Media, Culture and Society in Iran

Living with globalization and the Islamic state

Edited by
Mehdi Semati

Iranian Studies

The puzzle of how a vibrant civil society has continued to thrive under a theocratic Islamic state in Iran has long baffled many scholars and analysts of Iranian politics. This wide-ranging collection of essays by a group of young scholars, based mostly in Iran, provides the most informative analysis of this complex relationship between the society and the state in Iran by exploring the role of the media (including the press, television, cinema, the internet, etc.), music, popular literature, and gender relations. It offers fresh perspectives on the contemporary Iranian political culture – as well as politics of culture – in the postrevolutionary period and should be of great interest to students of Middle East politics, communications theory, and cultural studies.

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If the world needed any reminder that Iranians, like any other people, are busy resisting domestic tyranny, defying globalized imperialism, and mapping out the contours of their own place in history, Mehdi Semati's judiciously edited volume is here to respond to that need. Through a succession of brilliant first hand accounts on media, culture, and civil society in Iran, the essays capably collected in this volume cut through the mind-numbing clichés that think tank analysts and their native mis-informers have fed the public at large. The rambunctious Iranian press, a thriving internet culture, the politics of its youths, their arts and music, the importance of satellite TV, a globalized cinema, the inner dynamics of a grassroots women's movement, and innumerable other minutiae of a struggling cosmopolitan culture come to life in this unprecedented and deeply informative book.

Hamid Dabashi, Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and
Comparative Literature, Columbia University,
author of *Iran: A People Interrupted*

Media, Culture and Society in Iran

Media, Culture and Society in Iran offers a truly multidisciplinary approach to contemporary media and culture in Iran.

By exploring topics such as the Internet, print press, advertising, satellite television, video, rock music, literature, cinema, gender, religious intellectuals, and secularism, this unique and wide-ranging volume explains Iran as a complex society that has successfully managed to negotiate and embody the tensions of tradition and modernity, democracy and theocracy, isolation and globalization, and other such cultural-political dynamics that escape the explanatory and analytical powers of all-too-familiar binary relations.

Featuring contributions from among the best-known and emerging scholars on Iranian media, culture, society, and politics, this volume uncovers how the existing perspectives on post-revolutionary Iranian society have failed to appreciate the complexity, the paradoxes, and the contradictions that characterize life in contemporary Iran, resulting in a general failure to explain and to anticipate its contemporary social and political transformations.

Mehdi Semati is Associate Professor of Communication at Eastern Illinois University. He has written on international communication, cultural politics of transnational media, and Iranian media.

Iranian studies

Edited by Homa Katouzian
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Media, Culture and Society in Iran

Living with globalization and the Islamic state

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To my son Armin:
I hope when he is old enough to read this book, he will and be proud.

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Preface

The idea for this book was originally conceived in the summer of 2004. I wrote a Call for Papers that invited contributions from researchers and academics inside and outside Iran. A translated version of the CFP was also distributed in Iran. I received more chapters than there are presently in the book. For various reasons I could not place all submissions in a single volume. I have edited all of the chapters in this book so that their styles conform to American Psychological Association (APA) style, which is typically used in Communication, my own field. Chapters by Khiabany, Rahimi, Seyed-Emami, Nooshin, Naficy, Sullivan, and Tehranian required little or no further editing. Other chapters required additional editing to various degrees. Some of these chapters were originally written in Farsi, and I had received the translated versions. I have had to edit these chapters because the translations were not to my satisfaction. On some occasions I have had to retranslate passages and phrases for the purpose of clarity (after reading the original papers in Farsi). I edited these chapters further for clarity, grammar, organization, and structural reasons. However, I have made every effort to make sure that, in the process, I have not changed the contents or the arguments, even where I introduced language to give previews, to recap, or to provide a context for the arguments. In editing the entire manuscript, I have kept the use of diacritical marks to an absolute minimum. I have used a phonetic pattern that is very close to contemporary Persian as spoken in Tehran (with apologies to other regions), and recognizable by all Farsi-speaking persons. In spelling Persian names, I have tried to stay close to the conventional spellings. In most cases where the inclusion of the Persian word was deemed necessary, the word appears in *italics* in parentheses. Efforts have been made to minimize the presence of the apparatus of translation and writing across languages to make the reading experience unhindered.

Mehdi Semati

Acknowledgments

Working on Iranian media as an extension of my work in international communication, including the work on this book, has been a rewarding experience in many ways. It has provided me with a deeper appreciation for Iran, its culture, art, and history. I would like to thank the contributors to this book for their part in that. This type of project takes a considerable amount of time and effort because of the logistical challenges (working with language barriers and different academic norms, etc.). However, it has been a labor of love, for nothing else justifies the time and effort. I would like to acknowledge the direct and indirect support I have received from various individuals during the time I spent working on this project. I would like to thank my brother, Dr. Hadi Semati, for his advice and continued support. I should thank my colleagues at EIU for providing a cordial environment conducive to work. Dr. Mark Borzi's support is gratefully acknowledged. Dr. Patty Sotirin continues to be a generous mentor. I would like to thank Dr. Nasser Hadian for his encouragements. I thank colleagues in universities in Iran who have hosted me, especially Dr. Hussein Bashiriyeh. For the intellectual stimulation and support, I would like to thank the Conjunctures group, especially Professors J. Macgregor Wise, Jennifer Slack, John Erni, Gregory Seigworth, Gil Rodman, Jonathan Stern, Briankle Chang, Toby Miller, and Larry Grossberg.

Other family and friends continue to provide loving support. In the United States, I thank Masoud, Susan, Tara, and Saam for being our home away from home and for their loving support. To Philippe Ohanian and his family (especially Sabrina, Juliette, and now Paul) in Paris: merci encore! Mojtahed and Sharzehi families should be thankfully acknowledged. My own family in Iran continues to be the source of inspiration and strength for me. For their love, support, and guidance, I thank my father and my mother. Hadi, Abbas, Nazee, and Sara and their families provide much love and support. I thank them from the bottom of my heart. Finally, my wife and son deserve especial thanks. I want to thank Faezeh, my wife, not just for being a loving partner, a busy engineer, and a devoted mom, but also for being excellent at all of them and even more. I want to thank my son Armin for bringing much joy and love to our lives, and for providing pleasant distractions in my study. Armin, to whom this book is dedicated, is too young to read, but I hope someday he will read this book and be proud of his dad and his Iran.

Living with globalization and the Islamic state

An introduction to media, culture, and society in Iran

Mehdi Semati

"Iran" has become a pressing issue once more in many circles. It has become an object to be feared, a "problem" for the "international community" to solve. National and international media are consumed with images and commentaries on Iran. Yet, even as we see, read, and hear more about Iran, the less we seem to know about Iran.

Recent political developments have made the importance of the Middle East to international affairs and many aspects of national life in numerous countries tragically clear. The Middle East increasingly plays a significant role in various arenas. In the political arena, the politics of the world order and the foreign policy of many nations are touched by developments in the Middle East. In the domain of world economy, the role of the Middle Eastern energy resources including oil and natural gas in shaping the world economy is greater than ever. In the security arena, many of the actions taken by various states in the name of security have had major implications for domestic economic policies and for civil liberties. Recent military interventions in the Middle East and their global fall-out have contributed to this environment in ways that are yet to be fully understood. In such a context, the need to study and comprehend Middle Eastern cultures and contemporary societies has become an urgent issue.

Despite all appearances to the contrary, we know very little about today's Middle East. The parade of "experts" in the popular media, who often lack in-depth knowledge of the languages, cultures, religions, and social complexities of Middle Eastern societies, only masks that troubling reality. Their narratives tend to confirm what we already "know" about the Middle East in the familiar refrain of recurring and incessant conflicts. Is it possible that our characterization of the Middle Eastern political acts, social dynamics, and cultural practices as inscrutable, puzzling, and irrational is a reflection of our ignorance about those societies and their cultures? Why did the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran appear to Western eyes as an unforeseen, bewildering event created by irrational forces? Is it possible that such an event was seen as irrational and inexplicable because it contradicted our narratives of Iran (or its brutal dictator) as "an island of stability" in the region?

Iran's significance in the current political equations in the Middle East is clear. Among the factors that mark Iran's strategic importance are Iran's role in the world energy sector, its political and economic relationships to various states in Central Asia, its adversarial relationship to the United States, its complicated foreign policy postures toward important allies and adversaries of the United States, and the ongoing dispute regarding Iran's alleged interest in developing nuclear weapons. The hostile posture by the present American administration toward the Islamic Republic has raised the stakes even higher. If the infamous labeling of Iran as a member of the "axis of evil" by George W. Bush did not undermine the Islamic Republic, it did betray a certain orthodoxy and an instinctual condemnation of Iran that has become a feature of the American foreign policy approach toward Iran. Successive American administrations since the 1979 Iranian Revolution have tried to contain or undermine the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In spite of those attempts, and arguably because of them, Iran has become even stronger. Ineffective attempts at curtailing Iran's activities in various areas (e.g., defense, trade, science, and engineering) have led to a greater degree of self-sufficiency and resourcefulness. Moreover, recent American policies in the Middle East have been arguably more beneficial to Iran than any other states. The removal of the Taliban in Afghanistan helped Iran achieve one of its objectives. Iranians had been helping the Northern Alliance fight the Taliban long before Americans arrived in Afghanistan. The toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq not only eliminated one of Iran's main adversaries, but also ushered in a new political structure that is arguably closer to Iran than it is to the United States. The Shi'ite majority rule, at least at the present time, seems to be a promising future for Iran's influence in Iraq. That influence is a bargaining chip in terms of Iran's dealings with the United States and the West.

