

ULTRA

Positions and Polarities Beyond Crisis

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Labour Housing and the Normalisation of Modernity in 1970s Iran

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Keywords

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Abstract

In the 1970s, rapid modernisation fuelled population displacement and increased the number of workers in the large cities of Iran, in particular Tehran. In response, the Imperial Government initiated several housing programs focusing on the provision of megastructures on a large scale. Consequently, a new opposition formed among some sectors of society, regarding the dissemination of gigantic buildings in the International or Brutalist styles. Critics and clerics argued that the radical government interventions not only polarised the image of Islamic identity in cities, but also affected the behaviour of people towards, and their opinions concerning, the Islamic lifestyle. Additionally, some claimed the state aimed to normalise its project of modernity and rapid westernisation for the mid- and lower classes using housing. In this regard, this article investigates the 1970s imperial government social housing programs to verify these claims.

Using an extensive literature review, documentary research, observation, and descriptive data analysis, this article argues that, despite the government politics and modernisation tendencies in the 1970s, consumerism, political competition, the state of Cold War, and the emergence of new construction techniques, all resulted in the emergence of mass-produced megastructures offering a new luxurious lifestyle to residents. While the life and hygiene of the different classes were improved, these instant products inevitably facilitated the normalisation of Western lifestyle among the mid- and low-income groups of the society. Eventually, this visible social transition was utilised by opposition leaders as another excuse to topple the Pahlavi regime under the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Introduction

The notion of modernisation in the developing countries has been an interesting subject for many scholars. In the case of societies with old traditions, the process is more complex because of the advancement of globalisation, and the ongoing conflict between tradition and modernity. As a developing country with a rich architectural tradition, Iran has also been confronted with challenges in relation to different modernisation programs. In this regard, the state of architecture during pre-revolutionary Iran has been a hot research area for many scholars. At this juncture, the country saw rapid modernisation under the power of the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979). Akin to the process of modernisation in many third-world countries, the provision of affordable housing was a part of the state development program to respond to the existing shortage of housing. However, it was in the 1970s that the provision of high-rise and large-scale housing complexes became a key factor in the modernisation program, with an intention to form and advertise a modern image for the country.

With a focus on the public housing program of the 1970s, this article will discuss how the imposed megastructures and building types were formulated by the state to accelerate the provision of affordable housing, and to introduce a progressive image for Tehran, as the core of the modernisation program. Using an extensive literature review, documentary research, observation, and descriptive data analysis, this paper will briefly report on the important events and socio-political developments affecting the transformation of the public housing concept between 1940s to 1960s. This article will also highlight the emergence of gigantic housing complexes in the 1970s and identify the possible reasons for the dissemination of megastructures that quickened and normalised the process of Westernisation from the late 1970s onwards.

Social Housing and the Agency of Social Transformation (1940s – 1960s)

1. See Gholam Hossen Mirza Saleh, *Political Memories of Ghavam Al-Saltaneh* (Tehran: Moyin, 2017). See also Rana Habibi, "The Institutionalization of Modern Middle Class Neighborhoods in 1940s Tehran – Case of Chaharsad Dastgah," *Cities* 60 (2017): 37-49.

In Iran, the idea of social housing for the public did not become a priority until the end of the Second World War, and the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (the Second Pahlavi). Prior to this, the government delivered a small amount of affordable rental housing for Iranian military staff and cadres in the late 1930s; however, the state of stability and subsequent exit of foreign soldiers after the end of the Second World War resulted in a suitable situation for the continuation of the country's housing development. Made necessary by the rapid expansion of governmental organisations, the concept of affordable housing for low-income public employees was first suggested by the cabinet of Ahmad Qavam (1873-1955), who was elected Prime Minister five times between 1921 and 1952.¹



Figure 1: The Rahni Bank Headquarter in Tehran, 1976 (Source: Maskan Bank Archive. Photograph reproduced by permission from the Maskan Bank Archive, 2017)

2. The Rahni Bank transformed to Bank Maskan (the Housing Bank) after the Islamic revolution in 1979.

3. "A Brief History of the 20 Years Rahni Bank's Services," (Tehran: The Rahni Bank, 1960), 7-9. See also "A Brief History of the 40 Years Rahni Bank's Services," (Tehran: The Rahni Bank, 1979).

4. "A Brief History of the 40 Years Rahni Bank's Services."

5. "A Brief History of the 20 Years Rahni Bank's Services," 33.

6. "A Brief History of the 20 Years Rahni Bank's Services," 33.

7. "A Brief History of the 20 Years Rahni Bank's Services," 33.

8. "A Brief History of the 20 Years Rahni Bank's Services," 34.

