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Review Article

A Review of Political Culture, Confessions, and Violence

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Abstract

Authoritarian states have long employed coerced political confessions to suppress dissent, reinforce ideological authority, and legitimize existing political orders. While scholarship on interrogation and repression has largely focused on the extraction of information and punishment of political opponents, less attention has been given to the relationship between public confession and political culture. Drawing on theories of political culture, legitimacy, hegemony, and organized violence, this article examines televised political confessions in Iran as instruments through which the state seeks political compliance, social acquiescence, and ideological dominance. Building on the works of Charles Tilly, Ervand Abrahamian, Darius Rejali, and Michel Foucault, I argue that political confessions historically derived their power from a political culture that associated confession with truth, repentance, and moral transformation. The Iranian case suggests, however, that these cultural foundations have eroded. Growing public awareness of coercion, torture, and state manipulation has significantly weakened the credibility of televised recantations, reducing their capacity to generate compliance or legitimize political authority. Rather than functioning as effective instruments of coercion, public confessions increasingly expose the coercive power of the state itself, producing skepticism and further delegitimation. The article contends that when audiences cease to regard political confessions as authentic, their capacity to discipline the population is substantially diminished and their political utility becomes increasingly exhausted.

Keywords

Political Culture, Confession, Political Confession, Torture, Iran, Political Legitimacy

1. Introduction: A Brief Definition

The body of literature on torture is large [5, 7, 19, 28, 32, 41, 42]. Whether it is on torture historically [13] or specific to a nation [1, 15, 40], many have done extensive research and have profoundly enriched the literature. Within this literature, however, there is a minor gap, scarcity of sorts, addressing the relationship between states that torture as a political survival method and the existing political culture which reacts, responds, and critiques torture. Political culture and the change in political culture play a significant role in how the state legitimizes its behavior in relation to the population. Our political way of thinking is never a direct function of direct experience or acquired knowledge. It is a product of shared interpretations that accumulate and develop into traditions across generations. These cultural ways of thinking and attitudes are highly resistant to change [3, 27].

According to Lehman [29], "the relationship of the general culture and the political culture is analogous to the relationship of society to its political subsystem: the symbols which characterize the political sector (i.e., the political culture) and the other sectors of society are encompassed by a more general symbol system (i.e., the general culture), in such a way that

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the latter sets some limits of the variance of the former. In other words, a particular political culture can only be fully understood when it is viewed as part of the larger culture" (p. 364).

Political culture has strong relationship with general culture, just like there is a relationship between the populace and the extant political system. As Lehman puts it, "a political culture supporting pluralistic democratic values would be an unlikely development in the thirteenth century given the overarching theological values. Similarly, successful legitimation of political institutions in terms of the "divine right of Kings" in a modern society whose overall values are egalitarian and achievement-oriented is also improbable" [29]

Almond and Verba [4] argue that political culture be treated as both an independent and dependent variable. In one of the eminent studies of political culture, Almond and Vera claim that "the relationship between political culture and political structure is one of the most significant researchable aspects of the problems of political stability and change" (p. 33). The relationship between the two is mostly dialectical. They can function as both independent and dependent variable. However, political culture in many historical junctions transcends the political structure and lends itself to building a new one, as we argue in this paper on the specific case of Iran.

According to Dawson and Prewitt [12], political culture covers a wide range of political behavior and symbols. It might include "political traditions and folk heroes, the spirit of public institutions, political passions of the citizenry, goals articulated by the political ideology, and both formal and informal rules of the political game…political stereotypes, political style, political moods, the tone of political exchanges…some sense of what is appropriately political and what is not" (p. 26).

Both communist and noncommunist states in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia have used torture widely against political opponents, according to Einolf [13], however, the lack of information on the use of torture by 19th century governments and colonial powers makes it difficult to tell whether the rate of torture in the 20th century represents an increase over 19th century levels [13]. He argues that one of the reasons torture continues in the 20th century is because conflicts have caused an increase in the use of torture and that it has been used as a way of inflicting terror and imposing control upon the civilian populations of occupied territories [13, 41]. The torture of persons who engaged in nonviolent political activities, or were merely suspected of doing so, as the literature suggests, occurred in many countries besides fascist and communist ones, including Argentina [14, 18], Brazil [21, 22, 26], El Salvador [33], Iran [1, 38], Iraq [31], and many others.