That Iran is positioning itself as a major player in the region is hard to miss. What is easier to overlook is the fact that the Islamic Republic and its leadership have *generally* acted according to a logic that is driven to protect Iran's overall strategic and national interests. The close relationship to Hezbollah in Lebanon and political groups in the Palestinian territories is another indication that the Islamic Republic has been successful in cultivating relationships to its strategic advantage. Iran's engagement with and courting of various states in Central Asia and in the Persian Gulf, sometimes across ideological divides, further demonstrate the operation of that logic. In short, it is clear that Iran is on the rise and its resurgence as a regional power is not accidental. Iran is a pivotal state in the Middle East because it has managed to sustain an Islamic Republic against all odds since 1979. The need to understand Iran has never been more urgent.

Yet, the official narrative of the United States and many other Westerners regarding the Islamic Republic often depicts Iran as a state that is simply ruled by a handful of "mad mullahs." In this context, it is important to examine critically Iranian society and our knowledge of it. It is crucial to ask: What is the image of Iran in the political and popular imagination and in the narratives of media experts and pundits? Labels used to refer to Iran such as "theocratic society," "fundamentalist society," or the notorious "rogue nation" only serve ideological purposes and are devoid of any explanatory value. The United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, a Soviet Union expert no less, has referred to Iran as a "totalitarian state." Such a statement, regardless of its analytical inanity or its political and diplomatic efficacy, masks Iran's reality, which is far more interesting and complex.

One of our objectives in this volume is to dispel such an image of Iran. The field of culture provides a particularly interesting and useful site in that regard. Even a cursory look at the cultural and social life that gives Iranian society its dynamism reveals the inadequacy of the prevailing views on Iran. There are currently over 36 Persian satellite television channels available in Iran, as well as countless channels in other languages. Although the law prohibits the ownership and sale of satellite dishes, the government has refused to enforce these laws strictly for various reasons. Satellite dishes, and their use, remain ubiquitous. Internet growth in Iran has been phenomenal and among the fastest in the world. There are reportedly several hundred thousands of Persian-language weblogs, and that number is increasing daily. Persian comes only third in the ranking of weblogs according to language. The proliferation of Internet cafés has been phenomenal. Iran has a vibrant newspaper industry in terms of production and circulation even in the face of the state's restrictions. The print press has been a battleground for the reformists since the state controls the national broadcasting outlets. Iranian cinema is often praised as the most innovative national cinema in the world today. The presence of women in this industry in various capacities is remarkable. The lively popular music scene in Iran, with officially sanctioned and unauthorized underground concerts and online music festivals, partakes of the global youth culture. The intellectual scene in Iran is as vibrant as they come. Thinkers and arguments from continental philosophy, critical theory, literary criticism, and cultural studies, among others, are translated, disseminated, and engaged in various forums. On other fronts, Iran has met development needs and objectives that are noteworthy by many standards in social development. Currently, more women are graduating from universities in Iran than are men. The 80 percent literacy rate among the general population is quite an accomplishment for Iranian society.[1]

In spite of these realities and similar developments Iran is habitually portrayed as a "theocratic state" that is devoid of any semblance of a dynamic social and cultural life or the trappings of modern existence. That image of Iran, however, masks the unique ways in which Iranian society has engaged modernity and the current wave of globalization, and how it has managed contradictory forces and tendencies.

Indeed, living with contradictory forces and tendencies is a feature of life under the Islamic Republic. The constitution of the Islamic Republic embodies contradictory tendencies insofar as it combines elements of a democratic system with authoritarian rule. On the one hand, the electorates elect the Parliament (*Majlis*), the President, and the Assembly of Experts (clerics who oversee the appointment of the Supreme Leader). On the other hand, much of the political authority rests in the hands of the unelected Supreme Leader. He appoints many positions including the head of judiciary, the head of broadcasting system, and members to the powerful Council of Guardians, which has the power to determine the constitutionality of all laws or to veto the slate of candidates for various elections (e.g., Parliament, President, Assembly of Experts, local city councils).[2] Yet the importance of general elections and parliamentary practices with all their limitations should not be underestimated. The unpredictability in the presidential election during the summer of 2005 is a case in point. It is the merger of this measure of the popular will, exercised in elections, and the cultural dynamism explored in the arguments of this book that has allowed the Iranian political system to maintain itself.

More significantly, that false image of Iran conceals the fact that Iran is one of the few countries in the region with the best chance for producing a democratic system of governance. The "democracy debate" and the discourse of civil society in Iran are responses to the internal socio-political developments that go back to the constitutional revolution of 1906. The democracy debate in Iran stems from an indigenous movement because it is "neither a Western import nor a concession to the West, nor is it the project of the state or the elite foisted on the masses." It is a "popular idea that has developed from within the society."[3] Studying the immediate context for the emergence of the democracy debate and the discourse of civil society[4] in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution is instructive because it demonstrates, on the one hand, the state–society tension and, on the other, the significance of culture.

In outlining this context, we could engage in a project of periodization that divides the post-revolutionary period into four distinct periods or republics.[5] We may refer to these as the war years, the reconstruction era, the reform era, and the post-reform period. The first period covers the immediate aftermath of the Islamic Revolution that overthrew the monarchy and the Iran–Iraq war (1979–1988). Revolutionary fervor, ideological governance, and mass mobilization to support the war efforts marked this era. The primary preoccupation of the government was mass mobilization and the defense of the state against Saddam Hussein's aggressive regime and its Western backers. The second period, inaugurated by the passing of Ayatollah Khomeini and the end of the Iran–Iraq war, covers the post-war reconstruction era under the presidency of Hojatoleslam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989–1997). Economic reform and ending Iran's international isolation, and efforts at reforming the theocracy into a rational governing system were at the heart of the politics of this period.[6] The emergence of the lay Islamic intellectuals (e.g., Abdolkarim Soroush) was an important development in this period. These intellectuals attempted to provide a more progressive Islamic framework for the Islamic Republic, one that would demand reform without questioning the basic tenets of the constitution of the Islamic Republic. The third period (1997–2005), the era of the ascendancy of the reformist government, was inaugurated with a watershed moment in the history of contemporary Iran, namely the election of Hojatoleslam Mohammad Khatami as President in a landslide victory in May 1997. The fourth period began recently with the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as President in June 2005, a period that is poised to be more turbulent than the previous two periods.

The nexus of Iran's social change and political transformations in its recent history and in its future is culture. In this regard, we may point to the role the media have played in each of the post-revolutionary periods, and even in the revolutionary stage.[7] The contribution of "small media" (e.g., audio cassettes, leaflets) to the Iranian Revolution is well known.[8] In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, the eradication of all symbols of the monarchy through a "cleansing" (*paak-sazi*) of Iran's only national broadcasting body, National Iranian Radio Television (NIRT), ushered in the project of "Islamization" of society. The vivid and visible transformation of a national institution that represented the public face of the nation and its governing system embodied and contributed to the massive social transformation that was underway, with all its psychological and ideological implications.[9] During the Iran–Iraq war, the state did its best to deploy media for mass mobilization. The war created an environment in which developing propaganda for the purpose of mass mobilization acquired a certain sense of inevitability.

In the second period of reconstruction, the media provided a space in which alternative views on politics, Islam, and Islamic governance could be articulated. It is also in this period that the origins of the reform movement could be located.[10] Insofar as the broadcasting outlets in Iran are state controlled and reflect the official views associated with the office of the Supreme Leader, the commercial print press played a critical role in the creation of that space. The narrative of the emergence of the reform movement, and the individuals associated with it, is intertwined with the narrative of the trajectory of the post-revolutionary media in Iran. These influential individuals associated with the reform movement were largely former revolutionaries who had become disillusioned with the political developments since the end of the Iran–Iraq war. Moreover, they used print media to launch their political project. Individuals such as Abbas Abdi, Akbar Ganji, and Saeed Hajjarian were "typical members of the reform public intelligentsia" for their connections to the print press and to the reform movement.[11]

Reformists' reliance on the press to launch their campaign in the reconstruction era is well documented. We may cite as examples the individuals associated with the Center for Strategic Studies (*Markaz-e Motaleat-e Strategic*): Saeed Hajjarian, Alireza Alavitabar, and Abbas Abdi. Another example would be the Kiyan circle.[12] *Kiyan*, an influential monthly magazine that started publication in 1991, covered topics such as political theory, philosophy, and religion. It soon became a critical forum for the reformers with the established revolutionary credentials to articulate their vision. *Kiyan* and its contributors came to be known as the "Kiyan circle" for their influential role as opinion leaders and as members of the political elite. Abdolkarim Soroush, a distinguished theoretician of Islamic philosophy, was a major voice associated with this publication. *Kiyan*'s role was significant in two ways. First, by providing the forum for religious intellectuals to seek reform, albeit within a framework that is compatible with the established religious culture and the larger ideological cosmos of the Islamic Republic, it led the way in imagining a different political possibility. Second, the Kiyan circle sometimes functioned as an intellectual link between those who imagined reform within the confines of an Islamic framework and those who imagined reform outside of such a framework. For its contribution to the reform movement, the Kiyan circle has been dubbed the "intellectual engine"[13] of the reform movement.

