Comparative Studies in Society and History 2012;54(3):612–643.
0010-4175/12 $15.00 © Society for the Comparative Study of Society and History 2012
doi:10.1017/S0010417512000254

Iran's Karaj Dam Affair: Emerging Mass Consumerism, the Politics of Promise, and the Cold War in the Third World

CYRUS SCHAYEGH

Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University

This paper examines two intertwined processes that helped shape life in Tehran in the 1950s. One was a ravenous demand for electricity, part of a surge in popular expectations for mass consumer goods and higher living standards that began in mid-century; the other the 1958–1961 construction, to meet that demand, of a massive hydro-electrical dam, 180 meters high and 390 meters long, on the Karaj River 60 kilometers north of Tehran.[1] This double story, and more particularly the crucial role that societal actors played in it, illuminates society-state and domestic-global interactions characteristic of post-colonial, Third World countries during the Cold War.

The mass consumer society that began to emerge in the 1950s in Tehran, and thereafter across Iran, was not a bolt from the blue.[2] While in the West twentieth-century mass consumerism was rooted in the rise of consumerism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in Iran its origins are found in the nineteenth century.[3] That is when Western, Russian, British-Indian, and Ottoman goods began to arrive there in greater quantities than in the disordered

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Houchang Chehabi and Naghmeh Sohrabi, the participants in a 2010 Columbia University Iranian Seminar, attendees of a 2011 UCLA job talk, and the anonymous *CSSH* referees for their insightful comments, and *CSSH* Managing Editor David Akin for smoothing and refining the text. Research for this paper was made possible by a Swiss Foundation for the Sciences Fellowship for Advanced Scholars.

[1] The dam was also intended to improve Tehran's fresh water supply; see note 55.

[2] Pamela Karimi states that the 1950s U.S. "Point IV Program … indirectly re-oriented the Iranian economy toward mass market consumption." "Transitions in Domestic Architecture and Home Culture in Twentieth-Century Iran" (PhD diss., MIT, 2009), ch. 3: 5. See also Camron Amin, "Importing 'Beauty Culture' into Iran in the 1920s and 1930s: Mass Marketing Individualism in an Age of Anti-Imperialist Sacrifice," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, 1 (2004): 79–95.

[3] On the West, see Frank Trentmann, "Beyond Consumerism: New Historical Perspectives on Consumption," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, 3 (2004): 373–401. A key introduction to the topic is: Daniel Miller, ed., *Acknowledging Consumption* (London: Routledge, 1995).

eighteenth century, aided by Iran's greater stability under the Qajars (1794–1925) and trade agreements imposed by several European powers. After mid-century, courtiers and wealthy merchants, especially in the growing capital, Tehran, started to display wealth more openly.[4] The Constitutional Revolution's mass politics (1905–1911) helped popularize some goods like photographs, and at the same time debates intensified about the consumption of certain imported goods such as Western cloth.[5] In the 1920s and 1930s, Reza Shah Pahlavi's state (1921/25–1941) expanded roads and railways that helped create a national market. An emerging modern middle class joined what had been a small pool of people who could afford consumer goods. In Iran's largest cities new avenues lined by modern shops were central for marketing, selling, and buying such goods, while new leisure spaces like parks and novel "Western-style restaurants serving Western dishes" provided opportunities to display some of them.[6]

Still, this was a far cry from the mass consumerism that grew in the second half of the century.[7] Post-revolutionary political instability, World War I, the Depression, and World War II each cut into consumerist habits. The autocratic Reza Shah's state cared little for consumption and much for production and construction, typified by its financing of its Trans-Iranian Railway by means of a steep sugar and tea tax.

The social class basis for mass consumerism was not yet given and did not crystallize until the 1950s. During that decade, Tehran's middle classes, in particular, grew more quickly. They enlarged their presence in a city whose

[4] Willem Floor, *Textile Imports into Qajar Iran* (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2009); John Gurney, "The Transformation of Tehran in the Later Nineteenth Century," in Chahryar Adle and Bernard Hourcade, eds., *Téhéran: Capitale bicentenaire* (Paris: IFRI, 1992), 58; see also Houchang Chehabi, "The Westernization of Iranian Culinary Culture," *Iranian Studies* 36, 1 (2003): 43–61, here 49.

[5] Reza Sheikh, "Asnad-i tasviri," *Tarikh-i Mu'asir-i Iran* 3, 10 (1999): 319–23; Sivan Balslev, "Of Bowties and Boy Scouts," MS, 2011.

[6] Quote: Chehabi, "Westernization of Iranian Culinary Culture," 56. See also Patrick Clawson, "Knitting Iran Together," *Iranian Studies* 26, 3–4 (1993): 235–50; Eckart Ehlers and Willem Floor, "Urban Change in Iran, 1921–1941," *Iranian Studies* 26, 3–4 (1993): 251–75, here 269. For consumerism in other Middle Eastern countries, c.1900–1950: Mona Russell, *Creating the New Egyptian Woman* (New York: Palgrave, 2004); Uri Kupferschmidt, *European Department Stores and Middle Eastern Consumers* (Istanbul: Ottoman Bank Archives and Research Centre, 2007); Relli Shechter, "Press Advertising in Egypt: Business Realities and Local Meaning, 1882–1956," *Arab Studies Journal* 10, 2 and 11, 1 (2002–2003): 44–66; Nancy Reynolds, *A City Consumed. Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

[7] Frank Trentmann ("Beyond Consumerism," 381) gives a summary of an argument of Heinz-Gerhard Haupt about the difference between consumerism and mass consumerism, which applies to Iran as well: In "a 'consumer society,' … a particular set of goods was available to certain groups who used them for self-representation.… '[M]ass consumer society' was qualitatively different, not only because an expanding set of goods became accessible to more people, but because 'distinction' through possession was becoming more complex as consumption became connected with many more social, political and cultural formations." See Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, *Konsum und Handel. Europa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003), 20–21.

population between 1950 and 1960 doubled to two million, and they had more money and time to buy and enjoy goods. Key reasons for this development were a rise—and after 1963, a boom—in state employment, due mainly to the state's growing revenues after Iran's 1954 50-50 profit-sharing agreement with an international oil consortium, and a laissez-faire monetary policy that made loans more readily available.[8]

Make no mistake, the start of a mass consumer society in 1950s Tehran was not seamless. Different modes of retail, marketing, and purchase coexisted and would continue to do so. Most crucially, the majority of Tehranis, including many a provincial immigrant, remained poor and demanded above all cheaper basics—food, cloth, heating. In 1953 and 1954, for instance, a wave of protests against high-priced staples rocked Tehran.[9] Still, the above-mentioned socio-demographic and politico-economic changes did usher in a mass consumer society of hundreds of thousands of upper- and middle-class people in Tehran and in provincial cities. Electricity demand skyrocketed, advertisements flourished, consumer festivals and other modern marketing techniques boomed, and department stores opened, while tirades against "materialism" grew louder.[10] Mass consumerism exerted a dream-like attraction on the poor, as well.

I will argue here that this growing mass consumerism was shaped importantly by one domestic and two global processes.[11] Understanding these

[8] R. Sheikholeslami, "Administration in Iran, VII: The Pahlavi Period (1925–1979)," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, www.iranicaonline/org/articles/administration-vii-pahlavi (accessed 2 Jan. 2012); Paul Vieille and M. Hagcheno, "Le bazar et le tournant économique des années 1954–1960," *Studia Iranica* 1 (1972): 55. On oil, see note 70.

[9] These protests were rooted in the time-honored bread riot: Vanessa Martin, *Qajar Pact* (London: Tauris, 2005), chs. 3–5; Stephen McFarland, "Anatomy of an Iranian Political Crowd: The Tehran Bread Riot of December 1942," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 17, 1 (1985): 51–65.

[10] A famous example of the latter is Jalal Al-i Ahmad's *Plagued by the West (Gharbzadegi)*, Paul Sprachman, trans. (Delmar: Caravan, 1982 [1962]).

[11] The particular demand for electricity expansion was answered also because electrical power drove consumption as well as industrialization, the latter being the top concern of Iranian development planners. However, since this issue is not directly relevant to my argument, I will not address it further here. Iranian planners were influential because their base, the Plan Organization (hereafter PO) was Iran's technocratic headquarters during the 1954–1959 tenure of the iron-willed Abol-Hassan Ebtehaj. In Iran's Second Plan (1955–1962), infrastructural preparations, including electricity, received considerable funding. In "Irrigation" (23.5 percent of funding), about 85 percent (i.e., about 20 percent of the overall plan expenses), was used for the Karaj and Sefidrud hydro-electrical dams. The Karaj dam alone, primarily "not an irrigation project, … use[s] about 38%," (that is, about 9 percent of overall plan expenses): PO, Economic Bureau, *Review of the Second Seven-Year Plan Program of Iran* (Tehran: n.p., 1960), 28. In "Regional Development"—an added field, by 1962 16 percent above the plan's 100 percent total—Khuzestan gobbled up 94 percent (Kamran Mofid, *Development Planning in Iran* [Outwell: Middle East and North African Studies Press, 1987], 43). There, the exorbitant cost of the gigantic hydro-electrical Dez Dam, since 1955 Ebtehaj's pet project, made even the Karaj project look cheap. Finally, electricity expenditures were, by January 1959, 22 percent of "Municipal Aid" but were decreasing; since this aid was about 10 percent of Second Plan expenses by 1962, municipal electricity was a maximum 2 percent of

processes, together with the socio-demographic and politico-economic changes just sketched, helps explain why we can talk about an emerging mass consumer society in 1950s Tehran, at a time when the material lives of the majority of the city's inhabitants were dominated by scarcity.[12]

At home, material expectations were fueled by a "politics of promise," which together with severe repression, especially against leftists, and some cooptation, was initiated in 1953 by Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941–1979) and his elite politicians and technocrats to help stabilize their shaky government after a CIA-royalist coup d'état toppled popular Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq.[13] (Before 1963 the shah was a *primus inter pares* more than the autocrat he then became.) Part of this politics was the aforementioned laissez-faire monetary policy, which between 1955 and 1960 helped quintuple imports,[14] especially of Western mass consumer goods. These, in turn, encouraged some Iranian producers to adapt modern marketing techniques.

These developments were the domestic side of a coin whose global side was the acceleration in the 1950s of mass consumerism, particularly in the capitalist "First World" but also in the Soviet and eastern European parts of the "Second World."[15] Through increased exports, this momentum affected certain places and classes in "Third World" countries.[16] It was

total expenses (Mofid, *Development Planning*, 43; PO, Economic Bureau, *Review*, 89, Annex I-5). Together, the hydro-electrical dam expenses in "Irrigation," the Dez Dam's part in "Regional Development," and municipal electricity outlay consumed at least a third of the Second Plan's overall expenditures.

[12] Even in Western Europe in the 1950s, not all citizens enjoyed mass consumerism equally (Haupt, *Konsum*, 131–37), and many continued to experience shortages: Michael Wildt, *Am Beginn der "Konsumgesellschaft"* (Hamburg: Forum Zeitgeschichte, 1994). Retail practices remained complex: Victoria de Grazia, "Changing Consumption Regimes in Europe, 1930–1970," in Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern and Matthias Judt, eds., *Getting and Spending* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 59–83.

[13] On the coup, see Mark Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup against Mosaddeq," in Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, eds., *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 227–60. Ali Ansari states that, following August 1953, the shah was "very much a first among equals," and that even in the late 1950s, "royal dominance [remained] fragile." See Ali Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921* (London: Longman, 2003), 125, 143.

[14] Vieille and Hagcheno, "Le bazar, 55.

[15] On acceleration in the 1950s, see Haupt, *Konsum*, esp. 130.