Furthermore, this prevalence has continued until the present time, and the most recent Amnesty International report on the subject (2000) estimates that the governments of over 132 countries use torture. Their reports indicate that torture has been widely practiced in many countries throughout the last three decades [44].

While government secrecy makes estimating exact levels of torture impossible [17], Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, and the US Department of State have all released hundreds of reports on torture since these organizations began reporting on human rights abuses in the 1970s. Their reports indicate that torture has been widely practiced in many countries throughout the last three decades (Goldstein, p. 111).

According to Ervand Abrahamian [39], torture in Iran ceased for fifty years or so and made its way back to the political scene from the early 1970s on. It started again with the Shah's regime in the early 1970s who started to, "resort to torture for reasons very similar to those of the subsequent Islamic Republic. Both governments he claims, did not torture due to the conflict between tradition and modernity, the "ideological warfare, political mobilization, and the need to win "hearts and minds" (p. 3).

In Iran, torture functions differently than, for example, some Latin American countries where torture was used for confession and punishment. The public political and ideological recantation is an objective that is beyond confessing information.

Abrahamian states that, "Some modern states—especially in Latin America—have used torture for information, intimidation, and self-incrimination. But Iran uses it predominantly to obtain these ideological recantations…the clerical authorities in Iran keep close tabs on the interrogators and invariably stop the torment once they obtained the sought after recantation" (p. 4).

Confessions and recantations function differently in different societies. But according to Abrahamian the Iranian type and the early modern Europe function the same. They are similar in "that of grand theater staged by the authorities as positive propaganda for themselves and as negative propaganda against their real and imagined enemies. They are intended to destroy as well as to win over hearts and minds" (p. 6).

Appearing on the stage (public television) is itself a form of suicide, for it signifies the explicit rejection of oneself as well as the implicit betrayal of one's own friends, colleagues, and beliefs. To that end, many Iranians in the 1980s equated recantations with suicide and complete destruction of one's honor and reputation [34]. Recantations work best when the public shares two preconceptions: a) they feel that their society is mortally threatened by omnipotent external forces plotting incessantly with enemies well hidden in the very bowls of their community. This mentality can be termed conspiratorial—even paranoid, and b) they associate confessions with truth, guilt, redemption, and moral conscience—not with torture, coercion, violence, and unbridled power. Consequently, the recantations stress the "voluntary" nature of the whole exercise as well as the sinister links between external and internal enemies. These two issues feature as prominently as propaganda for the authorities and against the opposition. The Islamic Republic has the "dubious honor of being the world's premier producer of recantation shows" (Abrahamian, p. 13).

2. Literature on Political Torture and Confessions

The confessions "place in the limelight the state's avowed ideals—in the ideological as well as in the political, social, and economic realms. They hold up the opposition as the inversion of these ideals. They cite moral issues that bolster and undermine those active in the public arena. They also provide an avenue into the psyche of the larger society—its hopes and fears, likes and dislikes, dreams and nightmares, values and taboos, aspirations and aversions, past grievances and future strivings, collective memories, and selective histories" (Abrahamian, p. 13).

For Abrahamian, Iranian torture is modern, rational, and calculated: it serves to produce public recantations. If torture exists in periods where recantations are not valued, then one can question the link Abrahamian draws between torture and forced confessions. Scholars may be tempted to identify particular torture episodes in Reza Shah's prisons, during Muhammad Reza Shah's early reign, or in the brief revolutionary interregnum (1979-1981). This weakens though it does not disprove Abrahamian's thesis. For Abrahamian concedes that there was some corporal violence in these periods; the question is how we weigh this evidence. Abrahamian argues that the torture was infrequent, unsystematic, exaggerated, shorter in duration, or less painful than torture that followed the 1970s.

