dean, Dr. Javareshkian, is not a mathematician, but a theologian. He entered the discussion asking about how decolonizing mathematics would apply to Euclidian and non-Euclidian geometry. How did he know the difference between the two systems of geometry, if he was not very well read in other disciplines than theology? I suggested to Dr. Aghdassi to organize a session on decolonizing the hard sciences with the departments of the hard sciences of the university.

He told me an interesting news. His university was one of the first Iranian universities to offers students in the USA and Europe who have been kicked out of their university because they participate in the pro Palestine demonstrations to continue their study in Mashhad. The university would pay for everything. Some students, including one from the EU, had applied and their requests were being processed.

A final illustration, consider the work of Dr. Fariba Alasvand. Demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of Western feminist thought, Dr. Alasvand is engaged in a critical reconstruction of social theory on the issue of gender. This ambitious undertaking underscores the depth of scholarly inquiry within Iranian academia, and it is a project that many Western feminist scholars would find highly commendable.

In my view, fostering collaboration between Western universities and leading Iranian universities would be mutually beneficial. Scholars and researchers affiliated with critical social movements within Iranian academia could play a vital role in advocating for such partnerships.

Envisioning elements of a new world civilization

My recent visit to Iran has reinforced my conviction that a pivotal moment has arrived on the world stage where millions of us can make a difference in changing the course of history. Through concerted efforts by individual scholars and activists, social movements, and governments critical of imperial power, a significant impact can be achieved. This collaborative endeavor has the potential to generate a multitude of innovative ideas. In that spirit, I offer the following proposals for discussion. Our collective task is to foster a conducive environment and establish the necessary frameworks to cultivate and implement these ideas.

Idea 1: add a civilizational component to BRICS

BRICS began as an economic power. With Western economic boycotts, it is emerging as a political power as well. Its economic policies have distinct political ramifications. These policies will weaken the economic backbone of Western imperialism, thus weakening their political power. Every policy is implicitly or explicitly based on a philosophy. In many BRICS countries, there are discussions about the philosophical foundation of their countries' policies.

President Xi Jinping of China published a book titled *How to read Confucius and other Chinese classical thinkers*. In this book, he draws on classical Chinese philosophers to develop political guidelines for building Chinese society and navigating international politics.

In South Africa, President Nelson Mandela drew upon the ancient African philosophy of Ubuntu to articulate a new vision for the nation. Paraphrasing the founder of Western philosophy, René Descartes, he proclaimed: "I am because we are" (a powerful inversion of Descartes's famous dictum, "*I think therefore I am*"). In this philosophy, the collective provides the space for the individual to develop.

In India, Mahatma Gandhi sought a strategy in the ancient Indian philosophy of Satyagraha to define non-violent resistance. Today, Indian philosophers are examining the contributions that Indian civilizations can make to revitalize Indian society.

In Russia, President Putin says that "*Russia is not just a country, it's really a separate civilization.*"

In Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei placed the Islamic Revolution in the context of Islamic civilization: "*The great ideal of the Revolution is to establish a new Islamic civilization and to prepare for the rising of the sun of the greatest 'Wilayat' (Guardianship).*"

Brazilian intellectuals have yet to define the philosophical basis of their country's policies. The discussion of a new world civilization is entrenched in critical thinking from the Global South.

There is thus a climate for promoting the idea of adding a civilizational component to BRICS. In January 2024, Iran became a member of BRICS. Well-positioned, Iran can bring BRICS to the next level. The Islamic Revolution was grounded in deep theological and philosophical thought. Iran can play a vanguard role by establishing a structure within BRICS that takes up the challenge to building a new world civilization. This structure would facilitate cooperation among academic institutions (universities, think tanks) that create the knowledge for a new world civilization.

The aim of the structure is to decolonize the disciplines of science and reconstruct the discipline with creativity and by taking into account the contribution that different civilizations have made to scientific knowledge. This process has practical applications. It looks to develop new economic, social, political and cultural policies for a new world based on peace, dignity, social justice and prosperity. It promotes research within the disciplines, brings together scholars to reconstruct scientific knowledge, engages with Eurocentric thinkers in critical debates, and develops new textbooks for the disciplines. In October 2024, BRICS will hold its annual meeting in Kazan, Russia. This presents a golden opportunity for Iran to put forward a proposal to add the civilizational dimension to BRICS. The practical consequence is to establish a structure that brings together universities, think tanks and academics to decolonize knowledge production and create a new knowledge base for a new pluriversal world. That structure would serve as the

foundation for developing research programs, educational programs, and conferences on a new world civilization.