[16] Different roles were played by different parts of "the West"—most crucially the United States and the biggest West European countries—and a more detailed study would need to disentangle these regarding Iran. For U.S.-West European relations, see Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). World-wide, mass consumerism was driven by demand as much as supply; in Iran, a tell-tale sign was the doubling of debts owed by individuals between 1957 and 1960: Vieille and Hagcheno, "Le bazar," 55. For studies of how in the capitalist West and communist East, business and/or the state, as well as consumers, drove mass consumerism and, more specifically, electricity expansion, see: Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003); Konrad Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of*

further energized by the Cold War, which brought about a capitalist-versus-communist competition of consumerist models that also played out in the Third World.[17]

Against this background, a first key reason for the Iranian government's construction of the Karaj Dam was to meet a popular consumerist demand for electricity. This demand also had foreign political implications, which constitute a second reason the dam was constructed. The United States was interested in Iran because of its oil and long Soviet border,[18] and after the 1953 coup became the patron to Iran's client state. Iranian officials transferred the consumerist pressures they felt at home onto Washington, D.C. This tactic helped to maintain U.S. fears about Iran's stability: its administration felt it had to help finance the dam despite technical and fiscal reservations on the part of American technical experts and the U.S. Congress.[19] A third reason the dam was constructed, linked to the first, was the shah's urge to legitimize himself and Iranian technocrats' "building big" bias in development.[20] In sum, while, the Karaj

the GDR (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999); David Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880–1940* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); Harold Platt, *The Electric City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); see also Clemens Wischermann, "Einleitung," in Peter Borscheid and Clemens Wischermann, eds., *Bilderwelt des Alltags* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1995), esp. 8–12.

[17] My interest in the Soviet dimension took shape in discussions with James Pickett, a graduate student at Princeton University's Department of History.

[18] This was true from 1945 onward, and increasingly so from 1953 when, drawing lessons from the Korea War, President Dwight Eisenhower's "New Look Doctrine," inter alia, "called for a major effort to strengthen pro-Western countries along the entire periphery of the Soviet sphere of influence": Mark Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 93. Two studies that mention Tehran's leverage vis-à-vis Washington, D.C., are: Shahram Chubin, "Iran," in Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 216; and C. D. Carr, "The United States-Iranian Relationship, 1948–1978," in Hossein Amirsadeghi, ed., *The Security of the Persian Gulf* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 57–84. For the larger Middle Eastern context of Washington's interest in Iran, see: Ritchie Ovendale, *Britain, the United States, and the Transfer of Power in the Middle East, 1945–1962* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996).

[19] For a different example of U.S. economic development politics in the early Cold War Middle East, particularly the failure to keep Egypt close to the Western camp, see: Jon Alterman, *Egypt and American Foreign Assistance, 1952–1956* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Peter Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945–1956* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

[20] Bias: David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Daniel Klingensmith, "'One Valley and a Thousand': Remaking America, India, and the World in the Image of the Tennessee Valley Authority, 1945–1970" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1998). For other Middle Eastern technocrats advocating dams, see Elizabeth Bishop, "Talking Shop: Egyptian Engineers and Soviet Specialists at the Aswan High Dam," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1997); Yoram Meital, "The Aswan High Dam and Revolutionary Symbolism in Egypt," in Haggai Erlich and Israel Gershoni, eds., *The Nile* (Boulder: Rienner, 1999), 219–26; Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). A terminological note: as Nick Cullather argues, "By the twentieth century, ["modernization"] referred to economic and social

Dam was built by the government and partly financed by the United States, it was not simply a state project;[21] it was caused and demanded by, and in this sense belonged to, Tehranis as well.

The argument that in post-coup Iran popular material demands, especially those of urban middle classes, influenced state dam and electricity planning and, more broadly, foreign policy and domestic politics (of promise), is relevant beyond Iran.[22] It helps us to understand interactions between the Cold War and Third World development, and the interplay, in the latter process, between societal and state actors.[23] Building on and invigorating extant analyses, Odd

improvement. Its meaning fused with development…." "Development? It's History," *Diplomatic History* 24, 4 (2000): 643, n. 11. For this reason, here I use the term "development."

[21] On PO and development policy, see: Mofid, *Development Planning*; Farhad Daftary, "Development Planning in Iran: A Historical Survey," *Iranian Studies* 6, 4 (1973): 176–228; Frances Bostock and Geoffrey Jones, *Planning and Power in Iran: Ebtehaj and Economic Development under the Shah* (London: Frank Cass, 1989) (this study is rather hagiographic); Vali Nasr, "Politics within the Late Pahlavi State: The Ministry of Economy and Industrial Policy, 1963–1969," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 32 (2000): 97–122; Ibrahim 'Abbasi, *Dawlat-i Pahlavi va tawsi'a-yi iqtisadi* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Markaz-i Asnad-i Inqilab-i Islami, 2004). See also George Baldwin (a member of the Harvard Advisory Group to Iran's PO in the late 1950s), *Planning and Development in Iran* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967); Abol-Hassan Ebtehaj, *Khatirat-i Abol-Hassan Ebtehaj* (London: Paka, 1991); interviews with Abol-Hassan Ebtehaj (in Persian), 1 Dec. 1981–30 Aug. 1982, at Cannes, France, Harvard Iranian Oral History Project, at: http://ted.lib.harvard.edu/ted/deliver/executeQuery?_collection=iohp&searchtype=browsesearch&searchterm=52&searchxpath=tape%2Fnarrator~%3D%27%3F%27+or+tape%2FnarratorTransliterated~%3D%27%3F%27&docType=/iranianOralHistory&browseIndex=Narrator); interview with Khodadad Farmanfarmaian, a member of the PO's Economic Bureau (in English), 10 Nov. 1982–19 Jan. 1983, at Cambridge, Harvard Iranian Oral History Project, at: http://ted.lib.harvard.edu/ted/deliver/executeQuery?_collection=iohp&searchtype=browsesearch& searchterm=59&searchxpath=tape%2Fnarrator~%3D%27%3F%27+or+tape%2FnarratorTransliterated~%3D%27%3F%27&docType=/iranianOralHistory&browseIndex=Narrator); David E. Lilienthal and Development and Resources Corporation Collections, Princeton University Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library (PUSMML).

[22] Regarding Iran, it may help to go beyond the traditional focus on the state: Cyrus Schayegh, "'Seeing Like a State': An Essay on the Historiography of Modern Iran," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42 (2010): 37–61.

[23] This study also points beyond traditional political and economic themes of historians of the Cold War in the Middle East. For new approaches, see Gilbert Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds., *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), which fascinatingly combines (bottom-up) sociocultural with (top-down) diplomatic histories. See also, Odd Arne Westad, "The New International History of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 24, 4 (2000): 551–65; David Engerman, "The Romance of Development and New Histories of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 28, 1 (2004): 23–54; Saki Dockrill and Geraint Hughes, eds., *Palgrave Advances in Cold War History* (New York: Palgrave, 2006); and Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Reviewing the Cold War* (London: Frank Cass, 2000). On consumerism as an example: David Crew, ed., *Consuming Germany in the Cold War* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). Middle East Cold War overviews can be found in: Sayigh and Shlaim, eds., *Cold War*; Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009). For case studies: Salim Yacub, *Containing Arab Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Nigel Ashton, ed., *The Cold War in the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2007).

Arne Westad has shown that the Third World was a central Cold War arena.[24] Similarly, David Engerman and Corinna Unger have advocated a global history of modernization that studies it "not as an American export but as a global phenomenon that was hotly contested, between blocs but also within them." In consequence, they have called for "local studies [as] an excellent avenue to … global studies of modernization without losing sight of regional, national, and international circumstances."[25] My analysis here builds on these overlapping research agendas, but looks beyond their shared focus on state, NGO, and international-organization elites.[26]

Analyses of development and the Cold War in the Third World need to more seriously factor in ordinary people. Although led by elites, Third World development was also driven by material and often mass consumerist expectations, especially among sizeable—and in many parts of the world bourgeoning—urban middle classes. During the Cold War this meant that American or Soviet or other Western and Eastern patrons were affected by the elites as well as by the society of their client states. In the Third World, "the state" did not

[24] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). See also Peter L. Hahn and Mary Ann Heiss, eds., *Empire and Revolution: The United States and the Third World since 1945* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001); Zachary Karabell, *Architects of Intervention: The United States, the Third World, and the Cold War, 1946–1962* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations. A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007); Tony Smith, "New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 24, 4 (2000): 567–91. On diplomatic historians' "internationalization" of studies of American history and culture: Michael Hogan, "The 'Next Big Thing': The Future of Diplomatic History in a Global Age," *Diplomatic History* 28, 1 (2004): 3 (quote); Thomas Zeiler, "Just Do It! Globalization for Diplomatic Historians," *Diplomatic History* 25, 4 (2001): 529–51; Michael Hogan and Thomas Paterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2d ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[25] David Engerman and Corinna Unger, "Introduction: Towards a Global History of Modernization," *Diplomatic History* 33, 3 (2009): 376–77, here 377. See also David Engerman, "American Knowledge and Global Power," *Diplomatic History* 31, 4 (2007): 599–622; Cullather, "Development?"; Frederick Cooper, "Writing the History of Development," *Journal of Modern European History* 8, 1 (2010): 1–23. Recent case studies include: Bradley Simpson, *Economists with Guns. Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations, 1960–68* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); see also Engerman and Unger, "Introduction," 378, n. 12–14, 379, n. 15, 379, n. 17. For a synthesis focusing on the U.S. perspective, see Michael Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

[26] On the USSR: David Engerman, "The Second World's Third World," *Kritika* 12, 1 (2011): 183–211. On international organizations: Amy Staples, *The Birth of Development* (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 2006); Daniel Maul, "'Help Them Move the ILO Way': The International Labor Organization and the Modernization Discourse in the Era of Decolonization and the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 33, 3 (2009): 387–404. On development as an (elite) transnational field: Subir Sinha, "Lineages of the Developmentalist State: Transnationality and Village India, 1900–1965," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, 1 (2008): 57–90; Ekbladh, *Great American Mission*. For planning as a (elite) global phenomenon: Dirk van Laak, "Planung: Geschichte und Gegenwart des Vorgriffs auf die Zukunft," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 34 (2008): 305–26; Andreas Eckert, "'We Are all Planners Now.' Planung und Dekolonisation in Afrika," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 34 (2008): 375–97.

always ram development projects down "society's" throat.[27] The urban middle classes and/or other non-subaltern societal actors often gave these projects their blessings or even pushed for them.[28] Put differently, elite actors and subaltern actors or victims—the focus of most students of development—were not the only ones involved in or touched by development.

This does not mean that all Third World middle classes were the same; they differed greatly, including politically. The urban middle classes of Iran, from 1953 an increasingly autocratic state, were, like the country's population in general, disenfranchised and in this sense had little in common with, for instance, their Indian counterparts. And yet, across the post-war Third World the ranks of the middle classes swelled, their material expectations grew, and they rode on a mass consumerist wave whose crest was in the capitalist West (but which touched also the communist East).[29] While the Third World was a minor market for Western companies, in the eye of the Third World, middle-class beholder, the goods on display in shops and advertisements far exceeded those of their pre-war experiences. This situation, together with a more general hunger for higher living standards, had a marked effect both on economic development and on Cold War politics.

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In a 1955 letter that "the inhabitants of [Tehran's] Baqirabad Street" sent to the editor of *Ittila'at*, Iran's largest daily paper, they complained, "We have been forced to use the Khui Leather Factory … for lighting.… [But] unfortunately, the only thing we have seen of electricity is a wire and [some] tools. … Hence, we request that special [state] investigators … order the company to fulfill its written obligations."[30] The Baqirabadis were not alone, and outrage over faulty goods and services abounded in Iran's post-coup press. Tehranis had started to care about electricity a decade earlier, during World War II, when they needed reliable radio reception. This small increase in electricity demand was met because as of 1939 Tehranis were consuming only 8.5 mw of a total of 10.5 mw of power then available to the city. This was a sharp increase from 1.5 mw in 1934, the year the government had entered the

[27] James Scott presents a strong formulation of this thesis in *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[28] Another way of contextualizing state power has been put forward by Partha Chatterjee, who sees state-planned development as a "passive revolution" suited to rural elites' interests: "Development Planning and the Indian State," in Terence Byres, ed., *State, Development Planning and Liberalisation in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 82–103.