To design and build the social housing projects, the government introduced a mortgage bank, known as the Rahni Bank, as the administrator responsible for the provision of affordable housing (Figure 1).² The Rahni Bank was established in 1939 through the collaboration of the Iran National Bank or *Bank Melli*, and the Ministry of Finance.³ Shortly, the bank took the first steps in the early 1940s by setting up new housing standards and training its staff.⁴ To this end, at the suggestion of the state, the bank contacted British and American authorities due to their experience in the provision of mass-produced social housing projects.⁵ For example, the Rahni Bank received assistance from Britain's Cooperative Building Society. The Cooperative Building Society invited the director of the Rahni Bank to London, and later sent two members of the board to study the Rahni Bank's policies and supervise the subsequent design and construction.⁶ Similarly, a number of American economic advisors and design experts were sent to Iran with the financial support of the American authorities; the intention was to design and code the upcoming public housing projects based on the latest American housing standards.⁷ Later, the Rahni Bank began to send groups of staff to England for education and training under the supervision of some English design departments and mortgage institutes.⁸ Given these points, the core structure of the Rahni Bank was formed and coded based on the English and American post-war thinking, and this effectively "modernised" the language of the public housing projects from the beginning. The bank's early reports show a clear image of the ideology behind the housing policies and the overall modernisation plan. According to a Rahni Bank report:

Considering the emergence of modern dwellings all over the country, the traditional and old adobe-brick houses could no longer satisfy the people's desires. Nowadays, people are seeing more comfort, hygiene and welfare in the modern buildings. These modern houses changed the people's criteria

9. "A Brief History of the 20 Years Rahni Bank's Services," 9.

10. See Habibi, "The Institutionalization of Modern Middle Class Neighborhoods," 37.

11. See also Hamed Khosravi, "Planning a Revolution Labour Movements and Housing Projects in Tehran, 1943-1963" (paper presented at the 17th IPHS Conference: History-Urbanism-Resilience, Delft, TU Delft, 17-21 July 2016).

12. Pamela Karimi, "Dwelling, Dispute, and the Space of Modern Iran," in *Governing by Design: Architecture, Economy, and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. AGGREGATE (Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 123.

13. See the introduction of Willia E. Warne, *Mission for Peace: Point 4 in Iran* (Bethesda: Ibex, 1999).

14. Seyed Mohamad Ali Sedighi, "Mega Structure Reloaded: A New Technocratic Approach to Housing Development in Ekbatan, Tehran," *ARENA Journal of Architectural Research* 3, no. 1 (2018): 1-23.

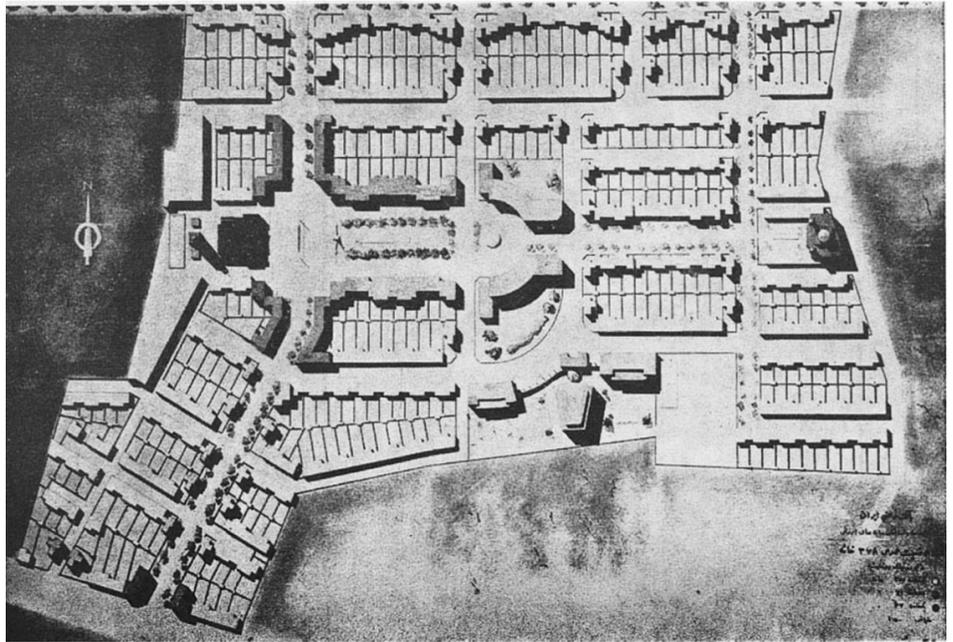
15. Read the introduction of Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era (the New Cold War History)* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

16. Rahmatollah Amirjani, "Architectonics in Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Iran" (paper presented at the 35th Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians of Australia and New Zealand: Historiographies of Technology & Architecture, Wellington, New Zealand, 4-7 July 2018), 22.