Idea 2: establish the Bandung dialogues

In 1955, leaders of newly independent nations and liberation movements across Asia and Africa convened in the Indonesian city of Bandung. Indonesian president [Sukarno](#) inaugurated the conference with these words: "*This is the first intercontinental conference of coloured people... in the history of mankind... It is a new departure in the history of the world that leaders of Asian and African people can meet together ... to discuss and deliberate upon matters of common concern. In spite of diversity that exists among its participants, let this conference be a great success. Yes, there is diversity among us. Who denies it? ... What harm is there in diversity? .. This conference is not to oppose each other.*"

The conferences' focus was on economic and political cooperation, but it also addressed the issue of culture. The final [declaration](#) states: "*Asia and Africa have been the cradle of great religions and civilizations which have enriched other cultures and civilizations while themselves being enriched in the process. Thus the cultures of Asia and Africa are based on spiritual and universal foundations. Unfortunately contacts among Asian and African countries were interrupted during the past centuries. The peoples of Asia and Africa are now animated by a keen and sincere desire to renew their old cultural contacts and develop new ones in the context of the modern world.*"

The spirit of Bandung arguably waned in the decades following the Cold War's intensification. However, the concept of Bandung as a forum for an alternative narrative of liberation, independent of Western political thought, retains its validity.

I propose to rekindle the Bandung spirit by initiating a series of small sessions featuring key intellectuals from China, Russia, and Iran. These sessions would focus on critiques of Western perspectives on world politics and explore alternative viewpoints from each nation, given their growing alignments. Subsequently, these sessions could evolve into a broader series of Bandung Dialogues, convening intellectuals and activists from the Global South to discuss the concept of a new world civilization.

Idea 3: reconstructing the disciplines

I have [argued](#) for a shift within the decolonial movement, from a focus on decoloniality to what is termed DTM. Decoloniality offers a critique of Western knowledge production; DTM seeks to provide an alternative. This alternative entails the reconstruction of academic disciplines, encompassing new economic, social, political, and cultural theories, alongside revised textbooks in mathematics and the hard sciences. Iran boasts a highly skilled scientific community. To facilitate this reconstruction and produce new textbooks, I propose fostering collaboration between academics from Iranian universities and their counterparts in both the Global South and the Global North.

Idea 4: bridging the divide between Iran and the anti-imperialist left

A complex history exists between Iran and the anti-imperialist left, particularly socialist movements. The MEK remains a relevant factor, inflicting casualties in Iran through continued acts of terrorism. Eurocentrism colors the views of many socialists, who perceive the Iranian revolution as regressive.

The pro-Palestine demonstrations in Europe and the USA are often spearheaded by secular, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist activists. Some find themselves perplexed by Iran's role in the struggle for a free Palestine. Engagement between key leftist theorists in Europe and the USA with the Iranian revolution could undoubtedly strengthen the movement as a whole and help clarify the left's position. With their Marxist background, they possess the theoretical framework to bridge the gap between Marxism and Islam due to their understanding of both ideologies and the limitations of the European Enlightenment. History presents Marxism with an existential dilemma: embrace universalism or pursue pluriversalism.

The socialist movement demonstrated remarkable theoretical flexibility. In China, Deng Xiaoping confronted some significant theoretical questions within Marxism. Considered one

of the 20th century's most creative thinkers, he employed a Marxist concept – "forces of production" – to argue that these forces could be developed alongside private capitalists, under the leadership of the Communist Party. This, in turn, integrated a crucial segment of the population – entrepreneurs with innovative ideas – into the economic development process. A pragmatist at heart, Deng prioritized poverty alleviation over the implications for the Marxist labor theory of value. The success of his vision is undeniable. By 2022, the World Bank acknowledged China's remarkable achievement of lifting 800 million people out of extreme poverty. The Chinese model is aptly termed "*socialism with Chinese characteristics*".