Is the causal link between torture and confessions as strong as Abrahamian wants to make out? The answer is not necessarily. On the one hand, you do not need a system that emphasizes forced confessions to trigger torture. There are societies—Chile, Guatemala, Kenya, South Africa, and El Salvador—where torture was common but where forced confessions were not. On the other hand, you do not need torture to generate forced confessions. Indeed, there can be police systems that generate forced confessions that torture little. In the US, forced confessions have been as troubling a phenomenon, and Zimbardo [48] has shown that police seek false confessions frequently, intensely, and with coercive techniques that have no relation to torture. In Japan, 86.6% of all criminal cases end with full confessions to the crime by the accused, a figure that any Iranian or American prosecutor would envy. Japanese police appear to torture in some cases, but it is also clear that the coercive pressures Zimbardo outlines are far more preferred. Even the Spanish Inquisition was familiar with these techniques, one reason religious courts tortured far less than secular criminal courts, even though the religious courts were obsessed with saving souls, not just catching criminals. What we can say at best is that when a system considers confession as the best proof, police officers try to get it by any means, sometimes torture. Forced confessions have an elective affinity to torture: each is sufficient but not necessary for the other to appear.

The paragraph below can speak to the idea of martyrdom and how suffering should be part of a political existence. If a revolutionary is serious about the business of revolution, then he/she must suffer and even give life for it.

Why did they accept public confessions as sincere (p. 187)? They had been to prison. They had experienced the torture and staging themselves. The answer goes to the heart of the political language game of pain. For it was widely believed that a true revolutionary would die under torture than change his mind under torture (p. 92, p. 107). At most, he would make "tactical" concessions, not soulful recantations (p. 225). Thus when someone known to one changed his views, it had to be because the change was sincere. Otherwise, they would have willingly chosen political martyrdom. This is naivet é alight, but this naivet é isn't corrected with more factual information but rather with a fundamental self-reconceptualization. Abrahamian believes that the political opposition has learned from the past and sees through the forced confessions. But the evidence he presents suggests that these groups are only skeptical about forced confessions in this regime. Political groups are still committed to political martyrdom, comparative pain-claims, "tactical" concessions, and victim hierarchies, and so they will succumb to the spell of public confessions again. (p. 1). Skepticism about televised confessions goes beyond political opposition, it is consequential or the result of decades of the same practice with minimal favorable outcome for the state. While it might still create fear in the population, it does not buy the state legitimacy any more than public religious rituals. Rejali believes, however, that until Iranian activists negate this belief, they are doomed to relive the past under future regimes. [39]

Abrahamian: "the recantations become especially useful when the audience is predisposed to accept confessions at face value and is innocent of the efforts that go into producing the show (p. 10). The recanters, not to mention the authorities, insist that the testimonials are the product of much self-examination, reflection, and reconsideration and that such confessions have nothing to do with coercion but are genuine signs of guilt, penance, and striving for redemption—either in this or the next world.

The process of confession and recantation in Iran:

1) Arrest
2) Interrogation
3) Torture to divulge information
4) Torture to recant and confessing to an ideological mistake and repent
5) Televised (publicized) recantation to create political/ideological legitimacy
6) Creates fear in the public
7) Creates demoralized attitudes toward change
8) Protects from the protector in the form of a racket
9) Martyrdom and suffering as a necessary ingredient to prove serious conviction
10) With changing of values in the past 20 years or so does suffering and martyrdom still remain a political value

This brings me (Darius Rejali) to the central question of Abrahamian's book: not what caused forced confessions, but why they so successfully demoralized groups [1], so much so

that the entire system turned to their production?

Political groups are still committed to political martyrdom, comparative pain-claims, "tactical" concessions, and victim hierarchies, and so they will succumb to the spell of public confessions again. Until Iranian activists undo this part of their heritage, eventually, they are doomed to relive the past under future regimes or even in purges among their own parties. In this respect, Abrahamian's book is an antidote to political naivetę, a medicine that one can only hope is taken widely. In this light there is and has been a competition among political opposition groups as how many activists they have lost and how much they have endured torture, and that quantity of revolutionaries or activists legitimizes the group not only as the most revolutionary but most correct in their political analysis.