concerning beauty and life, and they replaced the domination of materialism (caused by the luxury traditional houses) with new aesthetic taste brought by the abstract features of the imported modern buildings.⁹

Considering the Rahni Bank design ideology, one could see the emergence of functionalism, standardisation, and minimalisation with the first public housing project, known as *Chaharsad Dastgahl* 400-Unit Housing (Figure 2). This project was delivered in the Farah Abad district, and attempted to accommodate 400 families with four to eight members. Indeed, this project was the first official attempt to push the middle and lower classes towards global modernity using the concept of public housing.¹⁰ Due to this tendency, the design created some cultural difficulties in terms of space and function. Unlike the Iranian traditional detached houses, the project's form was based on a terrace house typology with courtyard, presenting the first cost-effective townhouse typology that showed strong dependency on the work of the modern movement in the West; Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud's workers' housing, the Kiefhoek complex, in Rotterdam, Netherlands (1925-1930) is an example of this. The design also imposed certain functions and way of life to residents. For instance, the bedroom design was based on the Western "bedroom sleeping style." However, in the traditional Iranian lifestyle, family members typically sleep in the living room, or in a big separate room also designated for sleeping; they sleep on the floor, side by side, on large wool mattresses. Traditionally, all rooms were multifunctional, and living spaces could easily be adjusted for different day or night-time activities. However, the logic of the proposed units dictated not only very specific activities and functions but also a certain family size and way of living.¹¹

Despite the Rahni Bank administration tendency, the rapid growth of the post-war relation between the Iranian government and the United States also intensified the Westernisation of the public housing projects. During the Cold War, the US struggled to keep Iran free of the spread of communist tendencies, and this marked the beginning of heavy US support for the Pahlavi monarchy. In a short period of time, America stimulated its influence by offering different political, cultural and humanitarian programs that could reframe the country's based on the emerging global culture of capitalism.¹² For example, Truman's Point Four Program was one of the introduced humanitarian programs used as a tool for developing the country's healthcare, education, agriculture, construction, and urban planning.¹³ More relevant to this paper, Americans also mentored various organisations responsible for the provision of affordable housing, and they brought different strategies, most importantly construction technologies, for mass producing mid- and high-rise public housing units in Iran. Additionally, as the Cold War began to intensify in the early and mid- 1960s, the administration of US President John Fitzgerald (Jack) Kennedy also initiated a new foreign strategy to defeat communist groups in so-called "emerging nations," including Iran.¹⁴ Similar to Truman's Point Four Program, it also aimed to introduce cutting-edge American technologies and scientific knowledge into under-developing countries.¹⁵ As a result of the mentioned points, between the 50s to late-60s, one could see a significant transformation in the typology of the public housing dwellings due to the imported building technologies, including prefabricated concrete and steel frame systems.¹⁶



17. Copied from an issue available at The National Library and Archives, Tehran, Iran.

Figure 2: The 400-Unit Housing Layout (Source: The Architect magazine. Photograph reproduced from the cover page of the *Architect* magazine (4), 1946)¹⁷

18. Fatemeh Farnaz Arefian and Seyed Hossein Moeini, *Urban Change in Iran: Stories of Rooted Histories and Ever-Accelerating Developments* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 107. See also Ali Soltani, "Iran," in *The Urban Transport Crisis in Emerging Economies*, ed. Dorina Pojani and Dominic Stead (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), 129.

Despite the influence of American post-war ideology on the Iranian public housing programs, one should consider the King, Mohammad Reza Shah, as a key player in the emergence of big-scale worker housing complexes with the language of modern architecture. In general, the Shah had strong tendencies towards "building big", and his administration employed many foreign companies possessing the capacity to construct large-scale projects in a short period of time.¹⁸ Personally, the Shah adored the mystical and aesthetic aspects of Iranian traditional architecture, and his family mostly lived in the Saadabad and Niavaran palaces in Tehran. Both palaces were small in size, expressing a strong language of Iranian vernacular architecture. However, as with other projects related to the regime's social reforms, the Shah wanted to see the realisation of his so-called "modern" perceptions in the country's housing programs; he strongly believed that the social housing projects should express the country's project of modernity, and he also directly supervised and commissioned a number of controversial projects at the time of his power. This is the reason that there are many photographs of, and speeches by, Mohammad Reza Shah during housing project briefings and opening ceremonies.

Towering Up: Normalisation of Modernity and the Dissemination of High-Rise Social Housing (1970s)

19. "A Brief History of the 20 Years Rahni Bank's Services," 68.

20. Sedighi, "Mega Structure Reloaded," 8.

21. "A Brief History of the 40 Years Rahni Bank's Services."