In Venezuela, Hugo Chávez championed the concept of "*socialism of the 21st century*" (see above). Building on these innovations, philosophical bridges between socialism and Islam can potentially be constructed, drawing on Professor Ameli's concept of justice. I would like to promote dialogue meetings with key Marxists of today to discuss these issues. Vijay Prashad is such a Marxist. I met him in Venezuela, but we were not able to sit together for a in-depth conversation.

On July 10, 2022, Vijay Prashad published an [article](#) on the website of *People's Democracy* with the title "*On Marxism and decolonisation*".

In September 2022 Prashad published an [article](#) with ten theses on Marxism and Decolonisation. In October 2023 I [responded](#) to that article with a critique of per thesis. He never replied to that critique. In a [YouTube](#) video published on June 13, 2024 with the title *Decolonization via a Marxist Lens!* Prashad blames decoloniality for looking only at culture. On June 1, 2024, Vijay Prashad and Mikaela Nhondo Erskog, published an article in the socialist magazine [Monthly Review](#), in which they review the work of Kevin Ochieng Okoth on a critique of decoloniality from a Marxist point of view.

I welcome their critique. We need to have a dialogue between different philosophies of liberation. Hopefully, they or other key intellectuals and activists from Europe and the USA will see the need to start a dialogue between Iran and the anti-imperialist left.

The Backlash

Openly engaging with enemies of Western imperialism and colonialism can be fraught. I experienced this firsthand in my interactions with my home country, Suriname.

On February 25th, 1980, a group of non-commissioned officers in the Surinamese army staged a coup d'état. The group, led by Desi Bouterse, was diverse in its political leanings. It included both left-wing and right-wing elements. I did not support the coup. The ascendance of the left led to counter-reactions from the US and Dutch imperial powers. The insurgents installed a civilian government led by President Chin A Sen, a right-wing nationalist. His administration was short-lived, as the left wing of the military disapproved of him. Several attempted counter-coups culminated in the arrest, torture, and execution of 15 people on December 8, 1982. One of them was my brother, who had remained in Suriname when our family left for the Netherlands. A military government was subsequently installed.

I was at my parents' house in the Netherlands when the news came through about my brother's execution. I still vividly remember how my mother cried out loud despair and couldn't stop weeping. My father was a picture of brokenness. Their first-born child had been tortured and shot like a dog. To witness my parents, whom I dearly love, in such uncontrollable grief was deeply painful for me.

A few days later, a high-ranking official from the Dutch Ministry of Interior Affairs contacted me. He invited me to a meeting with former president Henk Chin A Sen. Chin A Sen explained that he had travelled to the US, where he had met with the CIA. They were planning an invasion of Suriname, modelled on the use of contras in Nicaragua. They sought to enlist the support of left-wing activists who opposed the coup. He requested my backing. I categorically refused. I could never participate in a CIA-orchestrated coup, even though I witnessed the suffering of my parents and their desire for vengeance. This caused some tension in my relationship with my parents, which wounded me deeply, because I love them dearly. The CIA's coup plan was ultimately scrapped.

In 2010, I began a weekly column on a popular Surinamese news website, where I tackled issues of decolonizing the mind. Suriname had undergone significant changes. Just prior to the first elections in 1987, reactionary Surinamese groups based in the Netherlands funded a rebel group in the interior of Suriname, igniting a bloody war that claimed the lives of 450 people out of a population of 500,000. The war concluded in 1992. Army leader Desi Bouterse had entered politics. His National Democratic Party (NDP), with an anti-colonial and progressive platform, steadily garnered support in successive elections. In 2010, his party had formed a coalition government, with Bouterse as the helm as president. In 2015, the NDP secured an absolute majority of parliamentary seats, and he was re-elected president.

The December killings had caused a deep split within Surinamese society, both in Suriname itself and among the Surinamese community in the Netherlands. There were differing opinions on how to heal the divisions: amnesty, truth and reconciliation, court cases. In my columns, I drew the link between the December killings and the Interior war, and argued for dialogue and truth and reconciliation.