[29] Investigations of these processes can build on studies of, for example, the late colonial period: Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured Modernity. Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Claude Markovits, *Merchants, Traders, Entrepreneurs: Indian Business in the Colonial Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2008). Or they can build on postwar urbanization, for example in 1950s and 1960s Africa, which is usefully reviewed in Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), ch. 1.

[30] "Namihha-yi khᵛanandigan: Rafʿ-i naqisih-yi barq," *Ittila'at* (4 Jan. 1955): 5.

capital's electricity market. Into the 1940s, "people did not welcome electricity and were not ready to give up their oil lamps, to the point that the municipality was forced to condition [the issuance of] purchase licenses of shops in Lalezar and Islambul Streets on [subscription to] electricity." Not by chance, although Iran's 1939 total of 20 mw had by 1948 risen to 90 mw, its non-industrial consumption rate, at 23 percent, remained considerably lower than its neighbors' rates, and its 12 kwh per capita usage was eclipsed by Turkey's 32 kwh and Lebanon's 64 kwh that same year.[31]

It was about this time that the government began taking electricity expansion seriously. One reason was that it adopted a more integrated vision of development.[32] In 1946, the government commissioned a U.S. firm, Morrison-Knudsen, to prepare a mixed consumerist-productivist development plan.[33] Regarding power, the firm reported that hydroelectricity had to wait for urgently needed river flow measurements. For now, they advised, Iran's plentiful oil and gas should be used, in forty-four towns, to power small diesel-driven and larger steam-turbine plants.[34] In 1949, the new Plan Organization (PO) commissioned a more detailed plan. The plan's authors, the U.S. company Overseas Consultants, retained Morrison-Knudsen's mixed approach: electricity is "essential in industrial production … [and] in raising standards of living." It also stressed that Iran's many private and hence decentralized, costly, and unreliable grids fell short of present needs, and would soon be wholly inadequate. It recommended the building, through 1956, of oil-driven thermal central power stations totaling 220 mw and "immediate investigation … of water power." Although more expensive than city-based thermal stations, dams built in mountainous areas produced cheaper electricity, which eventually amortized construction costs.[35] There were soon improvements; Tehran municipality in 1948 installed an 8 mw U.S. Westinghouse generator; in 1952, the Tehran Power Bungah, founded in 1949, proposed to soon raise the capital's power output to 75 mw. By March 1953 the PO had transferred funds to forty-eight cities to allow them to build power stations totaling 25.3 mw, and

[31] Quote: Vizarat-i Ab va Barq, *Tarikhchih-yi barq-i Tihran* (Tihran: n.p., 1947), 37. An overview can be found in Willem Floor and Bernard Hourcade, "Barq. I. in Iran," www.iranica.com/articles/barq (accessed 28 Aug. 2010). The figures I cite exclude Anglo-Iranian Oil Company electricity production. Vizarat-i Ab va Barq states that the 1934 to 1939 jump was due mainly to the 1937 installation of a 6 mw Skoda generator (*Tarikhchih*, 36). The figure of 8.5 kw was used in 1939: "L'éclairage électrique en Iran," *Bulletin de la Banque Mellié Iran* 7, 41 (1939): 545. For comparisons with other countries, see: Overseas Consultants, *Seven Year Development Plan for the Plan Organization of the Imperial Government of Iran* (New York: n.p., 1949), IV: 189–90.

[32] Several projects came to naught during World War II: Vizarat-i Ab va Barq, *Tarikhchih*, 39.

[33] Morrison-Knudsen International, *Report on Program for the Development of Iran* (n.p., 1947), 3.

[34] Morrison-Knudsen, *Report*, 234, 235.

[35] Quotes: Overseas Consultants, *Seven Year Plan*, IV: 189, I: 49; electricity chapter: IV: 189–231. At the time, Iran's largest non-industrial plant was a 12,000 kw steam-driven plant in Tehran.

by that fall Tehran's capacity had risen to 21 mw. "Conditions have improved since 1948," a trade report affirmed.[36]

Many advances still existed only on paper,[37] and the 1949 Seven-Year Plan shored up rather than reorganized defective, privately owned grids. In 1951, many larger schemes were shelved when an international oil boycott, spearheaded by Britain to punish Iran for nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), slashed Iran's budget.[38] Imports of electricity-generating equipment decreased.[39] To make matters worse, this was at the very time electricity demand mushroomed. In Tehran, families took to installing small generators for themselves and their neighbors.[40] People demanded better lighting and talk grew about new uses for electricity, especially home appliances. While imports of the latter began in the interwar years, it was only now that development plans pointed out their role in raising living standards and that popular magazines enthused about their part in Western mass consumerism.[41]

In short, by 1953, electricity reform was of public interest and underway, and demand was on the rise, but implementation lagged far behind. Forty thousand Tehrani families were waiting for their subscriptions to be processed. Estimates about future needs grew by leaps and bounds, reflecting also the city's rapid population growth from around one million in 1950 to two million in 1960.[42] Quick action was required, and improvements indeed were made. Iran's overall spending on imports of electricity-generating equipment, including by private investors, rose from 120.6 million rials in 1953 (via a dip of 94.7 million rials in 1954) to 233.9 in 1955, 289.8 in 1957, 904.5 in 1959, and 888.5

[36] Bundesstelle für Aussenhandelsinformation, *Iran (Persien): Wirtschaftsgrundlagen und Aussenhandelsmöglichkeiten* (Köln: Deutscher Wirtschaftsdienst, 1953), 90 (quote), 91. Electricity report: Tehran Power Bongah, *Report No. 2* (Tehran: n.p., 1952), reproduced in *Karaj River Project: Evaluation Report, Prepared for the FOA* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, 1954), ch. 10. Westinghouse generator: Vizarat-i Ab va Barq, *Tarikhchih*, 39. Tehran's 1953 capacity: Dresdner Bank, *Wirtschaftlicher Lagebericht: Iran* (Frankfurt a.M.: Dresdner Bank, 1958), 44.

[37] For example, in 1951, there were thirty-two thousand electricity-subscribing parties, mostly families, amongst Tehran's 1 million inhabitants: Tehran Power Bongah, *Report No. 2*, 3.

[38] Bundesstelle, *Iran*, 91; PO, *Review*, 5.

[39] Imports costs were 83.2, 65.0, and 73.8 million rials in 1950, 1951, and 1952, respectively, after a rise from 3.8 to 17.2, to 72.3 million rials in 1945, 1946, and 1949: Julian Bharier, *Economic Development in Iran, 1900–1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 220.

[40] Vizarat-i Ab va Barq, *Tarikhchih*, 39f. By 1953, the longest-waiting, not-yet-connected electricity "subscriber-hopefuls" had applied in 1947: "Ta shish mah-i digar bungah-i barq chahar-hizar-i mushtarik-i jadid mipazirad," *Ittila'at* (16 Dec. 1953): 1.

[41] Overseas Consultants, *Seven Year Plan*, IV: 193; Bundesstelle, *Iran*, 90.

[42] Applications: "Bara-yi takmil-i kamil-i barq," *Ittila'at* (14 Oct. 1953): 1. Estimates: "Ta shish mah-i digar" (75–90 mw) and "Niazmandiha: Tihran ihtiaj bih-divist-hizar kiluvat barq darad," *Ittila'at* (26 Dec. 1954): 9 (200 mw). For another upward revision taking into account "Tehran's rapid expansion," see "Bara-yi ta'sis-i karkhanih-yi yik-sad hizar kiluvati-yi barq …," *Ittila'at* (24 Sept. 1957): 15.

in 1960.[43] In Tehran, milestones were the installment of three diesel generators totaling 3.9 mw in 1954, a 10 mw Westinghouse power station in 1957, and a 50 mw French Alstom station in 1959, as well as the 1961 inauguration of the 63 mw Karaj Dam.[44] This 700 percent increase in eight years, from 21 mw in 1953 to about 150 mw in 1961, eclipsed all past advances. Nonetheless, these increases in output were overwhelmed by the pitiless demand for more and more electricity, a situation that beset all of Iran to various degrees.[45] Tehran's electricity crisis was grave also because substantial growth, though continuously promised since the coup, only began with the Westinghouse station in 1957. Until then and into the 1960s, private suppliers remained important, and they hurried to reap maximum profits with minimum investments. Customers had to live with this situation *faute de mieux*, but complained about it ever louder as it dragged on.[46]

Unsurprisingly, the way people now talked about electricity differed sharply from the past. One Hassan Mir-Husseini was livid during his 1957 trial for having illegally tapped the municipal electricity grid: "In today's world, one should not have to live in the light of an oil lamp!" He claimed that his turn for a subscription had been immanent but—yet again!—delayed. The status quo being unbearable, he *had* to take matters into his own hands.[47] It is telling that electricity became a selling point in advertisements for apartments. "A house for rental or sale in Pahlavi Street" in 1958, for instance, had "10 ampère" tension.[48] Such precise information made sense only because supply trailed demand. But alas, once in a flat with electricity, many people faced the same problems as the Baqirabadis: low voltage, electricity cuts, and network breakdowns. Consumers' impatience with these problems was noted, reflected upon, and possibly reinforced by foreign suppliers of home appliances.[49] Some advertisements for refrigerators, amongst the most popular of these new products, praised low consumption and twinkled

[43] It fell into a range between mid-400 to low-700 million rials until 1965, then rose to 2,187 million rials in 1968. Bharier, *Economic Development*, 220.

[44] Vizarat-i Ab va Barq, *Tarikhchih*, 40f.

[45] "With minor exceptions, all systems are greatly overloaded": Sanderson & Porter Inc., *Power Survey of Iran for the Plan Organization* (1955), 13, quoted in Bharier, *Economic Development*, 221.

[46] The volume of letters to the *Ittila'at* editor complaining about electricity supply problems, for which private companies were held responsible, apparently grew around 1958. Early example: Firuz Hib'at, "Intiqad," (Critique—a letter to the editor) *Ittila'at* (6 Nov. 1954): 2; later examples: Rahmathullah Feiz, "Vam-i barq," *Ittila'at* (1 Jan. 1958): 5; "Barq-i na-munazzam," *Ittila'at* (23 June 1958): 5.

[47] "Mahkumiyat bih-ittiham-i sirqat-i barq-i dawlati," *Ittila'at* (18 Dec. 1957): 16. Similarly incensed Tehranis often complained in letters to the editor; e.g., Hossein Nikju, "Bain-i du barq," *Ittila'at* (31 Dec. 1957): 5.

[48] "Khanih bara-yi furush ya ijarih," *Ittila'at* (15 Feb. 1958): 15.

[49] Compare Pamela Karimi, *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran* (London: Routledge, 2012), ch. 3.

with promises of the sort of relaxed life enjoyed by the employee shown in image 1.[50] Other ads, for oil-driven models, harped on electricity's unreliability. "Power is out! But my fridge is working": the housewife in image 2 is all smiles and laughter.[51]

A different, growling sound came from newspaper editorial comments, short notices, reports, and letters to the editors. These were the opposite, complementary side of the dreamland sorts of advertisements—they portrayed electricity as a fundamental, non-negotiable modern need.[52] Why, asked an *Ittila'at* journalist with thinly disguised racism (and some hurt pride?), is Tehran's electricity supply less reliable than that of many Afghan villages, not to mention neighboring capitals like Baghdad or Ankara and Western cities?[53] Such questions abounded, and Tehranis and residents of provincial towns sent a steady stream of letters to the newspaper complaining about specific electricity providers and state officials. Editors egged them on, but also fêted advances in the capital and beyond.[54]

Electricity was not the only impatiently demanded infrastructure. People wanted also better roads and canalization.[55] Such demands partook of a still wider one, heard particularly in cities, for better goods and higher living standards. Often all of these demands were voiced in one breath,[56] but they were also distinct. The demand for clean water, though as pressing as any other, dated back to the late nineteenth century. Electricity, by contrast, now was not simply a necessity but a sign of modernity.[57] To the publishers of a children's book series launched on the Iranian New Year, 21 March 1954, "electricity" and "light" were important elements in "preparing your children for a new

[50] "Yakhchal-i Bosch," *Ittila'at* (18 Mar. 1958): 18.

