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A MACAT ANALYSIS

HAMID DABASHI'S

IRAN

A PEOPLE INTERRUPTED





An Analysis of

Hamid Dabashi's

Iran

A People Interrupted

Bryan R. Gibson



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Cover illustration: Etienne Gilfillan

Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.
Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data is available upon request.

ISBN 978-1-912303-20-5 (hardback)
ISBN 978-1-912128-40-2 (paperback)
ISBN 978-1-912282-08-1 (e-book)

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The Macat Library is a series of unique academic explorations of seminal works in the humanities and social sciences – books and papers that have had a significant and widely recognised impact on their disciplines. It has been created to serve as much more than just a summary of what lies between the covers of a great book. It illuminates and explores the influences on, ideas of, and impact of that book. Our goal is to offer a learning resource that encourages critical thinking and fosters a better, deeper understanding of important ideas.

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Macat has worked with the University of Cambridge to identify the elements of critical thinking and understand the ways in which six different skills combine to enable effective thinking.

Three allow us to fully understand a problem; three more give us the tools to solve it. Together, these six skills make up the

PACIER model of critical thinking. They are:

ANALYSIS – understanding how an argument is built

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PROBLEM-SOLVING – producing strong solutions

REASONING – creating strong arguments

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CRITICAL THINKING AND *IRAN: A PEOPLE INTERRUPTED*

Primary critical thinking skill: ANALYSIS

Secondary critical thinking skill: REASONING

Hamid Dabashi's 2007 *Iran: A People Interrupted* is simultaneously subtle, passionate, polarizing and polemical. A concise account of Iranian history from the early 19th-century onward, Dabashi's book uses his incisive analytical skills as a basis for creating a persuasive argument against the views of Iran that predominate in the West.

In Dabashi's view, Western approaches to Iran have been colored time and time again by the assumption that it is somehow trapped between regressive 'tradition,' and progressive 'modernity.' The reality, he argues, is quite the opposite: Iran has its own distinctive ideology of modernity, which is nevertheless opposed to many Western ideals. In order to prove his point, Dabashi draws on a lifetime's experience of literary criticism to analyse the relationship between Iran's intellectual and political elites over two centuries.

His analysis provides the key evidence for his reasoning by teasing out the implicit assumptions that underly the texts and people he examines. Looking beneath the surface of the evidence, Dabashi finds – time and time again – the traces of a uniquely Iranian notion of modernity that is quite at odds with its Western counterpart.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE ORIGINAL WORK

Born in Iran in 1951, **Hamid Dabashi** is a prolific Iranian American scholar, sociologist, and postcolonialist writer who specializes in Islamic studies, history, and culture. A passionate political activist in his youth, Dabashi studied in the United States, but went home to take part in the Iranian Revolution of 1978–9, before completing a double PhD back in America in 1984. His books have been highly praised, though his views on a number of subjects, including Israel, have polarized opinions. He is currently a professor of Iranian studies and comparative literature at Columbia University.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS OF THE ANALYSIS

Dr Bryan Gibson holds a PhD in International History from the London School of Economics (LSE) and was a post-doctoral research fellow at the LSE's Centre for Diplomacy and Strategy and an instructor on Middle Eastern politics in the LSE's Department of International History and the University of East Anglia's Department of Political, Social and International Studies (PSI). He is currently on the faculty of Johns Hopkins University and is the author of *Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

ABOUT MACAT

GREAT WORKS FOR CRITICAL THINKING

Macat is focused on making the ideas of the world's great thinkers accessible and comprehensible to everybody, everywhere, in ways that promote the development of enhanced critical thinking skills.

It works with leading academics from the world's top universities to produce new analyses that focus on the ideas and the impact of the most influential works ever written across a wide variety of academic disciplines. Each of the works that sit at the heart of its growing library is an enduring example of great thinking. But by setting them in context – and looking at the influences that shaped their authors, as well as the responses they provoked – Macat encourages readers to look at these classics and game-changers with fresh eyes. Readers learn to think, engage and challenge their ideas, rather than simply accepting them.

“Macat offers an amazing first-of-its-kind tool for interdisciplinary learning and research. Its focus on works that transformed their disciplines and its rigorous approach, drawing on the world’s leading experts and educational institutions, opens up a world-class education to anyone.”

Andreas Schleicher

**Director for Education and Skills, Organisation for Economic
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Prof Lord Broers,

former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge

‘The Macat vision is exceptionally exciting. It focuses upon new modes of learning which analyse and explain seminal texts which have profoundly influenced world thinking and so social and economic development. It promotes the kind of critical thinking which is essential for any society and economy.

‘This is the learning of the future.’

Rt Hon Charles Clarke, former UK Secretary of State for Education

‘The Macat analyses provide immediate access to the critical conversation surrounding the books that have shaped their respective discipline, which will make them an invaluable resource to all of those, students and teachers, working in the field.’

Professor William Tronzo, University of California at San Diego



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WAYS IN TO THE TEXT

KEY POINTS

- Hamid Dabashi is an Iranian American professor and literary critic at Columbia University in New York, and a political commentator for the news network Al Jazeera.
- In his book *Iran: A People Interrupted*, Dabashi weaves together 200 years of Iranian literature, history, and politics to illustrate the Iranian people's struggle against foreign imperialism*—the policy of empire building—and internal tyranny.
- Iran is at the forefront of international affairs, making Dabashi's analysis valuable to anyone interested in understanding why Iranians think and act as they do.

Who Is Hamid Dabashi?

Hamid Dabashi, the author of *Iran: A People Interrupted* (2007), was born in 1951 in Ahvaz, Iran, into a working-class family. His devout Muslim mother was a homemaker and herbalist who entertained the family with storytelling, while his father was a railroad laborer, toymaker, and talented cook.

Dabashi received his early education near home before moving to the Iranian capital, Tehran, to begin his university studies in August 1970. As a student he was a social activist and Iranian nationalist (that is, his patriotism shaped many of his political beliefs). He attended