3. Public Recantations

Two observations can be made comparing the political culture of Iranians vis-à-vis public confessions and recantations:

What makes the distinction between the attitudes toward public recantation of the 1980s and the 1990s? Martyrdom, pain and suffering as a political value existed during the 1970s throughout the 1990s. If Golsorkhi and Daneshian, (2 leftist revolutionaries tried and executed by the Shah's regime), were the ultimate revolutionaries during the Shah's persecution of political activists, and the remaining 13 "co-conspirators" traitors, today the Iranian political culture has deviated from that belief system quite drastically. According to Abrahamian who explains the public view of one who recants succinctly, "they associate confessions with truth, guilt, redemption, and moral conscience—not with torture, coercion, violence, and unbridled power" (p. 8). Consequently, and this is key in my argument, "the recantations stress the "voluntary" nature of the whole exercise as well as the sinister links between external and internal enemies. These two issues feature as prominently as propaganda for the authorities and against the opposition" (p. 8).

Intended racketeering by the state is no longer as viable and reliable as it was in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Through televised confessions the state intended to show how the population is protected from the enemy within. This in reference to Charles Tilly's 4 steps for all states to follow. Tilly's idea is that, under the general heading of organized violence, the agents of states characteristically execute four different activities:

1) War making: Eliminating or neutralizing their own rivals outside the territories in which they have clear and continuous priority as wielders of force
2) State making: Eliminating or neutralizing their rivals inside those territories
3) Protection: Eliminating or neutralizing the enemies of their clients
4) Extraction: Acquiring the means of carrying out the first three activities – war-making, state-making, and protection [43].

The state in Iran is mainly fulfilling the second activity on Tilly's list; eliminating or neutralizing their rivals inside those territories. The distinction that during the shah's regime and later in the Iranian state televised confessions most people blamed the activists for recantation holding the belief in martyrdom and suffering as a political cultural value. Today, however, not many feel that those on tv are particularly betraying any revolutionary line or cultural values.

Over the last few decades there has been a long chain of coerced confessions in which authoritarian states force political prisoners to go on television and confess to remorseful feelings and political revision about their past beliefs, views, and activity. In what seems unbelievable to friends and family of 'remorseful prisoners' take back their fundamental world outlook and denounce themselves and claim regret for everything they struggled for in the past. They appear stoic but somewhat certain about the decision. In some of these confessions they sometimes acknowledge their disbelief of how they could have possibly found faith in something contrary to the state's extant ideology. Despite the well-recognized and obvious pretentious construction of these confessions the state is adamant that this practice is a convincing process of legitimation in the eyes of the public, especially the domestic population.

Political confessions, to publicly approve and justify the current regime, have been a way for many authoritarian states to legitimize their political existence and have a long history. It is usually a determined effort on behalf of a regime feeling vulnerable about its survival facing considerable delegitimizing views by the population. Public confessions seem futile, and furthermore contradictory, and somewhat ironic since they lend themselves to deeper de-legitimation than the stability of the state [37]. In many countries, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, China, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Colombia, states and organizations have used political confessions to their advantage in legitimizing their state of political affairs [30].

Political confessions are grand in scope, and they are conducted and organized for state validity and the reproduction of ideological domination [2, 41]. It is at the core of the phenomenon, ideological, and it endeavors to establish political hegemony. In Latin America, torture for the objective of confession was at first used against specific political opposition. In Colombia in the 1960s, and in Argentina and Chile in the 1970s and 1980s, torture was routinely practiced under the military governments against political prisoners at many prisons [45].