[51] "Servel," *Ittila'at* (26 May 1955): 10. On another note, many advertisements were adapted from Western sources. The two here drive home this fact: Iranian office culture did not condone the use of alcohol and Tehran's wires were subterranean.

[52] "Barq-i ahali-yi chahar-rah-i Abbasi," *Ittila'at* (10 Feb. 1954): 1; "Namih-hayi khᵛanandigan: Barq va-ab-i Abadan," *Ittila'at* (23 Dec 1954): 5; "Bara-yi ta'min-i kamil-i barq-i masrafi-i ahali-yi paytakht," *Ittila'at* (14 Oct. 1953): 1.

[53] Hakim Ilahi, "Intiqad," *Ittila'at* (26 June 1955): 2.

[54] The letters to the editor section of *Ittila'at* of 20 July 1955 (p. 8) includes all of three different complaints, sent in from Hamadan and two Tehrani neighborhoods. Ali Javahar-Kalam, "Barq-i Saddih," *Ittila'at* (7 June 1958): 5; "Niru-yi barq-i Mahallat ta'min mishavad," *Ittila'at* (21 May 1955): 7.

[55] On water: Nasser Teymurian, "Die Trinkwasserversorgung in Iran" (PhD diss., Universität Bonn, 1960). For one of many newspaper articles: "Sakinin-i barzan-i 13 miguiyand: Ma-ra az ab-i aludih va gard-va-khak nijat dahid," *Ittila'at* (6 May 1958): 6.

[56] For instance, in early 1954, Tehran municipality promised to "secure potable water, asphalt [streets], light [thoroughfares], and reduce living expenditures as well as bread, meat, and rice prices": "Jalasih-yi shurah-yi 'ali-yi anjumanha-yi mahalli-yi shahr-i Tehran dar salun-i shahrdari tashkil yaft," *Ittila'at* (5 Jan. 1954): 1.

[57] Compare Beate Binder, *Elektrifizierung als Vision* (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 1999).

IMAGE 1 "Yakhchal-i Bosch," *Ittila'at* (18 Mar 1958: 18).

IMAGE 2 "Servel," *Ittila'at* (26 May 1955: 10).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417512000254 Published online by Cambridge University Press

life." Nuclear power signified the future, and generators and power stations featured prominently in descriptions of new neighborhoods like Tehran Pars.[58]

Tehran Pars and the other neighborhoods that received electricity in the 1950s were situated in Tehran's eastern, western, north-central, and northern parts, much less so in its poorer south-central and southern core.[59] The former parts were the capital's middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. For the sizeable minority of Tehranis—about 30 percent[60]—who had or were applying for electricity, power was a sign of modernity and a precondition not only for lighting but for consuming a range of products.[61]

Put differently, electricity and the demand for it were part of a phenomenon that in the 1950s was emerging in Iran and maturing in the West: mass consumer society. This was spearheaded by Western producers and consumers who were riding an "economic miracle" wave that swept aside and past the Great Depression and World War II, and eclipsed the pre-war roots of mass consumerism, which had been especially strong in the United States.[62] But it was a global phenomenon, too.[63] It was not simply that Iranian merchants imported more goods, especially from the West; retail was starting to become more diverse in Tehran, most visibly when, in December 1957, the first department

[58] Book series: *Ittila'at* (21 Mar. 1954): 12. Nuclear power: "530,000 kw barq dar yik saniyih," *Ittila'at* (11 June 1958): 8; "Buzurgtarin karkhanih-yi barq-i atumi-yi jahan," *Kh^{v}andaniha* 16, 29 (1955): 29. Tehran Pars: "Ba-ham az 'Tehran Pars,' in shahr-i mudirn va ziba, didan kunim," *Ittila'at* (15 Jan. 1958): 12.

[59] Complaints that the electricity supply was faulty came from middle-class and some upper-class neighborhoods: see e.g., "Intiqad," *Ittila'at* (4 Oct. 1954): 2 (Suvvum-i Isfand Street); "Namihha-yi kh^{v}anandigan," *Ittila'at* (7 July 1955): 8 (Qulhak); "Ma va kh^{v}anandigan," *Ittila'at* (8 Oct. 1957): 5 (West Tehran). A 1960 plan of the electricity transmission system built to connect the Karaj Dam with Tehran shows that power was fed into middle- and upper-class eastern, western, north central, and northern Tehran: Bungah-i mustaqall-i barq, *Matrah-i muqaddamati-yi ta'min-i barq-i Tihran* (Tihran: bungah-i mustaqall-i barq, 1960), back flap.

[60] By 1953, for instance, forty thousand Tehrani families were waiting for their subscriptions to be processed and almost that many must have had electricity (compare notes 39 and 44). These people cannot have been lower-class inhabitants, since electricity was not quite cheap yet: see e.g., "Intiqad," *Ittila'at* (6 Nov. 1954): 2. If we multiply the sum of eighty thousand by a (modest) factor of five (people per family), we get four hundred thousand people, about 30 percent of Tehran's population at that time.

[61] The latter process had started earlier with important changes in the architecture of houses and interior design: Mina Marefat, "Building to Power: Architecture of Tehran, 1921–1941" (PhD diss., MIT, 1988). Interestingly, emphasis on lighting went hand in hand with a newfound interest in interior design and Western furniture: Karimi, *Domesticity*, ch. 3.

[62] Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*; Crew, *Consuming Germany*.

[63] Mass popular culture, too, came into focus after the war; like mass consumerism, this was a Western-centered phenomenon with global effects and adaptation patterns. In Iran, the high-circulation *Kh^{v}andaniha* (comparable to *Reader's Digest*) never tired of splashing Western film stars like Gina Lollobrigida across its pages, and portrayed celebrities of Tihran's emerging pop culture scene in similarly artistic poses. See pictures in: "Gina Lollobrigida," *Kh^{v}andaniha* 17, 56 (Mar. 1957): 17; and "Tahmineh," *Kh^{v}andaniha* 17, 56 (Mar. 1957): 93 ("a theater actor with a great future"); "Azadeh," *Kh^{v}andaniha* 17, 56 (Mar. 1957): 100 ("an Iranian cinema artist"). Clearly, gender is central to this process, meriting an independent in-depth study. For tantalizing hints, see Farhad Zamani's film *Googoosh* (2000).

store, *Furushgah-i Firdawsi*, opened to great popular fanfare. (Soon, customers were caught shoplifting.)[64] As Western exporters to Iran introduced revolutionary marketing methods, which some local producers copied, countless Iranians started to experience consumption in new ways, especially in Tehran and provincial cities. Consumer competitions in which people were asked to choose a name for a new product, and consumer festivals, processions, and puzzles attracted masses eager to gain fame, win a prize (always a product), or at least obtain free samples.[65] Sometimes mass production itself was turned into a virtual act of consumption: the glass façade of Tehran's Pepsi Cola factory on Eisenhower Avenue allowed drivers and pedestrians to see the production line.[66] Also, newspaper advertisements increased and were transformed—they became imaginative and told stories. Some included photographs of "regular" people consuming a particular product.[67] In Tehran, only a sizeable middle- and upper-class minority could afford Western consumer goods and, more specifically, demanded and ultimately received electricity. But marketing meant that the masses became window shoppers and dream consumers, and even real consumers of cheaper products like Pepsi and Coca Cola.

Electricity demand, and mass consumerist expectations and habits more broadly, unfolded hand in hand with a major domestic political development after the coup: the politics of material promise. This politics was one way by which the new government around the shah and Prime Minister General Fazlollah Zahedi (1953–1955) tried to stabilize its shaky position. In the wake of Mosaddeq's ouster on 19 August 1953, the new government was as fragile financially as politically.[68] "Shock[ed] [by] the depth of the

[64] "Izdiham dar muqabil-i Furushgah-i Firdawsi," *Ittila'at* (15 Dec. 1957): 1; "Dastgiri dar Furushgah-i Firdawsi," *Ittila'at* (29 Dec. 1957): 16.

[65] Consumer procession: "Nushabih-yi bain-al-millali-yi Coca Cola," *Ittila'at* (13 Oct. 1957): 1, 19. Prize winners portrayed with Aspro and Oldham products: picture, *Ittila'at* (31 Dec. 1957): 3. Consumer competitions: "Aha-yi mardum, bih-Ja'far Khan-i 'aziz kumak kunid," *Ittila'at* (17 Oct. 1957): 6. Consumer (Coca Cola ski) competition: "Qarib-i du-hizar nafar az mardum-i Tihran dar musabiqat-i eski-yi karkhanih-yi Coca Cola shirkat kardand," *Ittila'at* (11 Mar. 1958): 11. Consumer puzzles: "Agha-yi 'Shams' imruz shinakhtih nashud," *Ittila'at* (18 Dec. 1958): 17. Iranian producers: "Dar ti-yi jishn-i buzurgi-yi … rughan-i nabati-yi Shahpasand," *Ittila'at* (26 Sept. 1957): 12. Compare Karimi, *Domesticity*, ch. 3.

[66] Oral communication from Houchang Chehabi, Cambridge, Mass., 26 Feb. 2011.

[67] "Photograph-ads" (two children drinking Pepsi Coca on a street): *Ittila'at* (15 Dec. 1957): 15. A sample of *Ittila'at* ads—from the months June 1930, February 1937, April 1944, June 1948, and April 1952—shows that ads multiplied massively and changed in quality from the early 1950s, and especially from 1953 onwards. See, e.g., *Ittila'at*, 25 Mar. 1930: 4; 5 Feb. 1937: 7; 6 Apr. 1944: 3; 7 June 1948: 4; and 26 Apr. 1952: 5, 6.

[68] The 1951 British-initiated oil boycott had forced Iran to "increase income taxes on urban wage earners … and [to] raise [the] price of government-controlled monopolies." These measures and others, like restrictions on currency export, prevented state bankruptcy. But they also increased inflation, posing "serious economic difficulties" for many individuals: Mary Ann Heiss, "International Boycott of Iranian Oil and the anti-Mosaddeq coup of 1953," in Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, eds., *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 190, 192.

crisis,"[69] the United States on 5 September announced a grant of $45 million, and in 1954 it bankrolled 60 percent of Iran's budget. It also jump-started military assistance and boosted development aid, which it had slashed in 1952. Iran's geo-strategic importance—its 2,000 kilometer-long border with the Soviet Union halfway between the two pillars of Washington's Soviet containment strategy, Western Europe and East Asia—made it the second-largest recipient of U.S. assistance in the Middle East and South Asia until 1961.[70] It was far from being truly stable, however. Although Washington believed it had prevented the worst by stopping an Iranian population high on nationalism from stumbling into Moscow's open arms in 1953, the long Soviet border remained a threat. More crucially, the CIA-royalist coup had badly shaken the shah's already wobbly legitimacy, especially in the eyes of pro-Mosaddeq nationalists and communists amongst the urban, modern middle classes and working classes.[71] This problem could not be fixed by repression (particularly of the powerful communist *Tudih* party), by overtures to some nationalists, and by accommodation of commercial and landed elites, alone, and popular political participation, the bedrock of Mosaddeq's legitimacy, was ruled out.[72] Something else was needed.

Five days after the coup, the shah exhorted Iran's merchants to help assure that "the general living standard rises." In the fall, a Tehran Radio broadcast marking Zahedi's first three months in office contrasted his "round-the-clock efforts to reduce your [Iranians'] problems and pains" with Mosaddeq who "had [burdened Iran] with more problems every day." It conveniently ignored that food protests had been minimal due to Mosaddeq's legitimacy, born of his popular politics, including the 1951 nationalization of AIOC.