The third post-revolutionary period was inaugurated with the election of Khatami as President in May 1997. Khatami's platform for presidential election advocated civil society, rule of law, and greater social freedoms, including greater openness for the media. Khatami's platform had appealed to youth, women, and the larger middle class who had been sidelined since their participation in the popular revolution of 1979. His landslide victory was seen as a step in the direction of seeking a government that was more accountable to the people, and not merely reforming the theocracy. As he assumed the office of President, he appointed Ataollah Mohajerani, an academic with a background in Iranian history, as his Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance. This appointment was a considered move insofar as Khatami anticipated that in order to advance his reformist agenda he needed to maintain the popular support that had elected him to the office of the President. He needed media outlets to mobilize that popular support. Furthermore, since the national broadcasting system was under the control of the Supreme Leader and his conservative allies, he needed access to other media to counter the conservative voices opposing his agenda. Khatami's experience as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance during the presidency of Rafsanjani informed his approach to this post, as this Ministry is responsible for issuing licenses for publications. Mohajerani furnished the media outlets which Khatami sought. A flourishing of print publications ensued. By granting licenses for publications, Mohajerani made it possible for a relatively wide range of opinions to be expressed in a variety of publications, leading to a "Prague Spring" in Tehran during the first two years of Khatami's presidency. Although one should not overstate Mohajerani's achievements in this regard, his policies were instrumental in providing the reformists media outlets to advance their agenda. Mohajerani's

> policies, even encouragement, were quite important in paving the way for a flourishing print environment of numerous newspapers and journals, which in the absence of legal oppositional political parties play an important role in informing the public of alternative views and organizing alternative social movements.[14]

The reformists have been effective in deploying the print press to reflect popular discontent, embodying oppositional tendencies, and articulating alternative visions of the social and political orders. However, this should not mean that the conservative forces have relented. During the past few years, the state and its conservative elements within the judiciary have closed more than a hundred newspapers with a reformist political orientation. Nevertheless, we should not forget that the reformist newspapers have been resourceful and resilient, and have often re-emerged in different configurations. In the factional[15] world of Iranian politics, newspapers with affiliations to different factions and power centers function as stages upon which partisan politics is conducted. The larger context for this partisan tension is the century-long struggle for a political system that reflects the popular will.

With the recent election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as President in the summer of 2005 Iran entered its fourth post-revolutionary period. We may refer to this period as the post-reform period. However, that label should not lead us to believe that the concept of reform has been eliminated from the political lexicon in Iranian politics. Rather, it has been subject to contestation and re-articulation. The reformist camp associated with former President Khatami lost the presidency largely because a competing definition of reform emerged during the presidential campaign of 2005. The surprise victory of Mr. Ahmadinejad and the kind of shift it represents in Iranian politics could be explained by exploring the role of culture in the larger political context of the past three presidential elections.

The promises of reform that had been the platform for Mr. Khatami and that had propelled him to presidency were ultimately cultural in a wider sense of the term. Promise of various freedoms, dialogue of civilizations, civil society, and so on, were all in one form or another promises of a more democratic society. As such, they appealed to the middle class and Iranian youth. During the 2005 presidential election, especially the second round, the issues that dominated the campaign were no longer reform in the political-cultural registers. Rather, they were socioeconomic issues. Here the call to “reform” by the “new conservatives” meant a more efficient and competent government, less corrupt politics, and a government that was more attentive to the needs of the economically disadvantaged. The constituency for this rhetoric was no longer the middle class. It was the lower class that had been neglected by the reformists, those who might have found the concern for democracy too abstract to be relevant to the realities of their lives.[16] The emphasis on culture to the exclusion of socioeconomic issues had meant that the reformist platform was no longer appealing to a large constituency. In this context, Khatami’s focus on culture “left an opening for the conservatives to appeal for public support.” That is to say, “The lacuna in Khatami’s program was thus turned into a political advantage for the conservatives.”[17] However, this should not lead us to the conclusion that the rhetoric of reform or the very concept is now defunct. The fact that many of the new conservatives called themselves “reformist fundamentalists” (*osoolgarayan-e eslah-talab*) demonstrates that the idea of “reform” has much political resonance, and that the liberal reformists have to contest its rearticulation.[18]

Moreover, the demographic realities in Iran favor a trend in social transformation that is based in the cultural register. Nearly 70 percent of Iranians are under the age of 30, with no memory of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. More than 67 percent of its 69 million population lives in urban areas. The rapid growth of the number of university students with easy access to information technologies is also significant. The high literacy rate is another notable characteristic of the Iranian population.[19] In short, it will be the young, urban, and educated population with access to information and communication technologies that shapes the future of Iran.

Against this background, this volume argues that existing perspectives on post-revolutionary Iranian society have failed to appreciate the complexity, the paradoxes, and the contradictions that characterize life in contemporary Iran, resulting in a general failure to explain and to anticipate its contemporary social and political transformations.[20] A primary shortcoming is an inadequate appreciation for the significant role of culture in Iranian society and its sociopolitical antagonisms. In the context of restrictions in the political arena, weaknesses of non-state institutions and processes, uneven institutionalization of the exercise of power and the limited space for political expressions and discourse, culture takes on considerable force. In other words, the scope of politics is wider insofar as politics is coterminous with culture. The key to the survival of the Islamic Republic and the relative stability of the Iranian political system, and at the same time to its brighter future, lies in the cultural dynamism that permeates Iranian society.

James Manor (1991), in his study of “Third World” politics, argues that the scope of politics in the Third World is broader because the “political dramas being enacted and the imaginings that occur in the Third World are often concerned with more than just political authority and economic development” (pp. 4–5). Some have taken their cues from such views to provide a study of the political culture in the Islamic Republic.[21] I believe we need to widen the scope of our analysis to the broader category of culture, which includes popular culture and popular political culture. Here the category of culture itself, as understood in cultural studies, is political. Culture in this sense is not simply a matter of aesthetic judgment, values, and tastes. Rather, it is a site for political contestation and struggle, where social relations are reproduced. As a set of practices in everyday life, as “texts” and other acts of representation and structures of meaning, culture is constitutive of the social order.[22] Culture should not escape our attention in the analysis of Iran precisely because it is where social change is making itself palpable.[23]

This volume aims to achieve several objectives. First, we hope to give readers a sense of the cultural dynamism that exists in Iran, one that is not otherwise visible to outsiders. Achieving this objective should dispel the image of Iran as a theocratic and closed state. Second, we aim to provide a picture of the ways in which Iranians live with the constraints and opportunities that are given to them, and how they have productively and creatively managed to live with globalization and the Islamic State. People find ways of “*making do*” with what is available to them, as Michel de Certeau would say. Third, in the course of our analyses we hope to show how Iranian society has managed to negotiate and to embody the tensions of tradition and modernity, theocracy and democracy, isolation and globalization, and other such cultural-political dynamics that escape the explanatory and analytical powers of all-too-familiar binary relations. Fourth, in the course of addressing media, culture, and society in Iran we aim to provide a glimpse of the work on culture and media as practiced by colleagues in the academic community in Iran.

The first part of the book covers a wider range of communication media in Iran. Chapter 1 addresses the press, state, and civil society in Iran. Its analyses reveal not only the dynamics of the press–state relationship in Iran, but also the limitations of the existing perspectives on the interrelationships among civil society, media, and the state. Chapter 2 explores the Internet in Iran and the larger context of its arrival, its growth, and the activities that have made such a growth possible. It also addresses the politics of the Internet in Iranian society. Chapter 3 is an empirical study of media consumption habits by Iranian youth. It addresses patterns of media use for gaining access to political news among young Iranians from a political communication perspective. Chapter 4 discusses rock music in Iran, which has a complicated relationship to pop music in post-revolutionary Iran. Here the intersection of the Internet, popular music, and national identity is particularly noteworthy. Chapter 5 discusses Persian satellite television channels in Iran. It explores the reaction by politicians to this new technology and the long-term impacts it will likely have in Iran. Chapter 6 examines the reception of video technology (videocassette recorders, and films and other forms of entertainment on video) by the public and officials in Iranian society. It uses the moral panic literature to frame that reception. Studying that reception is instructive because it sheds light on the potential reaction by the public and officials to the newer communication technologies. Chapter 7 is a discussion of advertising in post-revolutionary Iran. It examines advertising texts in order to see how they might reflect the political currents of the periods in which they were made. Chapter 8 is devoted to the topic of trends in the contemporary Persian poetry. It places post-revolutionary poetry movements in the larger context of contemporary Persian poetry. Cinema in Iran is an established art form and a cultural practice. For that reason, and given the international high profile of Iranian cinema, this volume has devoted two chapters to this medium. Chapter 9 explores the Iranian émigré cinematic output as a component of Iranian national cinema. This is an oft-neglected topic, even though Iranian cinema is the cultural form that has received the widest scholarly attention. Chapter 10 examines Iranian cinema through a reflection on the theme of absolutism, occasioned by a certain reception of Iranian cinema by Western critics and film markets.

Given the significance of religion in Iranian society, including its cultural and media spheres, the second part of the book is devoted to culture, state, and religion in Iran. Many commentators and media pundits have poorly understood religion and religiosity in Iran. These three chapters explore the intersection of culture, religion, the state, and the social system in which these elements coexist. Chapter 11 examines the discourse of *hijab* (veiling) and its relationship to fundamentalism in Iran. It explores the distinction between cultural Islam and fundamentalist Islam as they relate to the practice of *hijab* and gender relations.

Chapter 12 reflects on contemporary religious intellectualism in Iran. It explores how religious intellectuals have attempted to indigenize some principles of modernity and how they have addressed the global role of religious intellectuals. Chapter 13 discusses levels of secularization in Iranian society. It considers the post-revolutionary state's Islamization projects and their impacts on religiosity. It investigates if secularization is inevitable in Iran in the face of increasing structural and functional differentiation, specialization, and rationalization. The final chapter of the book is an "epilogue" written by a long-time observer of Iranian society, communication, history, and politics. The cultural patterns in this reflection are particularly noteworthy. It is a reflection on Iran through a historical perspective that seeks patterns of the past and present state of affairs in order to anticipate possible directions for the future of Iran.

It is hoped that the arguments and analyses in this volume present a more nuanced picture of Iran, one that begins to capture the complexity of this ancient society. A society that maintains within it an amalgam of the traditional, the modern, and the postmodern, and continues to defy the odds against it, deserves to be studied with fresh perspectives. A society that has managed to sustain the unresolved tension between these competing and contradictory forces in such productive ways will find solutions to its own dilemmas in the near future. We suggest that the cultural dynamism of a resourceful and resilient people holds the key to its brighter future.

Notes

1 This literacy rate represents individuals who are 15 years of age or older. See the country profile for Iran, as provided by The World Bank at www.worldbank.org, which reports 77 percent literacy rate. The US Census Bureau reports the Iranian literacy rate at 79 percent. See the country profile at www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm.