4. Torture, Confession, and Political Instability

Our central theme in this paper is that political confessions serve as a form of violence to legitimize the state in the form of racketeering a la Charles Tilly. Charles Tilly provides an

analysis on the violence perpetuated by the state and how it works to achieve the "assent of the governed" or to acquire the submission of the population as racketeering:

consider the definition of a racketeer as someone who creates a threat and then charges for its reduction. Governments' provision of protection, by this standard, often qualifies as racketeering. To the extent that the threats against which a given government protects its citizens are imaginary or are consequences of its own activities, the government has organized a protection racket. Since governments themselves commonly simulate, stimulate, or even fabricate threats of external war and since the repressive and extractive activities of governments often constitute the largest current threats to the livelihoods of their own citizens, many governments operate in essentially the same ways as racketeers. There is, of course, a difference: Racketeers, by the conventional definition, operate without the sanctity of governments (p. 171).

In essence, the state claims; although this public confession does not look violent but there is extreme violence behind it, a conspicuous message to the public. We are entitled to torture prisoners, force them to appear publicly to express their renunciation through the acceptance of state ideology and legitimacy. In a racket, the protector gives protection from the perceived (false) threat. Consequently, while the state is creating violence of torture and forced compliance, it is conveying the message to all citizens to comply with the racket with their silence and acquiescence.

We can understand torture by exploring the intricacies within the context of connections across state boundaries and the state itself. There are three models, and all three assume states are to ensure security, stability, and legitimacy. This stability is, of course, more imperative for the elite [8] than the rest of the population.

In her paper, 'Why Torture', Ruth Blakely [8], argues three models of causes of torture, security, stability, and legitimacy. The security model shows the dominant claim that it is conducted to defeat security threats. The stability model is used in authoritarian states as a method to instill fear and deter political opposition domestically. The third, the legitimacy model, is used to delegitimize those who are tortured and in turn to legitimize themselves as the protectors of society [8]. All three models can be surmised to function as a tool of legitimacy. However, in the case of public confession, torture functions as a means to achieve the latter two, stability and legitimacy.

Torture is seen as a tool of state power to discipline the population and suppress potential or actual political opposition that would pose a threat to the interests of the regime [36]. This opposition includes political insurgent movements, revolutionary groups, armed or otherwise, opposition parties, unions, groups demanding freedom of speech, political freedoms, and social justice. Usually, torture is publicized through state media and unofficially to make an example of those who fight the regime, demanding compliance by the rest of the population. For example, Amnesty International reported that in Guatemala during the 1980s, newspapers were permitted to publish photographs of dead torture victims, according to Blakely.

Criminal confessions, practiced world-wide, is to get an alleged perpetrator to confess to a crime which he/she may or may not be guilty of. Usually, this is to charge the offender and close cases which entail police beating, as physical torture and psychological torture, such as threats with long sentences, execution, etc. They function quite differently compared to political confessions. In the former, the aim is to close cases by forcing a confession, and the latter, hopefully keep cases open and make plenty of public references. In criminal confessions, the torture and beating remains a secret but in political confessions the public is informally made aware of the violence supplementing the legitimacy of entitled violence by the state.

5. Results

In the torture and confession literature, there are diverse views, from claiming that dictators are torn between torturing or not torturing because there is opposition; to political opposition parties may provide despots or authoritarian regimes with incentives to commit international human rights treatise and at the same time violate human rights [10] This pits dictators facing opposition and the need to torture in opposition to international human rights organizations who try to divert them. It does not so much condemn but understands the dilemma of a dictator. As opposed to some more straight forward findings in the research that torture does not work [42].

According to Sullivan, it is falsely believed that torture is an effective tool for combating opposition. His study validates that torture is ineffective for reducing killings perpetrated by armed opposition (insurgency). And furthermore, torture appears to have no real correlation with subsequent killings by armed groups. Based on the evidence presented, torture is ineffective for reducing insurgent perpetrated killing. Because it fails to reduce the level of violence. On the contrary, it increases the incentives for insurgent groups to resort to violence even more. However, to what degree can we assume the same outcome when it comes to torture to induce a public confession? Sullivan's view contributes to the short and long-term futility of torture when it comes to armed opposition. Public confessions, at the same time, seek other objectives, hence require the phenomenon to be independently studied. They seek the acquiescence of an angry, potentially radical public.