Between the 1940s and the 1960s, the Pahlavi regime successfully housed 230,000 families in social housing projects.¹⁹ In the early 1970s, it was estimated by the Iranian authorities that they needed to erect more than 283,500 dwellings in Tehran to only house middle-income employees and civil servants.²⁰ Subsequently, the Rahni Bank employed other strategies to accelerate the provision of housing to effectively respond to the lack of housing and the rapid increase of population.²¹ For instant, due to the success of the Cooperatives Movement in England, with the recommendation of Western advisors, the Rahni

22. See the "formation of cooperatives in Iran in "A Brief History of the 40 Years Rahni Bank's Services."

23. "A Brief History of the 40 Years Rahni Bank's Services."

24. Ann Crittenden, "The Shah in New York," *The New York Times*, September, 26 1976.

25. "A Brief History of the 40 Years Rahni Bank's Services."

Bank created new regulations that pushed governmental institutions and private companies to provide housing to their own staff through creating non-profit cooperatives.²² The new policy also encouraged the private and public sectors to participate in construction, especially in providing accommodation for low-income employees.²³ Shortly after, some semi-private companies and institutes also took responsibility for housing construction, most notably the Pahlavi Foundation. The Pahlavi Foundation was established by the Second Pahlavi monarch in 1973, as a non-profit governmental group intended to advance Iran's investments and charitable interests in America.²⁴ The Rahni Bank also employed other actions: providing a variety of housing construction loans to private builders and public organisations, offering free land or affordable plots to cooperatives and low-wage people, and giving financial aid and loans to construction material producers in order to accelerate the production of construction materials and decrease the price of building supplies.²⁵

Despite the attempts, the Imperial Government of Iran eventually realised that building megastructures could be an effective tool to overcome the housing crisis. Most importantly, building unique high-rise habitats with the language of Brutalist architecture or International Style would secure Iran's place in the global group of progressive modern nations, and, of course, put Iran in the headlines of architectural journals. Indeed, using megastructures and manifesting futuristic architecture were seen in line with Shah's ideology and tendency regarding the image of country; this would enable the state to showcase the distinctive housing style of so-called "progressive Iran." Additionally, the concrete high-rise buildings could be constructed in a short time and could accommodate large numbers of people.

26. Kamran Diba, "The Recent Housing Boom in Iran - Lessons to Remember," in *Housing, Process and Physical Form*, ed. Linda Safran (Jakarta: The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1979), 40.

27. The Association of Iranian Architects-Diploma (AIAD) was established in 1944 by architects who had mainly graduated in Europe. These architects, also known as the First Generation, were trained under the influence of early Modern architecture movements in Europe.

28. Sedighi, "Mega Structure Reloaded," 11.

To design and deliver the early megastructures, the authorities hired foreign architects and construction companies as the country was entirely unexperienced in terms of building large-scale high-rise projects. This could also bring an extra promotional gimmick for the state and to cultivate a reputation for superiority.²⁶ A review of the commissioned architects and construction firms of the early 1970s clearly verifies the above argument. For example, with the help of some members of the Association of Iranian Architects-Diploma,²⁷ the authorities commissioned Kenzo Tange, Moshe Safdie and Moshe Bashan, due to their experience in designing high-rise habitats and skyscrapers.²⁸ Simultaneously, different American designers assisted the Pahlavi Foundation to initiate a number of high-rise housing projects in different cities, in particular Tehran. Shortly after the implementation of these habitats, the expected progressive image of "Modern Iran" started to form, an image which manifesting everything "modern and Western" except what the country was globally known for: a profound history and authentic culture.

Interestingly, even the foreign architects and international construction firms correctly understood the strong power and great value of local traditions, and many of them attempted to address some aspects of Iranian culture in the design of megastructures. However, it was mainly the authorities that rejected any interpretations regarding the country's vernacular architecture and traditions. Building in the early 1970s, The Navy Residential Complex and Eskan Towers are clear examples of the

29. Neta Feniger and Rachel Kallus, "Israeli Planning in the Shah's Iran: A Forgotten Episode," *Planning Perspectives* 30, no. 2 (2014): 231-51.

30. Feniger and Kallus, "Israeli Planning in the Shah's Iran," 236.

31. Feniger and Kallus, "Israeli Planning in the Shah's Iran," 238.

mentioned inclination towards regional cultures. Both projects were designed and constructed by different companies from Israel through the Pahlavi Foundation commission. The Navy residential projects were given to Dan Eytan in 1972, due to his high-rise residential works in Israel.²⁹ This Navy housing scheme intended to deliver 12,000 dwelling units in two southern coastal cities, Bandar Abbas and Bushehr.³⁰ As Eytan explained, given his sensitivity to local traditions, he dedicated a lot of time to examining the dominant culture of the region, which resulted in delays in the planning process. In response, the authorities asked Eytan to accelerate the design process. A short quote from Eytan demonstrates the Westernising agenda behind the government's housing policy: "At one point, the Navy asked me why the project wasn't moving faster. I told them that I needed to learn locals' culture. They said – 'No. Bring your own culture. That's why we hired you.' So, I told them I only brought my profession."³¹