[69] William Warne, *Mission for Peace: Point 4 in Iran* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 261. Similar sentiments are expressed in: Washington, D.C.: National Security Council document 5402: Note by the Executive Secretary to the National Security Council on U.S. Policy toward Iran, Washington, D.C., 2 Jan. 1954, pp. 18–21, repr. in *Documentary History of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidency*, vol. 10 (Bethesda: Lexis Nexis, 2005), 230–33.

[70] In fiscal year 1954, U.S. economic and budgetary aid to Iran totaled $84.5 million. Together with $25.6 million in military aid, U.S. aid totaled 60 percent of Iranian government expenditures in 1954. From 1954–1961, Iran received on average $60 million military aid and $64.5 million U.S. economic aid per year (other than NATO member Turkey, only Pakistan received more): Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, 94, 101. However, "total foreign exchange revenues from the oil sector … [rose] from $139 million in 1955 to $359 million in 1960": Hashem Pesaran, "Economy: The Pahlavi Period," in Ehsan Yarshater, ed., *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, www.iranica.com/newsite (accessed 6 Jan. 2011).

[71] For Western diplomats' evaluations of the continued early post-coup strength of the National Front and the *Tudih*, and of Mosaddeq's continuous attraction: Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, 86, n. 1; Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 131, n. 19.

[72] James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 98–99; Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions* (London: Penguin, 1980), 93–94; Habib Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985), 193–94, 198; Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, 86–90. On hesitant overtures to nationalists and some of their demands, especially for land reform: Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 131–33, 140–41.

With winter's first snow, "all of Tehran's poor" were promised "coal and cloth."[73] Reacting to already vigorous consumerist expectations and protests against inflation, officials and the shah made countless similar pledges.[74] Once opened, this Pandora's box could not be closed. Pledges crystallized into a novel politics of material promise, which was politically crucial all the more because Iran's population, particularly in urban areas, was growing implacably.[75] This politics was not limited to the supply of basic staples, which had stabilized in early 1955 after persistent popular protests.[76] It helped to rush the government into an "expansionary monetary and credit policy." This, in turn, encouraged excessive state spending and buoyed mass consumer goods imports, which underpinned Iran's emerging culture of mass consumerism.[77]

At this same time, various bureaucracies attended to and vied for control of infrastructures, building roads and clean water supplies. Electricity was *the* key new infrastructure. Bureaucrats first sought to expand it by trying to coerce and cajole private electricity entrepreneurs into improving the many, often disparate thermal and diesel electricity generators and grids. Before long, they were entering the electricity market with ever-greater force themselves (and, in 1965, the market was finally nationalized). Crucially, since in about 1950 electricity demand surpassed supply, Iran's new rulers after the 1953 coup faced a *fait accompli* that they could only manage, not control. The politics of promise was a key element of its management of this crisis. It exacerbated the electricity situation by further inflaming expectations and by implicitly turning 19 August 1953 into zero hour. Expectation of material improvement became so high and the need to sustain the image of a post-coup leap

[73] "Shahinshah dar sharafyabi-yi diruz 'asr a'sa-yi sabiq-i utaq-i bazargani," *Ittila'at* (25 Aug. 1953): 1; "Bih-munasabat-i payan-i suvvumin mah-i zamamdari-yi dawlat-i Timsar-i sipihbud-i Zahidi," *Ittila'at* (21 Nov. 1953): 5; "Dar zimistan-i imsal bi-kulliyih-yi mustamandan-i Tihran zughal va libas dadih mishavad," *Ittila'at* (9 Dec. 1953): 1. On the argument that the absence of food riots and protests suggests that many were ready to make sacrifices for the popular policy of nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, see: Patrick Clawson and Cyrus Sassanpour, "Adjustment to a Foreign Exchange Shock: Iran, 1951–53," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 19, 1 (1987): 17–18.

[74] Protests about shortages and high prices persisted into late 1954; see British Foreign Office, Fortnightly Political Summaries, Tehran, 16–29 Jan.; 27 Mar.–13 Apr; 24 July–6 Aug.; and Aug. to 6 Sept 1954, all in R. M. Burrell, ed., *Iran: Political Diaries, 1881–1965*, vol. 14 (London: Archive Editions, 1997), 305, 317, 336, 341.

[75] My argument here draws on Ansari (*Modern Iran*, 142), who asserts that after the coup the "message of the Shah as a tireless campaigner for the welfare of his people was being systematically disseminated throughout the country."

[76] British Foreign Office, Fortnightly Political Summaries, Tehran, 16–29 Jan.; 27 Mar.–13 Apr.; 24 July–6 Aug.; and 24 Aug.–6 Sept. 1954, all in Burrell, *Iran: Political Diaries*, 305, 317, 336, 341.

[77] Quote: Pesaran, "Economy." On excessive spending, and the financial and budgetary crisis and resultant IMF-imposed Stabilization Program it triggered in 1960, see Baldwin, *Planning and Development*, 42–43.

forward so pressing that the improvements that were accomplished were insufficient to avert a torrent of popular critique.

Hence, although *Ittila'at* was owned by Senator Abbas Masudi, who had close links to the government,[78] it almost daily published complaints against private electricity suppliers as well as mayors, the Tehran Power Authority, the PO, and ministers—in short, all but the shah and Zahedi. As harsh as such criticism often was, the government had to accept it as the flipside of a politics of promise developed from a position of weakness. Meanwhile, this politics revealed a complex governing structure. The shah engaged in talks with the Americans, helped form the Karaj Dam Authority in 1953, and protected both it and the Tehran Power Authority (established in 1949) from jealous ministers. Publicly, he had a hand in specific projects and cut inaugural ribbons, allowing top Tehran Power Authority officials like director Ajudani to help spearhead governmental promises regarding electricity and to shape policy.[79] The shah's token presence, especially in the public eye, reflected his status as a *primus inter pares* as well as the relative influence of other actors. Yet this also meant that the politics of promise was neither a precise tactic nor designed and implemented from the very top downward. Rather, it was a general way of muddling through practiced by a range of bureaucrats, politicians, and government members.

Characteristically, six months after the coup the Tehran Power Authority presented a fifteen-point list of all the improvements accomplished since zero hour.[80] Authority officials spoke an unprecedented "service" language that addressed complaints, encouraged Tehranis to communicate problems to them, and promised to improve services.[81] In the meantime, the PO and Tehran municipality continued the pre-coup policy of certifying small, private electricity suppliers. But the limitations of that policy soon became manifest. Consumers continued to criticize sloppy private services and, before long, also inadequate state oversight. In January 1954, a new law governing private suppliers was passed,[82] and soon municipalities, too, became more active. Officials organized citizens' reunions at which they listened to complaints and promised remedies.[83] Despite this, in the late 1950s protests increasingly homed in on Tehran municipality for its presumed lack of initiative

[78] Abbas Milani, *Eminent Persians* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), I: 394–98.

[79] "Ba tavajjuh-i shahinshah mu'ama-yi barq-i shahr hall shud," *Ittila'at* (25 Dec. 1954): 7; "A'lihazrat-i humayuni dar musafarat-i Shiraz …," *Ittila'at* (31 May 1955): 1.

[80] "Bara-yi ta'min-i barq-i Tihran," *Ittila'at* (18 Feb. 1954): 1.

[81] "Ittila'iyih-yi bungah-i barq-i Tihran," *Ittila'at* (20 Dec. 1954): 12; "Agahi raji' bih-barq-i muvaqqat," *Ittila'at* (2 June 1955): 11. Responses to specific complaints: "Vizarat-i iqtisad-i milli: pasukh-i bungah-i barq-i Tihran," *Ittila'at* (30 Dec. 1954): 5; "Idarih-yi barq va Agha-yi Akbari," *Ittila'at* (13 Feb. 1958): 5.

[82] "Barq-i ahali-yi chaharrah-i 'Abbasi," *Ittila'at* (10 Feb. 1954): 1, 4.

[83] Ibid. Mayors used successes in electricity expansion to try to bolster their popularity: "Musahibih ba Agha-yi Gulsha'ian," *Ittila'at* (13 July 1955): 9; "Qat'-i barq," *Ittila'at* (28 Sept. 1957): 7.

and its insufficient control of the private market. Such critiques were facilitated by attacks that rivals such as senators and PO and Tehran Power Authority bureaucrats were waging against the municipality. Many officials made promises and most tried to redirect public ire toward their inferiors, and all of them bolstered a discourse of promises that exacerbated popular demands.[84]

This affair transcended domestic affairs and had international dimensions. I have already introduced one of these: Iran's gradual integration into a West-centered, though ultimately global mass consumer culture. Another concerned the Soviet Union.[85] In January 1954, a text on Tajikistan was published in *Payam-i naw*, Iran's leading Soviet Persian-language journal, founded in 1945 to serve the Moscow-funded *Soviet-Iran Association* and, by extension, the *Tudih*, by far Iran's biggest party and the Middle East's strongest communist organization. As one would expect, the article painted a glowing portrait of Tajikistan, which it said enjoyed "large fruit gardens, high-quality cotton fields that tractors plough with great attention, [and] tall electricity transmission poles that cross fields and deserts." In short, it was a paradise that fed everybody, with an industrialized economy that was steamrolling poverty and a state that literally went the extra mile to provide everybody with equal services. While stunning in their flourish, these images condense how Soviet writers and Iranian visitors to the USSR, not all of who were communists, depicted socialism's motherland. What was true of the "autonomous" Tajik republic—a land of "valleys immersed in sun" that was as Muslim as Iran but "rejuvenated" after ages of feudalism—was true of the entire "family of the Soviet republics," the world's citadel of justice and equality.[86] Unlike the capitalist West, here no-one went hungry, and all had a shirt to wear and a roof to sleep under. Education was free, and culture flourished. There was work for all, and many were able to buy a television, radio, or even a car. Indeed, while praising social mobility, the Soviet republics' equality, and religious freedom, *Payam-i naw* texts about the USSR stressed one thing above all: equal material welfare.[87] They

[84] "Niazmandiha: Tihran ihtiaj bih-divist-hizar kiluwat barq darad," *Ittila'at* (26 Dec. 1954): 9; "Mudir-i karkhanih-yi nisachi va barq-i Shiraz tawqif shud," *Ittila'at* (25 June 1955): 7; Majlis-i Sina: barqha-yi ikhtisasi," *Ittila'at* (7 Dec. 1957): 1; "Majlis-i shura-yi milli: shahrdari layiq nist," *Ittila'at* (29 Jan. 1958): 1, 18.

[85] For a literature review and critique: Engerman, "Second World's Third World."

[86] Quotes: "Safari bih-Tachikistan. Darrihha-yi gharq dar aftab," *Payam-i naw* 6, 11 (1953): 11, 8, 7, 11, 7. This is part of a *Payam-i naw* series about Soviet Caucasia and Central Asia. Compare Westad, *Global Cold War*, ch. 2, "The Empire of Justice."

[87] For comparisons with the West, and full employment: "30 sal mi'mari va sakhtiman dar kishvar-i shawravi," *Payam-i naw* 4, 10 (1951): 60. On the three "basics" of food, clothing, and housing, see speech by sipahbud Amanullah Jahanbani, "Shamih'i dar barih-yi sakhtimanha-yi 'azimi-yi susialisti," *Payam-i naw* 6, 6–7 (1952): 47; "Kulkhuzha," *Payam-i naw* 1, 8 (1945): 47; "Bipursid—ma pasukh midahim," *Payam-i naw* 5, 1 (1951): 66; Ali Vakili, "Mushahidat-i man dar kishvar-i shavrawi," *Payam-i naw* 6, 1 (1952): 4. Yahya Khudabandih wrote that there could be no doubt left as to the Soviets' high standard of living, in "Dar barih-yi zindigi-yi kargaran-i shawravi," *Payam-i naw* 6, 6–7 (1952): 101. Vakili reported seeing various goods in

highlighted the three basics of food, clothing, and housing, a savvy thing to do when addressing poor, Third-World Iran, but they also mentioned consumer goods. The authors seemed to imply that there was no area in which the USSR trailed the West.[88] Electricity played an important supporting role in *Payam-i naw*'s reports on the USSR.[89] Before the revolution, Tajikistan did not even know of electricity; now, extensive power grids fed by "countless" motors and hydro-electrical stations leapt to mind when describing a Muslim Central Asian republic like Uzbekistan.[90] Soviet electricity was cheap and available even in the remotest *kolkhoz*. What a difference from Tehran, or even the West![91] Most crucially, perhaps, electricity drove progress. Lenin had understood this early on, and after World War II accelerated electricity expansion strengthened both welfare and industrialization. It foretold a great future, too: the Soviets were building the world's biggest hydro-electrical stations and powerful nuclear reactors.[92] Who, the authors seemed to ask, could doubt their superiority?