Early in 2015, I came into contact with Melvin Linscheer, the head of Suriname's National Security. He was a regular reader of my columns and wanted to discuss a trajectory for peace and reconciliation. I proposed initiating this trajectory with a conversation between myself and President Bouterse on political violence between 1980 and 1992. The president agreed, and we conducted a two-day-long interview in 2015, which was subsequently published on [YouTube](#).

The backlash was immense. The right-wing media attacked my mission, claiming it was not about peace and reconciliation but about shielding Bouterse from prosecution. They alleged I was a paid mouthpiece for the man who killed my brother, even claiming I had received one million dollar as a reward. My private consultancy suffered financially. My brothers and sisters issued public statements denouncing me in the strongest words and severing all family ties. We received numerous death threats. The situation escalated to the point where Linscheer, head of Suriname's National Security, deemed it necessary to send an intelligence services captain to the Netherlands to train Sitla and me in basic security measures. Sitla has been by my side throughout these struggles, including the peace and reconciliation trajectory. We endured this significant backlash.

When I returned from my first visit to Venezuela, I participated in a public meeting in Amsterdam to share my experiences. Right-wing Venezuelans attempted to disrupt the meeting with vocal protests.

I expect similar challenges when I go public with my views on Iran. We will have to deal with them as they arise. Others have suffered far more than we have in the course of the struggle against injustice.

When I was in Iran, I spoke with Sitla daily about my experiences via Zoom. Now that we are retired, we have made a pact to travel together in this latter phase of our lives.

Upon returning, I suggested *"Let's book a trip to Iran and visit Tehran, Mashhad, Qum, Isfahan, and other beautiful places. We could combine it with presentations of the Farsi translation of the book."*

I cautioned her, *"There is a heads-up. In holy cities like Mashhad and Qum, women are required to wear a chador."*

She retorted, *"Wow, I cannot imagine myself wearing a chador as a feminist. That could be a real issue. Maybe this time you should go on your own."*

We have a simple daily routine as pensioners. We wake up, do our morning exercises, and then settle into our workspaces: she in the downstairs living room, and I in my upstairs study. We come together for lunch and dinner, and afterwards, we unwind with a short nap before enjoying some quality time watching Netflix. Sometimes, we switch off Netflix and put on our YouTube playlist filled with romantic songs. Unsurprisingly, our favorites are classic Bollywood tunes.

As one of the songs ended, she mused, *"I have been thinking about Iran. I wonder how I would look in a chador."*

"You would look wonderful," I said. *"After all, you are still the one I fell in love with fifty years ago, and I keep falling for you every single second."*

¹ I thank Ebrahim Mohseni Ahooui from the bottom of my heart for his extensive editing of this essay and his support for my work.

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³ The interview took place on March 29, 1988 and was published in Dutch in Sranan Akademia, vol. 1, number 1, May 1988, p. 45-56 (p. 55). Sandew Hira: Louison, G. - De voorbereidingen tot de Grenadiaanse revolutie (the preparations for the Grenadian revolution).

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⁶ Khomeini, A. (2011): *The little green book*. Bantam Books, p. 1.

⁷ Galeano, E. (2013): *Children of the Days. A Calender of Human History*. Nation Books. New York, p. 19.

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¹¹ Césaire, A. (1956): Letter to Maurice Thorez. Paris. http://diversity.wustl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Hassan_Documenta-Notebook_91.pdf.

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¹³ https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000117807_eng.

¹⁴ Idem. See for a discussion on Chavez and religion the article of Ramos, A.M. (2020): Use of religious references in Hugo Chávez's political discourse. *Política y Cultura*, julio-diciembre 2020, núm. 54, pp. 85-104. <https://doi.org/10.24275/ZYGI7869>.

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¹⁸ Idem, p. 27.

¹⁹ Idem, p. 47.

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²¹ Shariati, A. (1980): *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies. An Islamic Critique*. Islamic Foundation Press, p. 55-57.

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²⁴ Idem.

²⁵ <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/10823/As-the-page-of-history-is-turning-you-are-standing-on-the-right>.

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³² Idem, p. 8.

³³ Idem, p. 14.

³⁴ See <https://www.sid.ir/FileServer/JE/21017020190104.pdf> for a more elaborate analysis of the improvement of women's right in Iran since the Revolution.

³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1BAP12oKCO>

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