2 There are still more paradoxes that characterize Iranian politics. Among these is the fact that Iran is a highly politicized polity, yet sanctioned political parties do not exist. The various "Islamization" projects by the state have led to increasing secularization. Religious figures have had to bend and amend traditions in order to protect them. Modern institutions coexist with traditional institutions and practices. See Boroujerdi (2001, 2004) for an extended discussion of these and other paradoxes of post-revolutionary Iranian politics.

3 Gheissari and Nasr (2005). See Gheissari and Nasr (2006) for an insightful explanation of the historical context of the struggle for democracy in Iran.

4 For more on the discourse of civil society in Iran, See Kamrava (2001) and Mohammadi (1999).

5 Others have also used the term "republics" to refer to post-revolutionary periods in Iran. See Aras (2001) and Ehteshami (1995).

6 See Gheissari and Nasr (2005), Keddie (2003), Menashri (2001), and Ehteshami (1995).

7 For a discussion of the post-revolutionary media, the state and the prospects for social transformations in Iran see Semati (in press).

8 See Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994) for an analysis of (small) media's role in the Iranian revolution.

9 Many of the NIRT's qualified staff were summarily dismissed, several of its offices

were shut down, and research and programming development came to a halt. NIRT was renamed Voice and Vision of the Islamic Republic (*Seda va Seemay-e Jomhoori Islamee*). For more on details and an assessment of the challenges that NIRT experienced following the revolution, see Mohammadi (2003).

10 See Brumberg (2001), Milani (2005), Sadri (2002), Takeyh (2002).

11 Writing on the reform movement, Sadri (2002) has pointed out that the "ideal typical member of the reform public intelligentsia in *fin de siècle* Iran was a journalist who had left a high or sensitive post in the apparatus of the Islamic Republic around the last decade of the century." His exemplars include Abbas Abdi as "Radical reformer: The ex-editor," Akbar Ganji as "Muckraking reformer: The investigative journalist," and Saeed Hajjarian, "Political reformer: The inveterate editorialist."

12 As Jalaeipour (2002, pp. 219–235) has pointed out, the reformers in this period were organized in three "circles" (*halgheh*): individuals associated with the Center for Strategic Studies, those gathered around Abdolkarim Soroush, and a collection of individuals who had returned to Iran after their studies overseas. Many of these individuals would become involved with the press eventually. See Semati (in press) and Khiabany (Chapter 1, this volume).

13 This is Tabaar's (2005) characterization of the Kiyan circle.

14 Khiabany and Sreberney (2001, p. 207). Among the licenses issued by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance between 1998 and 1999 were two annual publications, 53 quarterlies, 59 monthlies, 27 weeklies, and seven daily newspapers. See Khiabany and Sreberney (2001) for an analysis of the newspaper industry and the discourse of civil society in Iran from 1998 to 2000. For more discussions of the news media during the Khatami years, see Samii (1999, 2001).

15 For analyses of *factional* politics in Iran, see Baktiari (1996) and Moslem (2002).

16 The populism that swept Mr. Ahmadinejad to the office of the President is not unique to Iranian politics (e.g., Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia).

17 Gheissari and Nasr (2006, p. 142). The perceptive analysis in this work delineates the mechanics of the presidential campaign and the larger context for the brief observations made here.

18 We should not fail to mention that the presidential campaign in 2005 was itself a remarkable cultural-political phenomenon. From the sophisticated Western-style media-saturated campaigns, to the fierce rhetoric of the competing candidates, and the intense interest by the populace, it showed that, even with its shortcomings, the electoral politics and the popular political culture of Iran negate Iran's image in the Western imaginary as a totalitarian state.

19 For information on the population characteristics, see the country profile for Iran, as provided by The World Bank, at www.worldbank.org. According to Rahim Ebadi, Head of Iran's Youth Organization, there are 16.5 million pupils, and 1.7 million university students in Iran (as of 2003). See the report by Payvand News at www.payvand.com/news/03/sep/1143.html.

20 For exploration of these paradoxes as they relate to the political structures and decision-making in Iran, and the failure of the American political class to appreciate complexities in the Iranian sociopolitical system, see the insightful analysis by Takeyh (2006).

21 See, for example, Farsoun and Mashayekhi's (1992) volume on political culture in the Islamic Republic.

22 This notion of culture, as John Frow and Meaghan Morris (1993) have argued, depends upon a theoretical paradox because it "presupposes an opposition (between culture and society, between representation and reality) which is the condition of its existence but which it must constantly work to undo. Both the undoing of these oppositions, and the failure ever completely to resolve the tension between them, are constitutive of work in cultural studies" (p. xx).

23 Stuart Hall has stated that the reasons for studying culture in his analysis of the

politics of the 1950s and 1960s in England included the following: “First, because it was in the cultural and ideological domain that social change appeared to be making itself most dramatically visible. Second, because the cultural dimension seemed to us not a secondary but a constitutive dimension of society” (quoted in Procter 2004, p. 14). I do not mean to suggest that the Iranian context is identical to that of the British context. I merely want to point out the significance of culture in explicating the political context, especially since the scope of politics is wider in a society such as Iran.

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Part I

New and old media in Iran

1 The Iranian press, state, and civil society

Gholam Khiabany

Introduction

Much has been said and written about the changing structure and nature of politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran since May 1997. Changes in Western perception of Iran as well as the Iranian press have been explicitly related to the election of the "moderate" clergyman, Mohammad Khatami. The presidential election turned out to be even bigger than expected. A record 88 percent of eligible voters, the biggest of all in presidential elections and only second in terms of popular participation in any election since 1979, did cast their votes.[1] Khatami had the backing of 69 percent of the voters. Since then the concept of civil society and its relationship to the state has become a growing concern among Iranian intellectuals. The press, in the absence of a proper political party system, has become a key space wherein the debates about the nature of political participation and the contours of the public sphere can be articulated. President Khatami was elected in 1997 with promises of greater press freedom and more diversity, and this was an important part of his election manifesto and one of the main reasons for his success. Yet the recent period has been full of contradictions, with an increase in the number of licensed titles immediately following his victory, but also a campaign of growing vehemence against the press. The censoring and closing of newspapers, the harassment and arrest of journalists have become only too familiar in the past few years. The advocacy of "civil society" by the pro-Khatami press forced the conservative press and the proponents of conservatives' policy to retaliate. The new political space that emerged after 1997, however, was inextricably linked with government, and as the continuing struggle over the press demonstrates, the arena of competition among various social, economic, and regional interests. "Civil society" did depend very much on the state and did not last long as the two pillars of Khatami's reform (the rule of law and civil society) were unreal and so easily crumbled in the face of the realities of Iran.

This chapter suggests that in order to understand the rise and fall of a dynamic press environment in recent years and their role in democratization, we should take into consideration the two contradictory elements enshrined in the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution, various political programs, and competing interests. In addition, and in order to move beyond the current discourse which reduces the whole complex struggle for the free press to a simple division between state versus civil society, we need to look at the complex nature of political communication in Iran and the presence of the towering figure of the state in the press market.

Revisiting civil society

For more than two decades now, the concept of "civil society" has been on the agenda across the globe. This notion has a very long history and first figured in the writings of classical political philosophers to theorize the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the transformations within Europe. More recently, it emerged after the collapse of the Soviet bloc to describe the rise of democratic movements in Central and Eastern Europe and since then in Asia, South America, and Africa to describe the rise in democratic fervor across the world. To be sure, the emergence of "civil society" in recent years cannot be simply explained in exactly the same terms as in the earlier usage since no one can argue that we are experiencing a transition to capitalism from feudalism. However, it is also hard to deny that the recent resurgence of the notion coincides with "globalization" which, as Dirlik has suggested, if it "means anything, it is the incorporation of societies globally into a capitalist modernity, with all the implications of the latter economic, social, political, and cultural" (2003, p. 275).

The revival of the concept of "civil society" in recent years, while certainly reflecting, in parts, movements for democratization at the global level, should not obscure the current intellectual fashions and increased "consensus" over the "multiplicity" of social life in so-called "post-modern" and "new" times. Detached from its historical context, civil society has come to be regarded as an all-encompassing and ahistorical concept (Sparks, 1994). As Wood has argued: "However constructive this idea may be in defending human liberties against state oppression, or in making out a terrain of social practices, institutions and relations neglected by the 'old' Marxist left, 'civil society' is now in danger of becoming an alibi for capitalism" (1995, p. 238). Wood suggests that the concept of civil society encompasses a very wide range of institutions and relations, and has been mobilized to so many purposes that it is difficult to identify a single school of thought. Nevertheless, there are two common themes which have emerged in recent discussion. The first one identifies civil society as an arena of freedom and autonomy outside the state, and the place for plurality or even conflict safeguarded by "formal democracy." The second identifies the economy (capitalist system) as only one of the many equally important spheres in *complex* (post) modern society (p. 242). A very good example that combines the two themes is evident in the work of John Keane, one of the most passionate advocates of the concept of civil society. In his view:

> Modern civil societies have comprised a constellation of juxtaposed and changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, an essen-

> tial core or generative first principle. They have included capitalist economies and households; social movements and voluntary public spheres (churches, organizations of professionals and independent communications media and cultural institutions); political parties, electoral associations and other "gatekeepers" of state–civil society division; as well as "disciplinary" institutions such as schools, hospitals, asylums and prisons.
>
> (Keane, 1988, pp. 19–20)

But it is difficult to suggest that all these "institutions of civil society" have comparable social power and it is not obvious why a democratic political life should depend on promoting all the elements of the above list. Furthermore such analysis neglects the very simple truth that some of the institutions of "civil society" such as hospitals are situated and organized within a capitalist economy, which "profoundly affected the organization of health care and the nature of medical institutions" (Wood, 1995, p. 245). Such accounts also neglect the fact that at least in some countries the "institutions of civil society" such as hospitals are controlled by the state, and as Sparks notes (1994, p. 33), it is not so obvious why in the case of Britain, for example, "the privatization of medical care (i.e., its transfer back into civil society) would represent an advance for democracy."