32. See Figure 9 in Feniger and Kallus, "Israeli Planning in the Shah's Iran," 243.

At the same time as the Navy project in 1972, Israeli engineers were also engaged with a progressive residential project in Tehran, the Eskan towers. The project was designated for the cosmopolitan elite and middle-income people, who were increasing in number as a result of the rapid modernisation process. Designed by Moshe Bashan, three towers of 32 floors each were intended to deliver a mixed-use complex with luxury facilities. Interestingly, Moshe Bashan also attempted to apply a number of vernacular quotations to reduce the alien expression of raw concrete in his building.³² For example, he carefully used different interpretations of vernacular arches to articulate the facade of commercial floors in addition to openings in upper levels (Figure 3). However, similar to the Navy complex, the Pahlavi Foundation pushed Bashan to disregard any culturally friendly manifestation. According to Feniger and Kallus:

33. Feniger and Kallus, "Israeli Planning in the Shah's Iran," 244.

Eskan's chief architect, Moshe Bashan, claimed that he was trying to adapt the tower to the local *modus vivendi*. He saw it as his duty to 'help the Iranians move from traditional living in private courtyard houses to modern high-rise dwellings'... A team member claimed that the Pahlavi Foundation representatives were offended by the suggestion of including [vernacular] arches in the facade, and [they] insisted on a building 'like everywhere else in the world.'³³