Costanzo [11] examines the effectiveness of torture and reports it is politically futile. Costanzo first looks at false confessions and examines the relevance of that research for torture-based interrogations. Then, he reviews research on the mental health consequences of torture for survivors and perpetrators. Finally, he explores the social-psychological conditions that promote acts of cruelty. After examining the arguments typically offered to justify the use of torture. He concludes that there is a cost to torture, and it does not outweigh

the sociopolitical consequences. These consequences include "the unreliable information extracted through interrogations using torture, the mental and emotional toll on victims and torturers, loss of international stature and credibility, and the risk of retaliation against soldiers and civilians" [11].

A more relevant and closer look at public confessions study was conducted by Fiskesjo [15]. He has had personal experience with Chinese authority and claims that the mass media face a difficult dilemma. That is, how to report on the Chinese spectacles of prisoners forced to perform fake, scripted confessions? The Chinese authorities, accordingly, produce confessions in order to create a new 'truth', one that is to be disseminated through Chinese state media and, if possible, through foreign mass media, and social media as well. Chinese mass media publicize the confessions under state pressure, according to Fiskesjo, and even assist in the arrangement of these new Orwellian' truths. He examines the dichotomy which exists within media outside of control of Chinese authority. Some, according to Fiskesjo, act responsibly and report on the issue and others more disgracefully avoid the whatsoever reporting. Fiskesjo's paper, in an indirect way, speaks to the legitimacy of a state that tortures. Among the reasons why media would refrain from reporting is to avoid questioning the legitimacy of the state that tortures. Questioning legitimacy in the age of globalization and neoliberalism, the ultimate political economy of most nations of the world would be 'bad for business' as the corporate world would put it.

Researchers for whom state violence is legitimate and taken for granted focus on methods to interrogate which would result into better and more reliable information [25]. They are more concerned with the "dynamic between interrogator and subject" and delve into the specific techniques of interrogation. To remedy this and advance the academic and operational fields, Kelly et al. identified 71 unique techniques and sorted them into six domains: Rapport and Relationship Building, Kelly et al., offer a testable model of how the domains may interact in the process of interrogation. Their model offers "heuristic devices for both researchers and practitioners searching for a parsimonious and more meaningful way to describe, research, and understand the interviewing and interrogation of those accused of wrong-doing or possessing guilty knowledge" (p. 177). This study, like many studies, develops and suggests more compassionate means to extract information from captives. The issue is raised [35], on whether the interrogator would really adhere to the guidelines of "heuristic devices" suggested by advocates of such means of interrogation. It is likely that most interrogators are directed to act more civilized and humane while interrogating. The question here is political legitimacy which any type of interrogation would diminish locally and internationally.

For these researchers there is no question of state legitimacy or whether racketeering is part of state making, rather the correct way of interrogation so it abides by local and international law. In the words of Tilly,

Legitimacy is the probability that other authorities will act to confirm the decisions of a given authority… [they] are much more likely to confirm the decisions of a challenged authority that controls substantial force; not only fear of retaliation, but also desire to maintain a stable environment recommend that general rule. The rule underscores the importance of the authority's monopoly of force (pp. 171-172).

Chandrasekaram [9] examines confessions given by Tamil Tigers and report them mostly fictitious. The confession transcends all other evidence as it ranks as the most influential of all forms of evidence that may be submitted in a criminal case. As the confession is provided by the defendant him/herself who has the ultimate authority to pronounce his/her crime, it is believed to carry the 'best evidence' on the suspect's mental state and best proof of criminal intention. Deconstructing the confessionary narratives of Tamil Tigers in this research, the reliability and validity of the confession were questioned. Based on this analysis several propositions were presented:

1) The confessions derive from institutional fantasies of victory at war
2) They carry fictions rather than factual accounts
3) They reinforce the myths that tortured suspects tell the truth
4) The state, including the judiciary, is in denial about the persecutory practices used within the justice system to determine the 'truth' of these confessions.