Recent proponents of civil society arguments fail to acknowledge the existing blurred boundaries between public/private, and state/civil society. The only logic that brings such heterogeneous lists of institutions under the same roof is a severe binary thinking that reduces everything into the state/non-state binary of free market ideology. Only a truly reductionist "concept" can give equal weight to the London or New York Stock Exchange and a refugee support group, and claim that the latter "institution of civil society" profoundly affects the nature of the financial market, exactly in the same way that market forces effect the "displacement" of people.

The concept, while providing little understanding of the harsh and totalizing realities of social life in contemporary societies, has been used nevertheless as a weapon to resist the coercive power of authoritarian regimes in a number of countries. This is certainly true to some extent in developing countries where the state is the source of most, if not all, power in society. In such a context where the separation of the "economic" and "political" sphere is not as "advanced" as in developed countries, "economic struggle has been inseparable from political conflict," and, "the state, as a more visibly centralized and universal class enemy, has served as a focus of mass struggle" (Wood, 1995, p. 46). Yet it is no accident that the concept of civil society that has propelled questions of the separation of the public and private, and the rule of law have coincided with the neo-liberal revolution in economic and social policy. Iran is a case in point.

Reform and civil society debate in Iran

The new reform movement that emerged in 1997, as Ashraf and Banuazizi (2001) have suggested, did not arise in a political or ideological vacuum. The context was the erosion of legitimacy of the ruling clerics, a considerable rise of a distinctly new interpretation of Islam by a number of intellectuals, the re-emergence of the radical wing of the regime that had been undermined and marginalized after the end of the war with Iraq, unending and increasing popular revolts of an overwhelmingly young population against restrictive cultural policies of the Islamic Republic, and of course a crippling economic crisis and economic policies of "structural adjustment" and reconstruction which began after the end of war.

The reform movement inside the Islamic regime, while always strong, essentially took off after the end of the war with Iraq and Ayatollah Khomeini's death, a period that Ehteshami has dubbed the Second Republic. According to him, it was only after Khomeini that "development of any independent political institution could really effectively take place," since his style of leadership and his supremacy of power did not allow for such development (1995, p. 27).

The process of reconstruction and reform had begun with the election of Rafsanjani as President in 1989. His major economic offering immediately after taking up his post was an IMF reform package that included exchange-rate unification, increased fiscal discipline, deregulation of trade and foreign trade, attraction of foreign investment, and privatization (Ehteshami, 1995; Karbassian, 2000). Denationalization of foreign trade occurred in 1989 as a result of the powerful lobby of *Bazzaris* and also a ruling by the Guardian Council that suggested the state monopoly of foreign trade is "contrary to Islam" (see Ehteshami (1995) for more detailed discussion of reform in this period).

Liberalization policy, however, met with a number of major political obstacles. By 1996 the Iranian Rial was devalued by a staggering 192 percent (from $1=IR600 to $1=IR1,750); prices were still controlled, privatization was limited, the so-called public foundations remained untouchable, unaccountable, and exempt from tax, and the state was still dominant in the economy. According to Behdad (2000), GNP per capita in 1996 was only 73 percent of the 1977 level. This substantial decline of the standard of living, despite all the early promises about self-reliance, prosperity, and redistribution of resources, was nothing less than a time bomb threatening the very existence of the Islamic Republic. People were restless, and a large section of the Iranian bourgeoisie, battered and bruised for much of the "revolutionary" period, used the Trojan horse of "civil society" to begin to argue for deregulation, political and economic liberalization, and privatization. In addition to failures of economic reform Rafsanji's presidency was marked, as many reformists later began to argue, with much needed parallel political reform. Yesteryear revolutionaries who had been marginalized since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini echoed such calls.

In 1997 Khatami moved the idea of "civil society" (*jame-i madani)* to the center stage of political debate in Iran. Yet the response to this call for "civil society," rule of law, and so on has been anything but uniform. A large collection of different groups of political intellectuals, who gathered under the umbrella of the concept of civil society, and welcomed his call for a parallel political reform next to economic liberalization, share a critique of the ruling political system, but differ in their definition of civil society and its relationship with the state. For some the crucial issue is that of facilitating expanding commodity relations and relegating social relations to market forces (Rashidi, 1998; Ziba-Kalam, 1998). The dichotomy of modernity and tradition and the rationalization of social relations loom large in other definitions, where civil society is unimaginable without overcoming tradition, demystification, secularization, and especially the end of state interference in the relationship between individuals and the family (Bazargani, 1998; Mahruyan, 1998). A significant aspect of this "cultural" definition of "civil society" in Iran has revolved around the idea of "cultural modernity" (Ashuri, 1998b), which abandons certain traditional practices and institutions (including that of the role of supreme jurist in Iran) and even challenges the very notion of *Umma* since it is monolithic and contradictory to the plurality of identities embedded in the idea of "civil society" (Mohammadi, 1999). Meanwhile, the other current urges for the end of "disorder," "chaos" and "revolution," and advocates a restructuring of power in ways that allow participation by different interest groups, a political pluralism, and tolerance (Ashuri, 1998a; Sahabi, 1998; Yazdi, 1998). The emphasis on the "rule of law" in the debate about "civil society," according to Kamrava, implies "both directly and indirectly, a primary role for the state." This very fact and the promotion of the idea of "civil society" by factions within the Islamic Republic clearly reflects the intimate relationship between the Iranian state and "civil society" (Kamrava, 2001, p. 167).

The promotion of the concept of "civil society" by factions within the Islamic Republic is the clearest indication that the dominant political Islam had all but run its course by the 1990s. Nevertheless, what is interesting is a fascinating case of historical amnesia in the arguments and writings of the reformists. The current debate about "open society" and "civil society" is filled with arguments against the absence of "law and order" and respect for legal rights guaranteed by the constitution. What is interesting is that many of the reformist writers (Baghi, 1999, 2002; Ganji, 1999, 2000; Ghachani, 2000a, 2000b; Jalaeipour, 2000a, 2000b) despite some clear differences in their methodologies and approaches, skate over the first decade of the Islamic Republic. This period was dominated, especially in the early years, by a strong presence and oppositions to Islamic Republic from secular organizations. The roles these groups played in the revolutionary uprising of 1979 and the continuous struggle for democratization, as well as the brutal ways in which they were silenced, have been ignored by these writers.

The period 1979 to 1989 was also a decade in which the key feature of the Islamic Republic, as all reformist writers agree, was the "charismatic leadership" of Ayatollah Khomeini. Reformists cannot simply question the validity of Khomeini's leadership. There might be arguments over who represents the "floor" and who represents the "ceiling" of the reform movement (Ganji, 2000). However, even the most radical of reformists cannot (not openly anyway) target Ayatollah Khomeini as the "floor." He and his legacy is the "ceiling," and the debate has revolved around not questioning the wisdom of his leadership, but "reinventing" him (Brumberg, 2001).

In addition, we also have to remember that during these years Iran was engaged in a long and bloody war with Iraq. Questioning this period also casts doubt over the reasons for the continuation of the war. Questioning the war effort also means questioning the current reformists who enjoyed their dominant position in Islamic state because of their instrumental role in "holy defense." It was after the Islamic Republic acceptance of the UN resolution and the beginning of "reconstruction" that their services were not as valued as before. The crisis of the Islamic state was in part reflecting the "crisis of identity" of this group.

Furthermore, and not surprisingly, the debate over civil society, while clearly important in democratic struggle, is a strategy that is linked to an attempt to influence the reform movement, and offers a prescription for the ills of Iranian society, which sees liberalization of the economy as the perfect remedy and not democratization (Mokhtari, 1998). This is no more obvious than in the writings of one of the most outspoken reformists, Akbar Ganji. One of his most recent books entitled *Constructive reformation* (2000) is peppered throughout with quotes from Popper, Berlin, and Hayek. He is advocating Popper's philosophy of "open society," as well as Hayek's belief in the market as the desired arbitrators of all social relations, and as such he is in favor of the privatization of everything. Therefore, as the late Mukhtari (one of the victims of recent rogue killings) pointed out, it does not come as a surprise that all of these are in favor of "depoliticization" which is a necessary condition for "liberalization." "Law," "order," respect for "constitution," and the call for the end of "chaos" are used not only to fend off "disorderly" conservatives – and with some positive democratic effect – but also to support the law of the market and collapsing these two ideas together. A further slippage then comes with equating them to civil society and democratic reform.

The Iranian press and civil society

Increasingly the press in Iran has come to be hailed and defined as the "fourth estate" (*Rokn-e Chaharom*). This conceptualization of the media is effectively another "elite theory of the media" that sees the media as part of the legislative process. There is nothing in the theory itself, or in the vague sense that media and politicians have used the term in Iran, as to where the external responsibility of the press lies. The term clearly recognizes a political function for the press, but as Sparks (1995) suggests, it "is silent about the relationship between the media and other forms of power and has nothing to say about relations of power which might exist within the media themselves" (p. 51). However, under the banner of "civil society" and the press as a "fourth estate," a new movement for democratization in Iran began to define itself in the 1990s. The battle between the "reformists" and "conservatives" in Iran is also a battle over the definition, the role, and the control of the media.

President Khatami was elected in 1997 with promises of greater press freedom and more diversity; this was an important part of his election manifesto and one of the main reasons for his success. Khatami was also aware that since conservatives controlled the national broadcasting organization, *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (IRIB), he himself badly needed a sympathetic press, which would gather support for his policies. After taking office in August 1997, he appointed Ataollah Mohajerani as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the key person in charge of regulating the press and culture. He promptly restored the licenses of a number of publications, removed many of the restrictions on the press, and paved the way for a spectacular flourishing of a pro-Khatami press. In the absence of legal oppositional political parties, the press played an important role in spreading the message of reform.