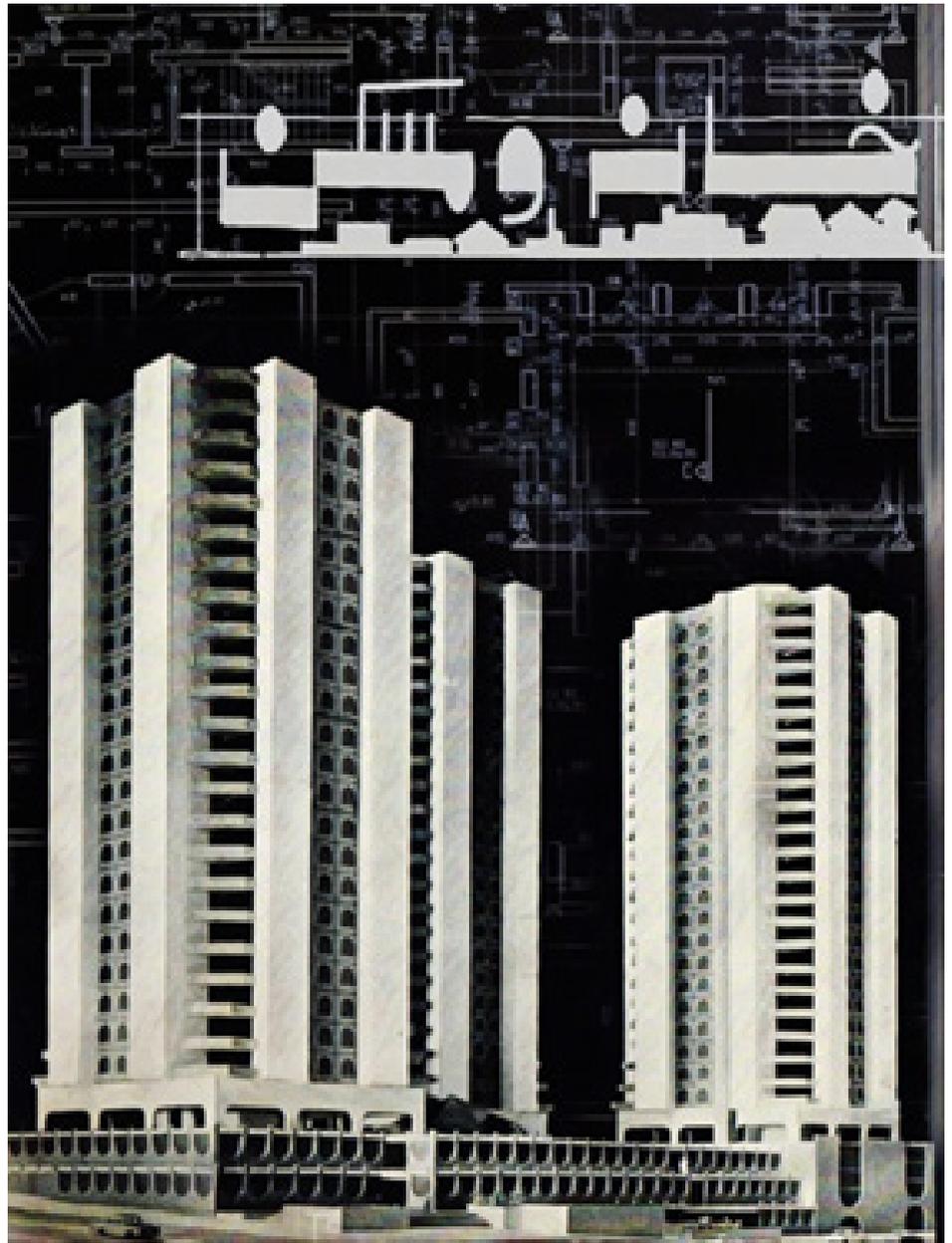


Figure 3: The original model of the Eskan project by Moshe Bashan
 (Source: The *Khaneh va Maskan* Internal Magazine, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 1978. Photograph reproduced by permission from the Maskan Bank Archive, 2017)

34. See Ruhollah Khomeini's quote cited in Pamela Karimi, *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran: Interior Revolutions of the Modern Era* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 135.

1970s Labour Housing and Consumer Culture of Capitalism

In the early 1970s, as the Iranian middle- and upper-classes were expanding, ideas on the desirability, or even necessity, of buying refrigerators, automobiles, televisions, processed food products, and other symbols of American consumer culture were disseminating. Tehran was becoming a modern mega-city, the value of the Iranian currency was increasing, and the society was becoming richer by the day due to the rapid increase in petrol-dollars, largely a result of the global energy crisis. In the case of architecture, vernacular houses, which had been a symbol of Iranian culture, were rapidly replaced by luxury villas expressing the wealth and power of the newly rich classes.³⁴ Apparently, the masses were adapting to the Western lifestyle, and this brought about a justification for the state to continue their affordable

housing program based on Western post-war proposals. As a symbol of having a modern life, living in high-rise flats gradually became popular among groups from the middle classes, especially for those who preferred to live close to central Tehran. Interestingly, due to its growing market, private construction companies and real-estate agencies also started to develop –luxury medium-rise and large-scale residences to attracting the middle- and upper-class of the society. Most of these projects were equipped with modern premium facilities, including swimming pools and playgrounds, to attract the masses. Interestingly, it is at this time that even the main government's affordable housing providers, most notably the Rahni and Construction banks, started delivering lavish high-rise and megastructure habitats for lower-income earners.



Figure 4: The Apadana complex (Source: Photograph by the author, 2017)

35. "A Brief History of the 40 Years Rahni Bank's Services."

36. "A Brief History of the 40 Years Rahni Bank's Services."

37. "A Brief History of the 40 Years Rahni Bank's Services."

38. "A Brief History of the 40 Years Rahni Bank's Services."

39. The construction of the project was hindered in 1979 due to the Islamic Revolution, but it was eventually completed in 1984 with the help of a new branch of the Rahni Bank, known as *Bank-e Maskan*, and Tehran Municipality

40. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, many open-plan kitchens were transformed into enclosed kitchens by *Bank Maskan*.

The 1971 Apadana social housing project in the south of Tehran is the best example of the government's new design inclination towards housing low-income groups in the early 1970s. Supported by the Rahni Bank, the Apadana habitat was designed by Nezam Ameri S.A.E Consulting Engineers, with the collaboration of a French construction company.³⁵ Located in the *Mehrabad* district, this complex has been the Rahni Bank's biggest high-rise project³⁶ delivering 2901 units in 46 apartment blocks.³⁷ Using a prefabricated concrete structure,³⁸ the Apadana blocks were designed based on the language of Brutalist architecture, manifesting bare concrete in detached and stepped volume patterns with different levels (Figure 4).³⁹ Compared to the previous social housing projects, the interior spaces were designed on a smaller scale, showing a clear functionalist and minimalist planning approach. The plans also clearly eliminated the cultural norms, in particular, the notion of privacy for housewives, by imposing semi open-plan kitchens and living rooms.⁴⁰ Interestingly, the complex offered outdoor swimming pools, gym, and tennis courts, along with other amenities such as shops, schools and open gardens. One should understand that it was so radical to offer this level of Western living style to the more traditional and conservative classes of society. Of course, the image of the country was becoming so-called "modern"; however, in the deepest layers of the society, a large group of people was

struggling to acclimatise to the modernisation. As a result, many critics and opposition groups understood these housing projects as attempts based on a social-engineering program to normalise Westernisation across the country and transform the low-income classes of the society.