There is a duality, however, between belief and practice in many settings, such as Islamic nations and Islamic criminal law. According to Malekian [32], Islamic criminal law or Islamic international criminal law prohibits torture for any purpose and by sudden means. This includes, according to Malekian, torture during various criminal procedures such as arrest, arbitrary arrest, pretrial detention, detention, and when the accused is found guilty. Therefore, "under Islamic criminal law the criminally accused is certainly innocent until proven guilty by an impartial and fair criminal court basing its judgment on the established law and evidence denoting the possible criminality of the accused" (p. 260).

Among practices forbidden by Islamic law is "Any mental harm with the purpose of reaching to some forms of *confession*" (my emphasis).

What is practiced in these nations, including Iran, however, differs immensely from actual law, Malekian states. In practice, torture is inflicted on the criminally accused and on some political prisoners. This, according to Malekian, "has been carried out irrespective of the motives". Torture of political prisoners has been carried out for several reasons such as "extracting information, *confession*, (my emphasis) punishment, prevention of certain acts and more often for the purpose of stabilizing and guaranteeing the authority of those who have political control in an Islamic State" (p. 261).

Einolf [13] correctly brings out the reasons why torture has increased into the 20th century and has become worse in recent years. However, mentions that torture is most commonly used against "people who are not full members of a society, such as slaves, foreigners, prisoners of war, and members of

racial, ethnic, and religious outsider groups." This is obviously a statement more appropriate for liberal democracies rather than despotic, and authoritarian regimes.

Exploring Iran's case

According to International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), in Iran,

"forced confessions have been systematically broadcast by Iranian state-owned media to instill fear and repress dissent, a practice that amounts to torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and other human rights violations. Victims revealed that not only were they subjected to torture and ill-treatment to force them to confess - often to false statements - in front of the camera, but that furthermore, the broadcasting of these confessions caused enormous pain and suffering. Many of the victims described these programs as mental and psychological torture with long-lasting impacts." [23]

While televised political confessions remain a recurring instrument of state repression in Iran, evidence suggests that their capacity to generate legitimacy, compliance, and public acquiescence has diminished substantially. What once functioned as a persuasive performance of ideological truth increasingly appears to large segments of the public as a transparent spectacle of coercion. As a result, the practice persists institutionally even as its political effectiveness becomes progressively exhausted

Public confessions continues to achieve a few objectives; a) exclude political opposition of all kind, b) create a hegemonic political and religious ideology, i.e. repentance, a political-religious conflation, c) create an economically stable condition for foreign investment, d) political stability, pervasive acceptance of the legitimacy of the regime, e) nonexistence and irrelevance of an alternative political system.

The use of harassment, and psychological warfare against political prisoners to extract forced confessions on television are well-known tactics used in the regime's prisons in the past four decades [46]. Amnesty International's September 2, 2020, report entitled "Trampling humanity: Mass arrests, disappearances, and torture since Iran's 2019 November protests," reveals dozens of examples of this brutality against protesters. Here, confession in Iran is depicted to precisely demonstrate the above objectives.

According to Michel Foucault [16], confession is a technique to control and monitor the institutions in any given society, including government and religion. Confession prevents critical thinking in terms of government and religion and establishes legitimacy for the state. As opposed to other thinkers, Foucault believes in the power of relationships not only in the struggle between class and state, but also in relationships of men and women, family, army, even between students and professors, etc. Unlike many Marxian thinkers, e.g., Adorno and Horkheimer, Foucault does not observe the power relationship in the historical context but in every relation in society. Therefore, the type of confessions induced by the state in Iran is more embedded in the ethics and moralities of the culture.

In the case of Iran, we are confronted by a prison situation that not only obtains information through interrogation and confession but finds it useful to distort the identity of the person. For example, in the 1980s, the regime tried to establish its power through massive suppression. First, the authorities intended to get the information, then the person would confess that he/she did not believe in the goal of his/her political organization and, in some instances, forced to believe in Islam, or what is socially constructed as "tavvab," one who repented; in essence confesses to his/her sins feels contrition and makes up for it by taking the right steps.