The "new cultural and political atmosphere" was even reflected in the titles of the new press. In opposition to conservative dailies such as *Resalat* (Prophetic Mission) and *Jumhouri-e Eslami* (Islamic Republic) colorful titles emerged such as *Jameh* (Society), *Neshat* (Joy), *Mellat* (Nation), *Azad* (Free), *Mosharekat* (Participation), *Fath* (Victory), *Hughug Zanan* (Women's Rights), *Rah-e No* (New Path), *Hayat-e No* (New Life), *Bahar* (Spring), *Goonagun* (Variety), and many more.

A closer look at the number of licenses awarded by the Press Supervisory Board to different groups and individuals to run publications in Iran provides a clearer picture of the realities and dilemmas of the press in Iran under Khatami (see Table 1.1). In just one year during 1998 to 1999, the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance licensed 168 new publications, including seven daily newspapers, 27 weeklies, 59 monthlies, 53 quarterlies, and two annual publications. The Ministry stressed that its policy was based on "expanding legalized freedoms and increasing the number of publications" (IRNA, 29 August 1999). According to another report published in the quarterly *Rasaneh* (Medium), by March 1998, nearly one year after Khatami's victory, the number of publications that were granted a license had reached 1,055. By then there were 828

Table 1.1 Number of licenses given by PSB between 1990–2000*

Year	*% of accepted application*	*Number of licenses*
1990–92	18.9	282
1993	4.6	69
1994	4.7	70
1995	7.1	105
1996	7.8	116
1997	18.9	281
1998	11.4	168
1999	22.4	333
2000	4.2	62
Total	100	1,486

Note
*For more information on licensing by PSB in the 1990s see Bahrampour (2002).

publications available in the market, while 227 had not printed a single copy despite having a license; a further 615 were in the process of applying for a license.

As Siavoshi (1997) suggests, conventional views on Iran have been based on the assumption that sharply divided societies lack tolerance, and the polarization between state and society as a whole prompts the state to use more coercive force (p. 525). Such severe binary views fail to acknowledge the division within the state and society. The history of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the crisis of legitimacy that was put on show during and after the 1997 presidential election illustrate the need for an alternative explanation of the complex relationship between the state and society. One cannot explain the limited, if inconsistent, diversity and the place of the press in Iran by such a broad generalization about state and society relationships. Furthermore, rather than seeing the relation between state and religion in terms of theological (ideological) considerations of the *ulema*, we need to acknowledged crucial institutional interests of divided *ulema* and the continuing struggle to claim the monopoly of economic capital and means of symbolic violence. In this respect a closer examination of the press in relation to the dichotomy of the state and civil society is needed.

In a country where historically the press has emerged as an agent of modernization, and where the process of "modernization" is a top-down and by definition authoritarian process, the link between the state and the press is inevitable. Therefore, in the newspaper market the state has been a major competitor and in most cases it has been the dominant player. A number of factors have contributed to the dominance of the state in this sector. In the first place the economic realities of the press industry, and the associated risks in producing a newspaper with little or no tradition of democracy, is not an attractive prospect for the private sector. Heavy and expensive machinery, lack of proper distribution networks (roads, rail), difficulties in producing viable and credible newspapers where there is no political and social accountability and transparency are a major turn-off for private investors. In such a context, the state is automatically in the driving seat. Resources, necessary capital, labor, distribution networks (especially when nationalized), and the essential factor of access to state institutions and governmental departments as a major source of news are in no way a major obstacle for the state. Massive investment of the state in creating major publication firms in Iran (such as *Keyhan* and *Ettela'at*) is a good example. In this sense Iran is not an exceptional case. According to Mirzaie (1998), the majority of the scholarly, scientific, and social-cultural periodicals in Iran are controlled and owned by the state. Of an average of 130 publications in these categories, generally more than 70 are controlled by the state. Figures released by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance provide further evidence (see Table 1.2).

This is a rather distorted figure for a number of good reasons. It only covers the period of renewed struggle for democratization, which has been helped by (and has helped) the semi-independent press or oppositional publications. Many "natural persons" are current and former government officials using the press as

Table 1.2 Authorized press, by concessionaire 1996–2000

Year	*Total*	*Natural persons*	*Government organizations and institutions*	*Non-government organizations and institutions*
1996	662	338	223	101
1997	800	444	239	117
1998	905	523	254	128
1999	1,018	610	268	140
2000	1,207	724	290	193

an organ to mobilize the popular support for their own ends. The word “private” does not necessary mean “commercial” in the classical sense or as is understood in the European context. Finally, many of the “non-governmental organizations” are directly or indirectly linked to the state apparatus. Nevertheless, in a period of about four years, the volume of authorized press has doubled and “private” titles have been the main beneficiary of this trend.

Second, in the absence of legal political parties, the press does carry the burden of and act as surrogate party. In the case of Iran (with a few exceptions in times of political turmoil) even some of the oppositional press is somehow linked to the different factions of the government. Such press hardly qualifies as either independent or non-governmental. Granted, they might and indeed do challenge the “dominant” factions, but their level of opposition and “independence” depends on their distance from the center of power. The majority of the reformist press in Iran does fall into this category. Neither political orientation nor affiliation of the press to political parties or “projects” is new or unusual in Iran.

Economic resources available to publications that are linked directly with state and government departments work in favor of such papers and against the semi-independent press. Subsidies in various forms (foreign exchange, papers, tax exemption, and so on) are distributed unevenly. Four major and bestselling dailies, *Keyhan*, *Ettela’at* (both regarded as “public property” and their managing directors are appointed by the supreme leader), *Hamshahri* (owned by Tehran Town Hall) and *Iran* (owned by the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)) swallow up more than 60 percent of foreign exchange subsidies. All have massive financial, technical, and transport facilities and the two biggest (but not the bestselling) dailies *Keyhan* and *Ettela’at* (the longest running newspapers in Iran) have their own modern printing press.

There is competition for the two main sources of income: subscription and advertising (Rezaie, 1998). State newspapers can and do keep the price of a single copy of their papers as low as possible.[2] Because of their unfair advantage, neither circulation nor losing money is their prime concern. In contrast, and in addition to increasing the price of their product, other publications either have to tackle the most controversial and sensitive political subjects or give prominent coverage to sensational and popular entertainment stories, none of which have been viable options. Both areas are sensitive, the first one for political reasons, the second for "moral" reasons. Both routes have been closed to newspapers with brutal force.

Income from advertising is similarly problematic as the major four dailies receive a big chunk of advertising revenue. In addition to the quality of print (color print) the big four, especially *Hamshahri* (the bestselling daily which carries more classified adverts than other papers), attract all announcements, projects and jobs of Tehran's town hall, and *Iran* as official "state advertisers" are in the driving seat (Mohammadi, 1998; Rezaie, 1998). More than 300 authorized advertising agencies produce the big chunk of adverts in Iranian newspapers. While the percentage of advertising revenue has increased since the end of the war, especially from the mid-1990s onward, still (in contrast to developed countries) less than 50 percent of the income of newspapers comes from advertising. We should also note the added twist in terms of major competition from television and other media. Rezaie (1998) estimates that advertising a product on television is 14 times cheaper (than advertising in *Hamshahri*) while television attracts 25 times more audience numbers. All these technical costs, distribution costs (where up to 40 percent of the price of a single copy is claimed by distributors), and political and economic instabilities make the press market in Iran a very risky one. Yet there is clear evidence (judging by the increased demand for cultural products and the flourishing of Iranian cinema, the emergence of exciting new publications, and the battle over the control of satellite and the Internet) that the state is incapable of catering for or even controlling the culture sector. The same factors and much more do prevent the existence of a healthy press market. The combination of all these factors has led to a relatively high newspaper cost. This in turn prices the newspapers out of the reach of many Iranians.

Any attempts at understanding the development of the press (or lack of it in Iran), their role in democratization as well as the current struggle for reform should take into consideration these realities of the press market, competing political programs, and the historical amnesia to which I referred earlier. In addition, and in order to move beyond the current discourse which reduces the whole complex struggle for the free press to a simple division between "reformist" (or *moderate* as it is known in the mainstream media in the West), and "conservative" wings of the Islamic Republic, we need to look at wider changes in Iranian society and the forces behind the emergence of the "civil society" movement.

Factional politics and the press

While Iran lags behind many of the Middle Eastern countries in terms of access to the media, it has one of the most vibrant press cultures in the region (see Table 1.3). Circulation of newspapers in Iran still remains well below the 100 copies per 1,000 inhabitants recommended by UNESCO in 1961. However, in terms of the titles of all countries in the region only Turkey has more dailies

Table 1.3 Access to communications in selected Middle Eastern countries

Country	*Number of telephones (per 1,000)*	*Cellular mobiles (per 100)*	*Estimated PCs (per 100)*	*Internet users (per 1,000)*	*Number of radio receivers (per 1,000)*	*Number of television receivers (per 1,000)*	*Number of daily newspapers*	*Circulation (per 1,000)*	*GDP per capita (PPP US$)*
Qatar	275	43.72	18.30	65.6	450	404	4	146	18,789
United Arab Emirates	340	75.88	14.06	314.8	335	134	8	140	17,935
Kuwait	208	67.95	12.06	87.9	678	505	9	387	15,799
Bahrain	267	58.33	16.40	203.4	580	472	3	126	15,084
Saudi Arabia	145	21.72	13.02	13.4	321	262	12	58	11,367
Turkey	285	34.75	4.46	60.4	178	330	57	110	6,974
Tunisia	109	5.13	3.06	41.2	224	100	8	30	6,363
Iran	**169**	**3.35**	**7.50**	**15.6**	**263**	**71**	**32**	**26**	**5,884**
Algeria	61	1.28	0.77	6.5	242	105	8	51	5,308
Lebanon	187	22.70	8.05	77.6	907	375	14	110	4,308
Jordan	129	22.89	3.75	45.2	271	82	4	47	3,966
Egypt	104	6.85	1.71	9.3	317	119	15	38	3,635
Morocco	41	20.91	1.54	13.7	247	115	20	24	3,546
Sudan	14	0.59	0.61	1.8	272	86	5	24	1,797

than Iran. This diversity has more to do with the peculiar nature of the 1979 Revolution, its important consequences, and the nature and structure of polity that was born in the aftermath of the revolution. There are three main and interrelated reasons for the existence of limited diversity in titles and perspectives: the class nature of the Iranian Revolution; the nature of the *Shi'a*; and the process of accumulation of capital and the lack of total control of economic capital by the dominant faction.