The Failure of Social Housing: The Search for Alternatives

41. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

42 See Karimi, *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran: Interior Revolutions of the Modern Era*, 135.

43. The term Westoxification refers to a fascination with western technologies and lifestyle which erodes traditional Iranian cultural practices. The phrase was first coined by Ahmad Fardid, a professor of philosophy at the University of Tehran, in the 1940s. The term came to the fore, and into common usage, when Jalal Al-e-Ahmad published a clandestine book in 1962, known as *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*.

In the early 1970s, a new opposition formed among some sectors of Iranian society toward the dissemination of buildings with the language of modern architecture, in particular large buildings in the International or Brutalist style. The state radical interventions, along with the effects of what Fredric Jameson calls "market ideology,"⁴¹ affected people's behaviour towards, and their opinions concerning, the Islamic lifestyle. In addition, the simplicity of the traditional lifestyle was being replaced by luxury consumerism, especially among the middle and upper classes of society. Tehran and other major cities became polarised between traditional and modern expressions, causing a sense of disorientation and lack of belonging among middle to lower classes. As a result, some intellectuals argued that Mohammad Reza Shah had poisoned the country with Western ideas and products, and they used this as an opportunity to stand against the regime.⁴² In addition, the Shah's policies concerning social and individual freedom, as features of modern democracy, faced difficulties. It was at this time that terms such as Westoxification⁴³ came into common usage in reaction to the Shah's development programs. Ultimately, the state project of modernity, and the provision of megastructures as a solution for the housing shortage, were not able to continue in the face of opposition from the hard-conservative core of the society.

44. Ali Mozaffari and Nigel Westbrook, "Shushtar No'w: Urban Image and Fabrication of Place in an Iranian New Town, and Its Relation to the International Discourse on Regionalism," *Fusion*, no. 6 (2015)

45. Nigel Westbrook and Ali Mozaffari, "A Return to the Beginnings of Regionalism: Shushtar New Town Seen in the Light of the 2nd International Congress of Architects, Persepolis, Iran 1974" (paper presented at the 32th International SAHANZ Conference, University of New South Wales, Sydney, 7-10 July 2015), 720.

46. Hamed Khosravi, "Politics of Demonstration (E) Ration," *San Rocco* 6 (2013): 28-37.

47. Westbrook and Mozaffari, "In Search of the Authentic Modern," 5.

Through Empress Farah's efforts, and with the help of the new generation of architects who were influenced by the 60s and 70s humanist discourses of architecture, the authorities attempted to find a solution to overcome the sense of disorientation, fading culture, and lack of belonging caused by the existing housing. With the help of Empress Farah Pahlavi, new cultural reform took place in relation to government health and educational foundations, and, most relevant, institutional architecture, mass architectural production and affordable housing.⁴⁴ As a consequence of the new agenda, between 1970 and 1974 the state organised a number of international congresses, and invited a large number of prominent international architects and urban planners, including Louis Kahn, Georges Candilis, Kenzo Tange, James Stirling, and Buckminster Fuller.⁴⁵ The intention was to map challenges involved in the creation of new habitats⁴⁶ and seek solutions to mediate between local cultures in the non-western countries that were facing rapid modernisation.⁴⁷ As a consequence of these transitions, even the highest ranks of the royal government began to share their concerns regarding the state interventions. This can be tracked in the 1975 *Honar-e Memari Magazine's* interview with Amir-Abbas Hoveyda, the last prime minister of the Pahlavi dynasty. In a short speech, Hoveyda mentioned that:

For the last 20 years, the architecture that we have offered to the people did not reflect the society's behaviour and manner. In terms of housing, what we have built were just copies of

48. "Prime Minister's Speech at Luncheon with Art and Architecture Magazine Editors," *Art & Architecture 1957*, 9-11.

Southern France, American and North African houses: learn from the people and build for the people.⁴⁸

Rapid Normalisation and The Continuation of High-Rise Housing

49. Various scholars categorised Ekbatan as an affordable housing project, mainly for the middle-income groups. See Amir Bani Mas'ud, *Iranian Contemporary Architecture: An Inquiry into Tradition and Modernity* (Tehran: Honar-e Memari-e Qarn Publications, 2016), 276. See also Sedighi, "Mega Structure Reloaded," 8&11.

50. Sedighi, "Mega Structure Reloaded," 11.

51. Sedighi, "Mega Structure Reloaded," 12.

Although the government showed more flexibility towards local cultures in the mid-1970s, this new tendency did not practically impact the regime's radical approach towards the housing programs. Ironically, the government had founded the architectural congresses of the early 1970s; however, it failed to follow the offered guidelines regarding the provision of appropriate housing. The emergence of Ekbatan housing⁴⁹ is the clearest example of the government's unchanged approach to the provision of instant housing to the middle- and low-income groups. Two years after the first international congress of architects in Isfahan, the Tehran municipality commissioned the Tehran Redevelopment Company (TRC) to implement the largest housing complex in the country's contemporary history, known as *Shahrak-e Ekbatan*, or the Ekbatan Town (Figure 5). The project planned to house 15,500 families, with a total population of about 80,000, in a 220-hectare area.⁵⁰ To implement the Ekbatan project, the TRC commissioned different international firms, including Gruzen and Partners, in partnership with a New York firm, the Starrett Housing Corporation, and later, a South Korean company, Space Group, founded by Kim Swoo Geun. These companies and architects were experienced in designing and constructing concrete megastructures. Accordingly, similar to Apadana complex, Ekbatan project also manifested a strong dependency on prefabrication techniques addressing International and Brutal styles by delivering 33 Y and V shape gigantic concrete blocks in different zones.⁵¹