Payam-i Naw was closed down soon after the coup, as were Iran's high-circulation communist dailies immediately thereafter. Still, the USSR remained a possible alternative model and a political threat in post-coup Iran's debate about consumption and electricity.[93] (It is telling that when the shah visited Moscow in June 1956 in a move calculated to prod Washington into maintaining aid, the Soviets offered to build Iran hydro-electrical dams.) The late Stalinist attention to non-socialist, Third World Iran, and to standards-of-life as a part of the developmentalist model it presented to Iranians, was exceptional,[94] but after Stalin's death there was a growing trend toward this approach. Under

the shops, and that people were buying them, even "luxury items" like radios, televisions, bicycles, and "different motors" ("Mushahidat," 5, 6). Also accentuated by Jahanbani was social mobility; that is, workers who became engineers (Jahanbani, "Shamih'i").

[88] The reality was different: Stalin stressed industrial and weaponry production, and after the devastating war, consumer supplies recovered "only" around 1950: Julie Hessler, *Social History of Soviet Trade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 303.

[89] Vakili, "Mushahidat," 7.

[90] "Safari bih-Tachikistan: Darrihha-yi gharq dar aftab," *Payam-i naw* 6, 11 (1953): 14; "Uzbikistan," *Payam-i naw* 7, 1 (1953): 39.

[91] On Baku's electrification and road asphalting: 'Adl (a member of Parliament), "Mushahidat-i ma dar Azirbaijan-i shawravi," *Payam-i naw* 1, 7 (1945): 24. Electricity and water in every village: "30 sal," 61. Also listed (p. 58) was the cost of a normal flat in Moscow in 1946, including running water and electricity (100 rubles; the average worker's income was 500 rubles). There were material improvements also in villages, including electricity, cinemas, radio, and newspapers: "Qarqizistan," *Payam-i naw* 6, 10 (1953): 41. On the cheap price of hydro-electricity: Jahanbani, "Shamih," 51; Vakili, "Mushahidat," 7.

[92] Jahanbani, "Shamih," 49–53. On electricity having been a key concern of the USSR since the revolution: Vakili, "Mushahidat," 7. Nuclear energy: V. Ramadin, "Atum-i ram shudih: ihdas-i karkhanih-yi barq ba-niruyi atum," *Payam-i naw* 7, 6 (1953): 67–73.

[93] Compare Karimi, *Domesticity*, ch. 3.

[94] In the early Cold War, Stalin focused on communist Eastern Europe and East Asia, and on the Soviet model's productivist side.

Nikita Khrushchev, Moscow's attention to non-socialist Third World countries grew. Also, and again unlike Stalin, Khrushchev "sought to maintain industrial production while increasing the availability of consumer goods." Indeed, Soviet economists now maintained, "The victory over capitalism would be assured … by increasing the Soviet standard of living," and this was formalized in the 1957 Seven-Year Plan.[95] The following boom rekindled a belief, shared by Western liberals, in the possible, ultimate superiority of socialism,[96] and this became part of the Cold War.[97]

Iran was fully part of that war. I have already noted that *Payam-i naw*, and pre-coup Iranian communist papers ridiculed U.S. developmentalist aid actions (such as importing Cypriote jackasses, with their proverbial dumbness portrayed as epitomizing American cluelessness).[98] And while the *Tudih* was repressed after the coup, Soviet radio broadcasts in Persian continued apace. They praised Moscow not only as the protector of world peace but also as the guarantor of fair development, and damned American and international development aid to Iran as "colonialist."[99] With Khrushchev's rise, the Soviet Union and Communist-block countries again intensified exports to the Third World (Iran came second in 1953 and 1955, and fifth in 1956). They made an impression at trade fairs and even organized them, as the Czechs did in Tehran in 1954.[100] And although they focused on industry, they also sold cars and home consumer goods. The domestic electrical products displayed included electricity counters, transformers, kitchen appliances, and

[95] Engerman, "Romance of Development," 41.

[96] Martin Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 374–75.

[97] The Soviets knew they were trailing the West regarding living standards and the rising mass consumerism there. This became obvious when a Cold War thaw allowed Soviets and Americans to resume mutual visits in 1955, and was underscored by the summer 1959 Moscow American National Exhibition, which purposefully and with smashing success put consumer goods front and center. Walter Hinxson, *Parting the Curtain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 161, 167. Still, in Khrushchev's "kitchen debate" with visiting Vice President Richard Nixon, and during his own U.S. tour that fall, he asserted that socialists would soon beat and "bury" capitalists in consumerism as much as in technology and industrialization (Hinxson, *Curtain*, 180). In hindsight, and already by the mid-1960s, Khrushchev's projections appeared unattainable. But at the time even leading Western newspapers like the *New York Times* and *Le Monde* found them at least plausible (Malia, *Russia*, 374–75).

[98] Warne, *Mission for Peace*, 49.

[99] *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (15 Sept. 1953): page CC11. Soviet radio broadcasts in Persian continued their critique (with some interruptions due to improved relations, for example in 1956). In 1959, for instance, they habitually deplored Iran's "poor living conditions": *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (5 Oct. 1959): page M1.

[100] Joseph Berliner, *Soviet Economic Aid* (New York: Praeger, 1958), 76 (on fairs), 216 (on statistics, only Soviet exports). In 1953, Egypt came first; in 1955 Argentina; and in 1956 Yugoslavia, followed by India, Argentina, and Egypt. However, Berliner (pp. 80–81) also reports that the USSR remained starkly autarkic. In 1956, for example, its imports from non-communist countries totaled less than 1 percent of its total world imports; the United States continued to be an incomparably stronger trade power. On the Czech exhibition: "Namayishgah-i sanaiyi'-i chikusluvaki," *Ittila'at* (16 Nov. 1954): 11.

sewing machines.[101] Sometimes advertisements for "communist" products were associated with communist symbols; in one, a red star shined down on a Moscowich car "for all."[102] Cold War competition shone through advertisements in more patent ways. In the one in image 3, Škoda boasts about inroads into "the biggest car-producing countries," that is, the West. Its resemblance to image 4—which appeared a mere week later, after Sputnik's launch, and reads "both are peerless, Škoda on earth, the satellite in the sky"— captures how the 1950s Soviet "standard of life" advance zigzagged between the USSR's need to catch up with the West and the conviction that it would soon do so.[103] The latter belief was not lost on Iranians, nor was the belief among Westerners that this feat might well be possible.[104]

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On a January afternoon in 1954, eleven men convened a meeting in the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the U.S. Foreign Operations Administration (FOA), which oversaw U.S. Third World technical assistance, known as "Point Four."[105] Norman Paul, the FOA organizer of the meeting, wasted no time in telling them why they were there: "The reason [I have] asked for the meeting [is] that members of the staff have certain questions and reservations about the Karaj Dam project."[106] The participants, including FOA head Harold Stassen, knew that both "the Shah and Prime Minister [Zahedi] feel that [the Karaj Dam] is the most important project in Iran, economically, as a monument, as a source of power and water for Tehran, and as a source of irrigation for the area surrounding Tehran."[107] They were also aware that Karaj Dam advocates in Iran were preaching to the choir: the idea of the dam dated back to the 1920s and gained wide popularity in the 1940s. It had become more

[101] Czech "Škoda" diesel electricity motor ad: *Ittila'at* (2 June 1954): 5. Soviet "ZIS" and "Poveda" car ads: *Ittila'at* (18 Mar. 1954: 10; and 3 Nov. 1954: 6). Polish "Motoimport" truck ad: *Ittila'at* (3 Nov. 1954): 8. Czech "Kovo" electricity counter ad: *Ittila'at* (18 Mar. 1954): 6. Hungarian "Technoimpex" transformer ad: *Ittila'at* (29 May 1955): 1, and electrical kitchen appliances ad: *Ittila'at* (2 Jan. 1958): 9. "Kovo" sowing machine ad: *Ittila'at* (23 Sept. 1957): 8. See also Polish "Skorimpex" clothes ad: *Ittila'at* (18 Dec. 1957): 10.

[102] *Ittila'at* (23 June 1955): 3.

[103] *Ittila'at* (17 Oct. 1957: 11; and 8 Oct. 1957: 9).

[104] Iranian newspapers translated USSR travel reports by foreign journalists. *Le Monde* journalist Phillipe Bonne was typical in that, while identifying a great consumerist gap between the Soviet Union and the West, he also noted that Soviets' material well being was changing "very palpably." "Mardum-i shawravi zindigi-yi khudra az hamih jah bihtar midanand," *Ittila'at* (6 Oct. 1957): 13. Compare *Paris Match* reporters Dominique Lapierre and Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini, "Pa bih-pa-yi in du khabarnigar az pusht-i pardih-yi ahin didan kunid," *Kh*ᵛ*andaniha* 17 (1957), 50: 8–11; 51: 8–11, 31; 52: 10–13, 33–34; 53: 8–10.

[105] The Foreign Operations Administration, which existed from 1953–1955, coordinated the U.S. Technical Cooperation Agency's technical assistance programs, but also military aid. Launched in 1949, the Agency's very first agreement was with Iran, in 1950.

[106] Foreign Operations Administration, Executive Secretariat, Meeting on the Karaj Dam Project in Iran: 1, Washington, D.C., 23 Jan. 1954, fol. 504.1, box 15, record group 469, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md. (hereafter, NARA).

[107] Ibid.: 2.

IMAGE 3 Advertisement in *Ittila'at* (8 Oct. 1957: 9).

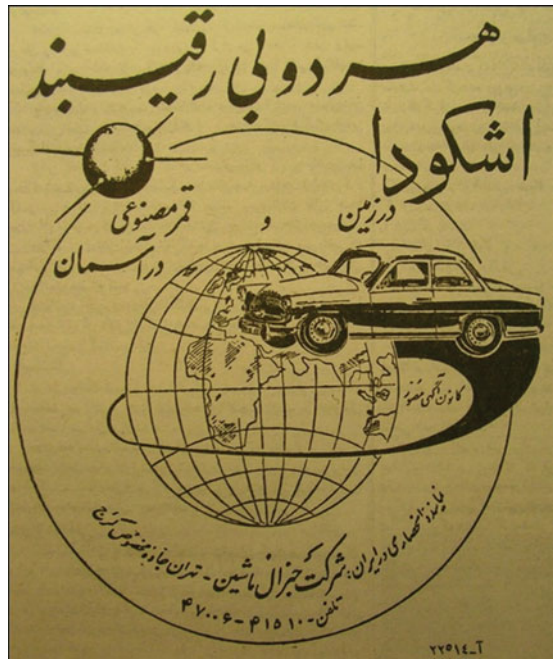

IMAGE 4 Advertisement in *Ittila'at* (17 Oct. 1957: 11).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417512000254 Published online by Cambridge University Press

concrete between 1946 and 1951 with World Bank, American, and French surveys and some preparatory work, before being shelved in 1951 with the oil nationalization crisis.[108]

They and other American officials concerned with this project were of two minds. William Warne, from 1951–1955 the first head of the FOA/United States Operations Mission-Iran (USOM-I), for instance, had made a u-turn after the coup. Before that he had campaigned for extensive, low-cost rural assistance as the best way to develop Iran's economy, winning over Mosaddeq despite the latter's interest in dams.[109] After the coup, though, he became "enthusiastic" about the Karaj Dam project, "although he realize[d] that there are problems involved." In contrast, "Walker Cisler of the Detroit Edison Company, FOA consultant on electric power … [felt] that thermal power could be developed more quickly and for less money." Many FOA officials and other bureaucrats shared Cisler's objections, and it was these concerns that had necessitated the January 1954 FOA meeting.[110] But as it disbanded their orders were clear. "Mr. Stassen … concluded that … we cannot now throw up to the Iranians a mass of negative considerations without creating an explosion. The project may not be the best solution, but it does meet the political requirements" of buttressing the new, rickety Iranian regime.[111]

Worried Iranian officials maintained pressure: they passed on to Washington the stressful demands with which Tehranis confronted them for much more and cheaper electricity as part and parcel of a growing mass consumer culture, and they issued ominous warnings about the political consequences of answering "no." This pressure climaxed during an October 1954 visit by Khalil Taleghani to Stassen. The Karaj Dam Authority director dramatically stressed Tehranis' desire to see material progress after Mosaddeq's removal. Visible steps were imperative, and the Karaj Dam was the best prospect.[112] Pressure was also put on the Americans by Abol-Hassan Ebtehaj, from 1954 to 1959 the head of the powerful Plan Organization.[113] In an October 1954 meeting

[108] Ibid.; U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, *Karaj River Project Iran: Evaluation Report* (Washington, D.C., May 1954), ch. 1: 7; Bernard van Renselaer, "How *Not* to Handle Foreign Aid," *Reader's Digest* (Feb. 1957): 28. Van Renselaer had been part of a Senate Appropriation Committee investigation into foreign-aid programs.