It is worth remembering that the 1979 Revolution was a popular, urban, multi-class revolution that brought together a wide range of social groups and united them against a common enemy that was the Shah. It was a modern revolution that used modern forms of struggle such as demonstrations, general strikes, and in the climax of the uprising in February 1979, armed struggle and occupation of key places and institutions that included the television center. It also created modern institutions such as *komiteh* (committees) and *shura* (councils) in factories, schools, universities, neighborhoods and so on, as well as a range of modern associations and trade unions and guilds. However, the popular alliance that emerged against the Shah could not sustain itself either politically or ideologically. The end of the monarchy was in many ways the only thing that the various social groups had in common. The collapse of a popular, broad-based coalition was an inevitable result of the complex class structure of revolution. In this respect, the 1979 Revolution was not a unique experience. This was the repeat of the previous major social movements, most notably the Constitutional Revolution (1906) and the 1951 to 1953 oil nationalization struggles (Foran, 1991). The unique feature of the recent experience, however, is that the erosion of the 1979 popular alliance has not sent any of the participant social groups packing. Workers, women, and ethnic minorities have nothing to show for their magnificent efforts in 1979 and are still pressing for the two main aims of the revolution that are yet to be realized: *Esteghlal va Azadi* (Independence and Freedom). The vibrant press culture in Iran reflects this reality.

The second important reason for the existing diversity in Iran has to do with the nature of *Shi'a*, the multi-pole sources of power and legitimacy within the *Shi'a* structure, and the crucial issue of the economic structure, which sustains the various factions inside the Islamic Republic. The key reason for the diversity within the *Shi'a* structure and the existing *sources of emulation* was the very specific forms of religious tax (most notably *khoms* and *Zekat*) paid to selected *ulema*. One of the key reasons for the confrontation between the clergy and the Pahlavi dynasty in the 1930s (despite their collaboration in the 1920s) was precisely over (not as it is usually assumed competing "values" and "worldviews" but) strong institutional interests which included taxation and the monopoly of "economic capital." In the process of modernization and state building in the 1930s, Reza Shah started reforming education, the judicial system, and taxation. In all of these, he managed to seriously weaken the clergy as a rival source of social authority (Gill and Keshavarzian, 1999). This is a point that is conveniently ignored by the modernization school and Islamism in the way that they frame the church–state conflict as a dichotomy between tradition and modernity, with religion usually falling into the category of tradition.

Shi'a clergy's claim over the monopoly of violence after 1979, crucial as it was, did not solve the monopoly over "economic capital." Immediately after the revolution, the new state began nationalization and confiscation of large-scale private property. These were put under the control of Para-governmental institutions that are under the control of the supreme leader (Saeidi, 2001). The existence of these institutions known as *Bonyad* (Foundation)[3] has made the borders between public and private very ambiguous. These foundations, as Khajehpour (2000) argues, operate in the grey area between the public and private sector. It is estimated that these foundations own some 20 percent of the asset base of the Iranian economy with a 10 percent contribution to the country's GDP. In some estimates, they are as large as the government itself (Zangeneh, 2003). Undoubtedly, these are a major obstacle for the "rationalization" of political authority in Iran and one of the main reasons for the failure of liberalization policy and the inability of the Islamic Republic to define and legitimize a new social order (Behdad, 2003). These foundations dispense their huge profits by paying war veterans, families of martyrs, advancing Islamic causes in various parts of the world, and promoting the welfare of the Islamic community as they see fit. They are important economic and political resources for the ruling elites and interested factions.

Another factor that contributes to the nature of the press and political communication is undoubtedly television and the struggle to shape and control the flow of information. In Iran, television is controlled by the supreme leader and, according to the Islamic Republic's Constitution, must be used as a tool to "serve the diffusion of Islamic culture" and must "strictly refrain from diffusion and propagation of destructive and anti-Islamic practices." Since the supreme leader controls the state television, a president or other state officials have to resort to the press. This contrast between the relationship of television and the press to power is neither unique nor peculiar to Iran (see Chalaby, 1998).

All the above factors contribute to the formation of a "state within a state" and help to maintain the limited diversity and survival of the press in a country where the advertising market or the size of readership is not big. Therefore, the state in its various forms has been the main enemy as well as the main facilitator of communication channels in Iran. Various factions have specific economic, political, and cultural agenda and their views are expressed in their official and unofficial organs. Broadly speaking, there are four main trends within the Islamic regime (Siavoshi, 1997; Zarifi-Nia, 1999).

First, there is the tendency known as the Traditional Right (*Rast-e Sonati*) and at the heart of it is *Motalefeh* (The Islamic Coalitionary Society) dominated by the *Bazararis*. The key person within this faction is Asgharoladi who has held various posts including Minister of Commerce, deputy speaker of the *Majlis* and as a presidential candidate. He is a member of the supervisory council of the Relief Aid Committee and director and founder of the *15th Khordad* Foundation. Another key figure is Mohsen Rafighdost who was a key member and administrator of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards during the Iran–Iraq war and for a long time director-general of the Oppressed Foundation (Mohammadi, 2003). This group holds extreme religious, cultural, and business views, and their views are published in the daily *Resalat* (Prophetic Mission) and monthly *Shoma* (You).

The second group, the Modern Right, are well placed on the right of the economic spectrum, but differ from the Traditional Right in their cultural outlook, and favor a more pragmatic approach to cultural matters. The figurehead of this group is Rafsanjani, the second most powerful man in the entire history of the Islamic Republic with various business links. Called by his close associates the "Generalissimo of Reconstruction," he has been the speaker of *Majlis*, president, and currently head of the Expediency Council. This group has gathered in and around it a group called the Executives of Reconstruction of Iran, and their views are expressed in *Hamshahri* (Fellow countryman) and *Iran* (published by IRNA).

The third current, labeled the Traditional Left, share the political conservatism of the Traditional Right and are in favor of total Islamization of public and private life in Iran and bringing all aspects of public life under *Shari'a*. However, they oppose liberalization policies and seek greater intervention of the state in the economy. Two newspapers express the views of this group: *Keyhan* (Galaxy) and *Enghelab-e Eslami* (Islamic Revolution).

The final current, the Modern Left, is a broad spectrum of activists who were marginalized after Ayatollah Khomeini's death. Like the Traditional Left, they favor substantial state intervention in the economy, but they are the group who have responded to popular pressure from below for liberalization of cultural sphere. Members of the Association of Militant Clergy and another influential group called the Organization of the Warriors of the Islamic Revolution (*Sazeman Mojahedin-e Enghelab Eslami*) are associated with this current. Among key members of this current are Karoubi, the speaker of the Sixth *Majlis*, and Hajarian, the key architect of Khatami's election campaign. Their views are expressed in a range of reformist journals including the now defunct *Kiyan*, *Salam* (Greeting), *Asr-e Ma (Our Era), Sobh-e Emrouz* (This Morning), *Khordad*, and *Mosharekat* (Participation), the official organ of the Participation Front. In the absence of real political parties (Fairbanks, 2003), these groupings and their publications have acted as a surrogate. Their existence and survival all depend on financial resources, loyal agents, and various familial, political and economic networks.

Such close links between the various factions of the ruling elite and the press is even more evident in the formation of the reformist tendencies and their organs. Before 1997, reformists and advocates of civil society inside the regime were essentially organized into three circles (*halghah*) (Jalaeipour, 2000a). The first, gathered around one of the most influential Muslim intellectuals in Iran, Abdulkarim Soroush, argued openly for "civil society" and "political development" (*towse-h siasi*). The monthly *Kiyan* under the editorship of Mashalah Shamsolvaezin, who later edited four of the most influential reformist papers, was the unofficial organ of this circle. The second circle was the "Center for Strategic Studies" (*Markaz-e Motaleat-e Strategic*) where researchers and activists such as Saeed Hajarian and Alireza Alavitabar (both later involved in the *Sobh-e Emrouz* newspaper as managing director and editor), and Abbas Abdi who later became editor-in-chief of *Salam* (Greeting), and then *Mosharekat* (Participation) were among the key players. Views of this group were regularly published in publications such as the monthly *Rahbourd* and the fortnightly *Asr-e Ma* (Our Era), and later in newspapers with wider appeal and circulation such as *Salam*, *Hamshahri* (Fellow Citizen), and *Iran*. Around 2,500 students who, after the war and during Rafsanjani's presidency, went to England, Australia, France, and Canada to obtain their PhDs basically formed the third circle. Among these were Mohammad-Reza Khatami (brother of President Khatami) and Mohsen Mirdamadi. Both played a crucial role in establishing the Mosharekat Front and its publication *Mosharekat*, and topped the list of elected Members of Parliament in Tehran constituency in the 2000 parliamentary election.

Judging by associations of these circles with specific organs, it is not surprising that the reform movement in Iran is strongly associated with the press. This relation has been perceived as "an extreme case of negative politicization in which the arena of constitutional politics shifts away from the parliament as the main legislative organ to the press and informal channels of protests and even to the street" (Arjomand, 2003, p. 25). In this process, the judiciary assumes the function of political control.[4] The "fourth estate" therefore, rather than being an independent sphere of civil society, is the major battleground and a source of dispute between other estates. What adds to this reality is the very fact that the struggle for democracy in Iran is not simply the result of theological debate of *ulema*, but also the Iranian people's major dissatisfaction with the Islamic Republic. The limited diversity of the press in Iran is indicative of the limited options/solutions that have been offered to resolve the insoluble chronic crisis of the Islamic Republic. Let us not forget that Khatami himself was part of this limited remedy offered by the Islamic Republic and a form of conciliation offered by the state to "civil society." After all, Khatami was selected and approved by the Council of Guardians, which accepted only four out of 238 candidates to the presidential election of 1997.