The confession policy under the Islamic Republic is quite different from the Pahlavi, regime. During the latter period, the prisoner was tortured for the purposes of extraction of information sought by the SAVAK (the Shah's secret police). They needed the information to find, arrest, and annihilate the guerilla organization or any political organization. A more religious and cultural method prevails with the Islamic Republic, however. Political prisoners would never be released from interrogation during his/her time in prison, which induces an identity disorder [20, 24, 47].

These methods have been modified under the Islamic Republic over the past three decades, and parts of it continue to this day. According to Basoglu, Ozmen, & Shahin [6], three types of stressors related to various aspects of psychopathology can be found in survivors of torture: a) perceived severity of torture, b) secondary effects of captivity experience on various life areas, and c) general psychosocial stressors following captivity.

Changing the Pattern of Confession from group to individual

In the past four decades, the post-revolutionary Islamic Republic has been somewhat successful in suppressing a significant part of its political opposition. The protests that emerged thereafter consisted of individuals who are journalists, civil activists of whom many are women, writers, and intellectuals.

In conclusion, the confession serves as a security structure for the state and its aim is to break the resistance and to humiliate and dishonor dissidents.

Three entities are affected by tortures: a) the individual him/herself, the state that tortures, and the observing public. The individual suffers recantation consequences in becoming depressed, self-loathing, and demoralized. As far as the state is concerned, there is a sense of legitimacy and hegemonic prevalence of its ideology. For the public, which is what is at issue in this paper, it has grave outcomes. Despite what few opposition groups, Justice for Iranians, Shadi Sadr, a famous human rights lawyer based in London, claim that confessions have a demoralizing effect and create feelings of hopelessness for any serious political change.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper was a brief look at torture and legitimacy and delved into political confessions as a pragmatic approach for

volatile states seeking wider local and international legitimacy. States holding a monopoly on violence have used that entitled privilege to force their political opposition to concede to their supreme ideology perpetuating that monopoly [41, 43]. In the case of Iran, individual confessions publicized through state-run networks have helped the racketeering practices of the regime. How has the prison political culture affected the general political culture? It appears that the Iranian political culture hardly accepts recantations as a serious testimony to the state's legitimacy. The question remains whether the use or abuse of such legitimate power contributes to the assenting population remaining acquiescent for a while longer. Does racketeering, while surreal, create real fear of danger even though the population recognizes the nature of the racket well? While Charles Tilly correctly recognizes hegemonic racketeering behind violence and legitimacy of the state, a reasonable question becomes; to what end can the cycle continue? In this age of interconnectivity can we hold the international community accountable for being too tolerant?

7. Political Culture of Violence

The process of confession does not work as a top-down power structure, as in a dictate from above. Rather it works by presupposing the existence of a secret that must be revealed in order to liberate and to finally reveal the hidden essence of the confessor. In addition, as Tilly argues, a tendency to monopolize the means of violence makes a government's claim to provide protection, in either the comforting or the ominous sense of the word, more credible and more difficult to resist.

This paper argued that political confession is not merely an instrument of repression imposed from above, but a culturally mediated performance that depends upon the audience's acceptance and even more important adherence of its claims to truth. As Fletcher argues, confession derives its persuasive force from the assumption that it reveals a hidden moral essence and liberates the confessor through disclosure. Tilly's contention that the state's monopoly of violence enables it to transform coercion into a claim of protection and legitimacy rings true, with certain caveat. Although political confessions operate at the intersection of violence, culture, and authority, their effectiveness rests not simply on the state's ability to compel speech, but on the public's willingness to interpret that speech as genuine. When audiences cease to regard confession as a revelation of truth and instead recognize it as an expression of coercive power, the mechanism loses much of its capacity to generate compliance, legitimacy, and political acquiescence. Under such conditions, political confession no longer functions as an effective vehicle of authority but becomes a visible reminder of the violence upon which authority depends.

The ultimate lesson is that political confessions derive their power not from coercion alone, but from belief; when belief erodes, the political efficacy of confession erodes with it.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest

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