[109] Warne, *Mission for Peace*, 27.

[110] Foreign Operations Administration (as in note 106). For another opponent, Everett Eslick, head of the Power Branch in Washington, see van Renselaer, "How *not* to Handle Foreign Aid," 28.

[111] Foreign Operations Administration (as in note 106).

[112] Harold Stassen, Karaj Dam Project and General Aid Program, Washington, D.C., 8 Oct. 1954, record group 460, fol. 504.1, box 15, NARA.

[113] Early on, Taleghani and Ebtehaj had differences, but they were personal rather than technical. Suspiciously, Ebtehaj launched his Dez Dam Project in mid-1955, in the wake of losing the battle for control over the Karaj Dam, one of few developmental projects that remained outside the PO's purview during his tenure. From 1955, Ebtehaj supported the Karaj Dam. Taleghani and he retired from their respective jobs in 1958 and 1959, and during the dam's construction from 1958–1961 the PO continued to support it.

with U.S. Ambassador Loy Anderson, timed to coincide with Taleghani's visit of Stassen, Ebtehaj claimed that Iran was waiting "with baited breath for [the] U.S. decision…. These decisions might determine whether or not Iran would be able [to] lay firm foundations for its future economic and social development."[114] The pressure of Tehrani electricity demands on Iran's government is clear from a revealing example of the politics of promise: the Karaj Dam adorned 10 rial bills in 1958, three years before the dam's inauguration.

By 1955, the FOA and the State Department had accepted the Karaj Dam construction as a *fait accompli*, but the debate was not over. It flared again the following spring, and this time not in a FOA back room but in the U.S. House of Representatives. Many legislators were attacking FOA's allegedly wasteful, mistakenly state- rather than market-led, and politically futile Third-World assistance program. They argued that it fed nothing but the delusions of a clique of New Dealers.[115] While Point Four had had its share of critics since its start in 1949,[116] the conservative backlash during the Eisenhower administration was particularly scathing (and paralleled a domestic rollback of New Deal public dam building).[117] The scope and rush of Washington's aid to post-coup Iran made that country a perfect target for attacking the FOA more broadly and establishing legislative control over a new field of executive action, whose sprawling nature mirrored the global reach of the new American superpower. In spring of 1956, the Government Operations Committee's International Operations Subcommittee in the House of Representatives initiated a series of fifteen hearings about USOM-I. The subcommittee submitted its conclusions in early 1957: "Aid and technical assistance programs in Iran," it asserted, "were administered in a loose, slipshod, and un-businesslike manner." The Karaj Dam in particular, it said, was a bottomless pit into which USOM-I was throwing millions without stipulating any production timeline or obtaining financial assurances from Iran.[118] This congressional inquiry buoyed those American critics who charged that FOA operations worldwide were often grandiose and wasteful. To some, Iran was *the* example for what had gone wrong, and the Karaj project was at the very heart of the problem.[119]

[114] Stassen, Karaj Dam Project, citing confidential cable 825, from Henderson, dated 7 Oct. 1954.

[115] Compare Ekbladh, *Great American Mission*, ch. 5.

[116] Jonathan Bingham, *Shirt-Sleeve Diplomacy: Point 4 in Action* (New York: John Day, 1953), 13–14, 235–41.

[117] Karl Brooks, *Public Power, Private Dams* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), ch. 7.

[118] U.S. Congress, *United States Aid Operations in Iran. First Report by the Committee on Government Operations, January 28, 1957* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1957), 3 (quote), 34–39; U.S. Congress, *United States Aid Operations in Iran: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations, House of Representatives, Eighty-Fourth Congress, Second Session* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1956).

[119] Van Renselaer, "How *not* to Handle Foreign Aid," 25–30.

But such analyses were partial—attacking the FOA for the Karaj Dam, and making Warne a bogeyman, ignored the key role played by Iranian officials. The latter turned their weakness into a strength by playing on American worries about Soviet gains in a fragile post-coup Iran.[120] In matters of infrastructure and development, although Tehran received money from Washington, it pursued aggressive policies that at times clashed with the agendas of certain U.S. decision-makers.[121] Put another way, without the Cold War and resultant U.S. aid, the Karaj Dam might not have been built, or at least it would have been built later than 1958–1961. But that it *was* built despite protracted American opposition reveals both the limits of the U.S. patron's power and the leverage of its Iranian client. In January 1954, Stassen's concluded that "the political factor is overriding," and we must agree with that assessment—the Karaj project was unstoppable for political reasons. U.S. congressional protests and internal FOA dissent faltered in the face of Iranian pressure and State Department acquiescence. Major construction started in 1958, and three years later, in October 1961, the dam's electricity flooded Tehran.

Directly responsible for this success were the shah, Prime Minister Zahedi, and technocrats of the Karaj Dam Authority and the PO. It was they who made the decisions and pushed the Americans. Indeed, not only the Karaj Dam but dams in general received strong support from various technocratic quarters.[122] As for the shah, his enthusiasm for the Karaj Dam extended to his backing numerous other dams.[123] In his eyes, dams expedited development, were a powerful symbol of his commitment to modernize the country, and would help him gain legitimacy.[124] The shah also visited dams abroad, for instance in India and Japan. (Such visits were customary; Indian Prime

[120] Regarding the leverage of South Vietnam, another country of geo-strategic value to Washington, see: Kathryn Statler, "Building a Colony: South Vietnam, and the Eisenhower Administration, 1953–1961," in Kathryn C. Statler and Andrew L. Johns, eds., *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War* (Lanham: Rowman, 2006), 101–23.

[121] Even politically, sometimes, "The Cold War inverted power relations by allowing the weaker party to cash in on weakness" (Chubin, "Iran," 216). Nonetheless, Washington had considerable say in geo-political and military matters and used Iran as a base to help contain the USSR, especially in the 1950s (Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, 93–98).

[122] The organs of the PO and of the Independent Irrigation Agency published routinely on dams: "Sadd-i Sefidrud," "Sadd-i Dez," and "Sadd-i Karaj," all in *Guzarish-i Haftagi-yi Sazman-i Barnamih* special Nawruz edition (Mar. 1959): 24, 32, 56; "Tahavvul va takammul … saddha-yi 'azim," *Ab* new series 3 (1956): 25–110. For a general technical journal article on the Gurgan dam, see: "Tarh-i sakhtiman-i sadd-i Gorgan va ahamiyyat-i iqtisadi-yi an," *Majallah-yi 'ilmi va fanni* 2:6 (1959): 19–30.

[123] "Marasim-i iftitah-i sadd-i Kuhrang," *Ittila'at* (17 Oct. 1953): 1.

[124] Dez Dam: Mohammed Reza Shah, *Mission for My Country* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), 144–46. Dams and other infrastructural projects, and the shah inaugurating or visiting them, featured prominently in the short weekly news show that people had to watch in the cinema, as the national hymn was played, before the movie started (Houchang Chehabi, personal communication, Cambridge, Mass., 26 Feb. 2011).

Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited the Karaj construction site.)[125] This international dimension was vital for Iran's technocratic planners, too. Their journals discussed and depicted both Iranian and foreign dams and other developmentalist projects and emphasized the help that foreign specialists gave to Iran.[126] That most Iranian technocrats stressed the importance of dams was unexceptional: dams were a common means for Third-World countries to competitively show, and show off, their aspirations for modernity, and a way for their technocrats to connect with and even join the increasingly well-networked, global technocratic elite.[127]

What is more, state agencies and employees tirelessly communicated with the public about development projects. Dams like the Karaj adorned bills and stamps, teachers explained them to students, and they were discussed on radio programs. Radio Iran organized tours "for representatives of different classes of people" to the Karaj construction site, and after the dam's inauguration officials attending conferences in Tehran sometimes used their leisure time to visit there.[128] But did the people shown in image 6 visit the dam simply as Radio Iran employees? And did the people in image 5 go to the building site simply because the state invited, or perhaps ordered them to be there, or because it manipulated them by educational means, bills, or radio programs? That was not the case; if, as shown earlier, the Karaj Dam was intended to meet a ravenous demand for electricity, then more was involved in its construction than high politics or elite technocratic considerations. Persistent, popular expectations were a powerful impetus.

The belief in a massive technological solution to Tehran's electricity crisis had old roots and enjoyed contemporary support far beyond the technocratic elite. In the interwar years, many small dams were repaired or constructed

[125] For his visit to India's Bhakra Nangal dam, see *Ab* new series 3 (1956): cover picture; in Japan: "Shahinshah imruz az sadd-i 'azim-i Sakuma bazdid kard," *Ittila'at* (26 May 1958): 1; Nehru's visit: "Agha-yi Nehru … sadd-i Karaj bazdid namudand," *Guzarish-i Haftagi-yi Sazman-i Barnamih* 25 (1959): 16.

[126] "Bara-yi 'umran va abadi-yi Khuzistan az nazariyat va pishnihadat-i ma'ruftarin-i muhandisin-i bain-al-millal va mutalla'tarin-i rijal-i kishvar istifadih kh^{v}ahad shud," *Mahnamih-yi Sazman-i Barnamih* 2, 5 (1956): 14–16. A picture of the U.S. Hoover Dam graces the cover of *Ab* new series 3 (1956).

[127] Ebtehaj and Lilienthal, for instance, built a life-long friendship. Their correspondence can be found in: fol. 6, box 487, Development and Resources Corporation Records, PUSMML.

[128] Quote: Title page picture description, *Radiu Iran* 46 (1960): 1, of left picture. Right picture: "Kungrih-yi radiu-yi kishvar," *Radiu Iran* 70 (1962): 11. The Dez Dam construction site, too, was often visited: Khuzestan Development Service/New York Office, letter 22803, 12 Aug. 1961, fol. "Iran," box 426, David Lilienthal Papers, PUSMML. The Kuhrang Dam was on the 1954 50 rial bill, and the Karaj (Amir Kabir) Dam was on the 1958 10 rial bill. The Karaj Dam was on a 1962 2 rial and 6 rial stamp, while the Dez Dam was on a 1963 6 rial and 14 rial stamp: http://iranstamp.com/shop/year-1962/cat_18.html and http://iranstamp.com/shop/year-1963/cat_19.html (accessed 27 Feb. 2011). Re education: Houchang Chehabi, personal communication, Cambridge, Mass., 26 Feb. 2011. In 1956 and 1957, Radio Tehran broadcasted a fifteen-minute "Development Program": see e.g., *Radiu Tihran* 4 (1956): 25; and *Radiu Tihran* 13 (1957): 25.