Figure 5: A concrete block of the Ekbatan complex (Source: Photograph by the author, 2018)

Indeed, the continued construction of high-rise public housing, and the dissemination of Western lifestyle among labours and middle classes in the 1970s were driven by a number of different political and economic factors. First of all, one should understand that the country's project

52. See the "The Turning" in Andrew Scott Cooper, *The Fall of Heaven: The Pahlavis and the Final Days of Imperial Iran* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2016), 217.

of modernity was programmed and led by the Shah, and changing his ideology on his modernisation strategies and their effects on people was something that was almost impossible. Of course, there were some influential key players, including Empress Farah, who moderated and domesticised some aspects of the existing Westernisation program. However, it is convincing to conclude that Shah could not tolerate any criticism regarding his approach and thinking, and that's why most political activities and parties were banned or isolated. Indeed, in the mid-1970s, Iran was a one-party state under the control of the Second Pahlavi monarchy, and the party members, in addition to most of the individuals around Shah, all praised and admired the state interventions.⁵²

53. Mozaffari and Westbrook, "Shushtar No'w."

54. Diba, "The Recent Housing Boom in Iran - Lessons to Remember," 38-39.

Another reason for the continuation of instant high-rise housing was the ongoing migration from rural to urban areas due to the 1970s' rapid industrialisation, high rate of employment and overall state of economic frenzy in Iran. As a consequence of the migrant displacement, squatter housing and slums were developing on the fringes of Iran's so-called "modern towns," especially Tehran.⁵³ This severely challenged the progressive-appearing image of Iran. As a result, the government preferred to consider foreign contractors who could deliver instant housing through fast building technologies, including prefab. The proliferation of high-rise public housing also accelerated the Iranian government, as a profit-driven political state, to achieve more profits and economic benefits. The instant public housing brought more financial benefits by reducing building costs and construction time. Consequently, the provision of mass housing helped the state to keep more of its budget for its capitalistic agenda and other programs concerning the Shah's project of modernity⁵⁴

55. Diba, "The Recent Housing Boom in Iran - Lessons to Remember," 38.

56. "Prime Minister's Speech at Luncheon with Art and Architecture Magazine Editors," 9-11.

The domination of technocrats in the body of the royal government could be counted as the third major cause for the continuation of megastructures. In the 1970s, the increase of petrol-dollars and ambitious political leadership resulted in the emergence of a breed of achievement-oriented super-technocrat. The new generation of technocrats realised that the public housing market could be employed as a potential political and financial tool to be manipulated for the sake of power and reputation.⁵⁵ The provision of affordable housing within a short time, along with the construction of fancy high-rise buildings for the middle class and the wealthy, became a bewitching slogan. The technocrats understood that their capacity to commission and deliver a large number of units in a short time could play a key role in increasing their reputation among the population, especially among the Iranian politicians. Through building luxury "instant" high-rises, politicians could achieve "instant" political success by contributing to the Shah's modernisation program. Subsequently, these kinds of successes would help them to be seen by Mohammad Reza Shah and the Royal family, and achieve more projects, and, of course, more profits. Indeed, the regime's deceptive slogan, "Learn from the people, and build for the people,"⁵⁶ simply lost its legitimacy.

Of course, one could find some incidents indicating the social engineering agenda of authorities in different levels, however, it can be concluded that the Shah's main intention was to improve the condition and social life of his people using modernity. However, like the process

of modernisation in many third-world countries, the Shah's development program consisted of three major features: technology, products, and most importantly, architectonics with a particular focus on mass-produced Western style housing. All these aspects inevitably influenced the behaviour of large groups of people and brought something of a Western consumer culture and social transition to Iran. It is convincing to conclude that, since the 1970s, the introduced megastructures and housing models have rapidly accelerated the normalisation of modernity, in particular, for the more conservative groups of people. Ironically, the 1970s housing typologies, which were criticised by many radical Islamic groups, became the favourite prototypes for the government of Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Interestingly, the aforementioned shifts in aesthetics could also be seen in different layers of the Islamic regime. This paradox clearly shows the psychological power of architecture.