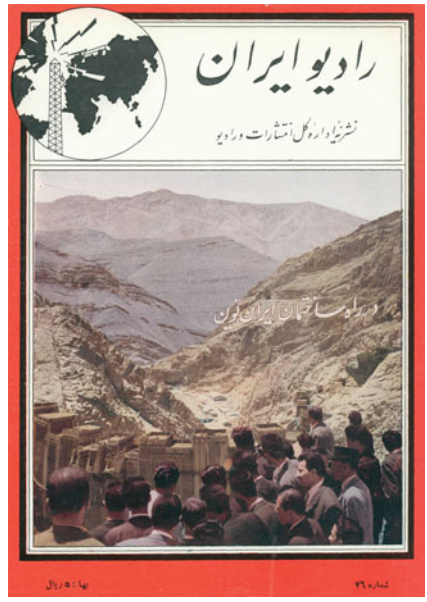

IMAGE 5 The cover of *Radio Iran* 46, from 1960.


ساختمان عظیم سدکرج مورد بازدید اعضاء کنگره رادیوئی کشور قرار گرفت

IMAGE 6 "Kungrih-yi radio-yi kishvar," from *Radio Iran* 70 (1962): 11.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417512000254 Published online by Cambridge University Press

across Iran, and this may have helped prepare the ground for the planning of larger dams.[129] We have seen that the idea of building a dam on the Karaj River to improve Tehran's water supply was first formulated in the 1920s. It began to receive more serious consideration in the 1940s, at which point its electricity component also became important. The state was at that time administratively and financially incapable of turning the idea into reality, but it was already popular, as was the notion of dam construction more generally. Its advocates included the powerful Ayatollah Abol-Ghassem Kashani and Prime Minister Mosaddeq. Talking with USOM-I head Warne in 1952, Kashani opined, "The friendship between the United States and Iran might be strengthened … if we built one or two large, spectacular dams … on the Ziandehrud River near Isfahan … [and] on the Karun in Khuzistan." Mosaddeq longed for "some big, spectacular project, like a dam, undertaken to provide the immediate action which Iran craved."[130] In fact, construction of Iran's first large dam after World War II, the Kuhrang, commenced during Mosaddeq's tenure as a democratically elected prime minister. A few persons critical to the post-coup planning of the Karaj Dam had held key positions under Mosaddeq, such as his Minister of Agriculture Taleghani. Even before Mosaddeq's tenure, specialized journals had started to seriously publish about dams and report government progress on a number of small ones.[131] It is clear that the post-coup flurry of dam constructions was far more than a high-modernist autocratic idea of the shah and a few technocrats; it had solid historical roots and considerable popular support.

This did not mean that after 1953 all dams received equal public support. For example, Ebtehaj's enormous Dez Dam project in Khuzistan, started in 1955, was often attacked as inanely expensive, of little use, and beneficial mainly to foreign contractors, planners, and financers, and Ebtehaj's rivals even managed to have him imprisoned for a few months in 1961 and 1962.[132] It is telling that no such accusations were directed against the Karaj Dam. Critiques of dams often focused not on the fact that they were built but rather on their *faulty* construction.[133] Financial and political reasons help to

[129] "Ta'mir va saddsazi-yi sadd dar Isfahan" (1936), and "Mukatibat marbut bih-sakhtiman-i sadd-i bituni-yi Babulsar" (1939), fols. 29100 01356 and 290005864 (radif), Sazman-i Asnad-i Milli, Tehran, Iran. This also shows that development was not simply exported from the post-war "West to the rest." Compare Engerman and Unger, "Introduction," 377.

[130] Warne, *Mission for Peace*, 27, 66.

[131] "Mutala'at-i saddsazi," *Ab* 1 (1951): 9–11; "Khulasih-yi guzarish-i 'amaliyat-i Isfand 1329," *Ab* 1 (1951): 16.

[132] For a harsh general critique, see "Intiqad-i shadid az sazman-i barnamih," *Ittila'at* (12 Oct. 1958): 1, 17. For a serious popular critique of the Dez Dam, see: Airgram, Embassy Tehran to State Department, 4 June 1959, fol. "Plan Organization," box 43, record group 469, NARA; and compare fol. 1, "Ebtehaj, incarceration," box 488, Development and Resources Corporation Records, PUSMML.

[133] "Guzarish-i hay'at-i i'zami-yi Ittila'at az sadd-i Gulpayigan," *Ittila'at* (5–10 Mar. 1955): 1.

explain this difference. The Karaj and a host of other smaller dams were cheaper than the Dez Dam, which was the only dam in Iran explicitly patterned on the model of the Tennessee Valley Authority. Moreover, the main builders of the Karaj Dam were the Karaj Dam Authority and the Tehran Power Authority rather than the PO, whose director Ebtehaj talked so bluntly and had such contempt for the older ministries that he lost his post in 1959. But the fundamental reason for the widespread acceptance of the Karaj Dam was not that it was the linchpin of a grandiose technocratic vision of development, but rather that it met a popular need.

Popular embrace of the dam was expressed in cultural practices surrounding the dam, and these had historical precursors. During the 1928–1939 construction of the Trans-Iranian Railway, Iran's first massive modern technological project, crowds often attended opening ceremonies of this station or that track section.[134] The railway was "a spectacle," not only as an exhibition of "western technique on a grand scale"[135] but also as a new, impressive leisure site. In the late 1930s, "no sooner had the first train pulled into Shahi than people from Tehran, too impatient to wait for the road bed to reach the capital, patronized the railway, mixing pleasure with patriotism. First they traversed hundreds of kilometres by automobile over the Elburz mountain range, then boarded a Persian train in Shahi for a 120 kilometre journey to Bander-Shah only to return immediately."[136] Riding the train was an end in itself—it mixed pleasure with the use of modern technology, which in turn induced a feeling of belonging to modernity. One might say that such practices formed part of a complex process of becoming modern. The railway was not exceptional in this regard, and in the 1950s Tehran's Mehrabad International Airport became a popular leisure destination for Tehranis, a place where families could watch planes while pampering their palates in a café.[137]

Against this background, we can grasp that peoples' visits to the Karaj Dam are more than state-organized events. Beginning in the early 1960s, family excursions there became a cultural practice for tens of thousands of middle- and upper-class Tehranis. They went simply to see it and to take in the enormity of a paragon of modern technology, and perhaps to picnic, promenade, or hike near the dam basin, or even to practice water sports on the lake.[138] Consider "Visit to Karaj Dam, Iran 1962," a short, amateur 8 millimeter film

[134] For the crowded inaugurations of even secondary railway lines: "Rah-ahan-i Tihran bih Qazvin," *Iran-i Imruz* 2, 1 (1939): 11–12.

[135] "Across Iran," *Times* (15 July 1938): 17.

[136] M. Essad-bey, *Reza Shah* (London: Hutchinson, 1938), 207.

[137] Houchang Chehabi, personal communication, Cambridge, Mass., 26 Feb. 2011.

[138] Ibid.; telephone interview with Mahshid Noshirvani, 9 Mar. 2011. The dam also featured in foreign guides as an attraction for sports- and nature-loving tourists: Jean Hureau, *Iran Today* (Paris: éditions j.a., 1975), 198, 211, 242.

accessible on YouTube.[139] It begins with a quick shot taken from a moving car of the mountains above the dam. It then cuts to the dam wall: a shot from afar, pure cement, not a soul in sight. The dam is placed at center stage here, an enormous structure that demands respect even from a distance. The next cut is a radical change of dimension and perspective, and we find ourselves in a roadside parking space next to the dam basin. We see people walking about, sitting in cars, or chatting in standing groups. They have become the center, and by making the dam the stage on which they socialize, they domesticate and appropriate it, and turn it from a monumental object into something almost banal, so much so that it literally disappears from the camera's view.

To be sure, it was the Pahlavi state that built the Karaj Dam. But what with that structure meeting the electricity demands of middle- and upper-class Tehranis, and their using it as a place of leisure, it belonged to them, as well.

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Today, even more than before 1979, the Karaj Dam area is a common leisure destination, and building dams remains as popular as it was in the Pahlavi past.[140] By examining that past, I have shown the possibilities of writing socio-cultural histories of development and the Cold War in the Third World.

For one thing, the cultural Cold War between a capitalist West and a communist East was tangible also in the global South. Furthermore, Third World elites as well as "ordinary people" like urban middle classes helped influence decision makers in the Cold War centers of Washington and Moscow, as well as in London, Beijing, and other powerful First World and Second World capitals.

Furthermore, by exploring the role of ordinary Third World, middle-class people in development I have illustrated that development was not a seamless process. Technocrats and ordinary people disagreed, including among themselves, not only about broad directional questions—More industrialization? More agriculture?[141]—but also about policy specifics and the usefulness of particular projects. Certainly dams were in fashion in the 1950s and 1960s, in Iran not the least because they had a pre-war history. But the population, and to lesser degrees also the political and technocratic elites, debated the value of

[139] At: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1boXKygX1NY (accessed 27 Feb. 2011). One *CSSH* referee suggested that a tourist might have shot the film, but observed that "the dam did in fact become a spot for picnics and photos," which is indeed apparent in the many people seen at the film's end.

[140] Iranian National Committee on Large Dams, *Sadd-sazi-yi mu'asir-i Iran* (Tehran: Iranian National Committee on Large Dams [IRCOLD], 1998).

[141] Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Nick Cullather, "Miracles of Modernization: The Green Revolution and the Apotheosis of Technology," *Diplomatic History* 28, 2 (2004): 227–54; Corinna Unger, "Industrialization vs. Agrarian Reform: West German Modernization Policies in India in the 1950s and 1960s," *Journal of Modern European History* 8 (2010): 47–65.

and justifications for specific projects. To middle-class Tehranis, the Karaj Dam made sense because it served their needs. By contrast, many criticized the Dez Dam importantly because it promised no tangible benefits. While the existence across many post-war countries of specific technocratic practices, like dams, suggests the existence of global trends, I have shown with the Iranian case that we must also keep sight of cultural idiosyncrasies and social constellations that gave different shapes to these trends.

Finally, this case study indicates the research possibilities inherent in connecting two fields of historiographic inquiry. One is the maturation of mass consumerism in the capitalist West (and the promise thereof, especially under Khrushchev, in the communist East), the other the role played in Third World development by emerging mass consumerism, and more broadly, by mushrooming expectations for higher living standards. These two subjects were linked on various levels, not least through trade and culture during the global Cold War. No doubt, Third World markets, where few could afford mass-produced consumer goods, were secondary at best to most Western exporters. Nevertheless, in a Third World capital like Tehran hundreds of thousands did buy goods, and many more dreamed not only of political emancipation but also of a materially better future, a dream that increasingly fed off images of a materially comfortable West.

Abstract: This paper examines two intertwined processes that shaped post-war Tehran. One was a ravenous demand for electricity, part of a surge in popular expectations for consumer goods and higher standards of living. The other was the construction of the Karaj Dam to meet that demand. Consumerist expectations, especially among Tehran's bourgeoning middle classes, developed together with a West-centered but ultimately global maturation of mass consumer culture, with the cultural Cold War, and with the shaky post-1953 regime's politics of promising higher living standards. The Karaj Dam became possible when that regime frightened its patron—the U.S. administration that dreaded Soviet influence—into helping pay for the project despite reservations in the U.S. Congress and among technical specialists. The dam was not simply a top-down state (or U.S.) project—it was also caused by and in that sense belonged to Tehranis. I draw on archival and published primary sources, images, and secondary literature to tell a story of society-state and domestic-global interactions that characterized many Third World countries. This paper builds on past studies of relationships between the Cold War and Third World development, and of the transnational history of development/modernization. But it transcends their focus on elites, and that of other scholars' on subaltern victims, and argues that analyses of Third World development and the Cold War must include the middle classes and, conceptually, social history.