By any standard and any definition it is hard to suggest that the press in Iran is distinctly located outside the realm of the state. While there are certainly serious debates and serious critiques of Islamic polity in Iran, much of it, albeit under immense pressure from below and in response to the harsh economic and social realities of modern Iran, has come from within the main cadres of the ruling elites whose interests are effectively linked to the preservation of the current regime. For this reason, Khatami and his allies have consciously tried to prevent popular politics from flowing out on to the streets.

The turbulent and complex relationship between the state and cultural and symbolic production has remained one of the key and central concerns of social theory. The continuing debate about the role/intervention of the state within media studies, especially around the fields of cultural policy, political communication, censorship, democratic processes and so on, is an indication of the significance of the role of the state for the cultural and symbolic production industry. Terms such as "public" and "private," "restricted" and "free," "state" and "market" have formed some of the most controversial pairings of categories in modern liberal societies. Success, progress, and freedom in this narrative have been measured according to the degree of separation between these pairings and increased "undermining" of the role of the state.

In relation to the press, such severe dichotomist thinking is best illustrated by the Jeffersonian choice between "a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government." Regardless of the merits of such arguments in specific times, and despite its rhetorical use over time to further the cause of the "free press," the choice has never been that simple. In general, the separation between public and private, as well as state and market, has never been achieved. Witness the continuing consensus over the need for legislation dealing with "private" matters (custody, childcare, divorce, inheritance). The separation between the state and the media remains an *ideal* even in the most advanced capitalist societies.

The identification of the press as an institution of "civil society" provides no purchase on forms of the media that are clearly part of the state apparatus. At least in contexts such as Iran it is rather difficult to point out the realm of the state. Examining the relationship between the media and democracy in Southern Africa, Berger (2002) points out a number of significant problems in the liberal theory of the media, which offers the most extreme dichotomy of the state and civil society. In his view in such forms of understanding of the media that lines the state against civil society, it is not clear exactly where the state starts and where it ends. Furthermore, there is the issue of entanglement between the state and "civil society." The danger of seeing "civil society" as essentially an oppositional force misses the crucial link between the state and civil society and, as may be seen in the case of Iran, how civil society "is often closely articulated with or integrated into – even contradictory and cooptively at times – key elements of the ruling establishment" (Berger, 2002, p. 26). Furthermore, to offer "civil society" as the *solution* to the *problem* of the state is to romanticize the former and ignore the very undemocratic consequence of regulating culture and the media through market mechanisms and the havoc that privatization has caused all over the world. Little wonder that many commentators on the nature of the Iranian press usually divide the Iranian press into state controlled and private (with reformist publications usually and wrongly pigeon-holed in the "private" category). While they point to the lack of clear and unified developmental media policy, they divide the approaches to media policy in Iran into two broad categories. The first favors domination of the press by the state and recognizes no function for the press except as a megaphone for its own agenda. The second, despite recognizing some role for the state in media policy, sees the press as a "commodity" whose survival should depend on market competition (Bahrampour, 2001; Baghi, 2002).

By focusing on the media–state relationship, "civil society" perspective not only turns a blind eye to the connection between the two, but also sees the role of the media as only providing checks and balances on government and therefore ignores other forms of power in society. In particular, it fails to provide any purchase on significant differences within the non-state media, and is silent about the realities of internal power relations within "civil society." In this narrative a broad range of media, from small alternative, community, student publications to publications with circulations of hundreds of thousands are brought under the same roof ("civil society") because of the perceived assumption about their relation with the government.

Conclusion

A free press and democracy are symbiotically related. It has come as no surprise that the renewed call for democratization and changes in polity in Iran has been so explicitly related to the press. As the recent events in Iran and the increasing dampening of the optimism of the 1990s illustrates, most notably in the results of the overwhelming boycott of elections to the 7th Majles in 2003, there still remain troubling economic, political, and legal concerns. In this environment a solitary focus on the state and civil society dichotomy will simply not do. Democracy should not be reduced to a political system in which citizens are allowed to make some limited choices out of limited representatives now and again. More than anything else, it is about active citizenry, distribution of resources and power, as well as providing check and balances on different forms of power. The reform movement from above and its affiliated press failed because it was an elitist-centered model of organization, leadership and the press which could not (in fact did not want) to free itself from the strait-jacket of the Islamic Republic.

Critical analysis of the media and democracy in Iran needs to move beyond the liberal theory of the press, which focuses solely on the repressive role of the Iranian state. It needs to consider the well-documented nature of the Iranian state as a contradictory entity (enshrined in its constitutions and operations and factionalism) and a major site of the competing social forces and institutional interests. Moreover, it needs to break with the neo-liberal discourse in the economic reconstruction, which offers privatization as the solution to the ills of Iran. Such limited focus on the relationship between the media and the state, by confining itself to the repressive measures of the state and glorifying the "market competition," neither offers a critique of liberalization, nor a substantive analysis of class relations and disparity in access to communication resources in the country. This is not to deny the significant contributions of the reformist press, nor their lasting impact and legacies in promoting more open and critical debates in the press. Rather, it is to point out once again the need for a more complex examination of the contradictory nature of the Islamic state and its relation to the media.

Notes

1 More than 98 percent of Iranian electorates voted in a referendum to establish an Islamic Republic held on April 1, 1979, immediately after the "end" of the revolution was announced.

2 *Keyhan*, *Ettela'at*, and *Hamshahri* each cost 200 Rials (2 cents) while the price of many "independent" publications is usually 500 Rials (5 cents). The gap in price is even bigger in the magazine market. The price of reformist *Kiyan* (4,000 Rials) was 180 percent more than *Keyhan Farhangi* (1,500 Rials), which is published by *Keyhan* firm.

3 Main Bonyads are *Mostazafan* (Oppressed), *Shahid* (Martyr), *Kumiteh Imdad* (Relief Committee), and *15th Khordad*. The last one, and in defiance of the officials' attempt to revise Islamic Republic foreign policy, increased the reward for the assassination of Salman Rushdie.

4 In response to the reformist press attempt to act as a legislative organ (fourth estate), the judiciary more than ever before assumed the function of political control (Khiabany and Sreberny, 2001, 2004; Samii, 1999, 2001; Tarock, 2001). Among the measures used to curb the reformist press and journalists are the current press law passed just before the parliamentary election of 2000 and the domination of the Iranian Parliament by reformists deputies, anachronistic laws on libel and selective readings of the pre- and post-revolutionary laws, censorship, violation of publications, their premises, equipments and facilities, regular harassment of journalists, imprisonment and hefty fines, and of course the outright banning of many of them. By the end of 2002 more than 80 publications in Iran had been banned by the judiciary. Furthermore, by labeling the reformist and independent press as the enemy of Islam and the Islamic republic, they have continued the tradition of mobilizing supporters of the dominant faction to intimidate, repress, and terrorize dissident voices and journalists. What is also clear is the effective use of certain elements of the "fourth estate," namely certain state-controlled media such as IRIB and organs of the dominant factions such as *Keyhan*, to discredit and humiliate those that are not considered in their view to be sympathetic to Islam, the Islamic Republic, and the supreme leader.

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2 The politics of the Internet in Iran

Babak Rahimi

The victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the hardliner political candidate in Iran's 2005 presidential election, has marked a major development in the consolidation of the Islamic Republic. The victory highlights a new populist and nationalist paroxysm, whereby combined elements of social conservatism, in terms of puritanical *shariaism*, millenarianism, and populist egalitarianism, have enabled the Islamist state to mobilize conservative clerics and hardliner echelons of the regime to tighten their hold on power.

While the growing strength of authoritarian rule after the 2005 presidential election has unleashed a new era in the contemporary history of conservative hegemony in post-revolutionary Iran, the reformist factions of Iranian politics continue to present their opponents with alternative and creative forums of dissent through new media. These media are changing the political landscape for reformist groups and oppositional movements. Among these media is information and communication technology (ICT), the politics of which continues to serve as a distinct venue of resistance to conservative rule. While drawing upon the most central issues related to the cultural and political life of Iranian society, Internet dissenters weave together a decentralized network of opposition and critical discussion, tackling political and social taboos ranging from sex and politics to Islam and democracy. Although the impact of such forms of cyber dissent is limited due to new state measures to control the use of the new technology, the Internet continues to pose an insurmountable threat to the clerical-led regime.

Since the 1997 election of Mohammad Khatamai to the most recent state clamp-down on the Netactivists and bloggers following the 2004 parliamentary elections, the Internet, and in particular the blogsphere, have offered an alternative public discourse to the state-controlled media and Internet outlets. It has served as a powerful supplement to political interaction and free communication, discouraged under the conservative regime. For the most part, the rapid development of the Internet, in a country where 70 percent of its 70 million population remains under the age of 30, poses one of the most important threats against authoritarian hegemony in Iran.

This chapter argues that, despite measures implemented by the regime to curtail the force of the Net as a new space of communication, the rapidly growing and changing computer network known as the Internet has provided creative ways for political dissidents to challenge state authority. The case of Iran serves as a fascinating example in the ways in which information technology has produced new spaces of dissent in the difficult struggle against autocracy, enabling political participants to shape and sustain alternative sites of resistance, where they did not exist before. More than any other technology, the Internet has been an innovative means of promoting and mobilizing resistance, one that defies centralized control.

Birth of the Net in Iran

When in January 1993 Dr. Mohammad Javad Larijani, director of the Institute for Studies in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics (IPM), sent Iran's first electronic mail as a greetings message (a greeting to administrators at the University of Vienna), it would have been difficult to conceive that more than a decade later Internet users in Iran would soar to five million by 2005, one of the fastest growth rates in the world (OpenNet Initiative, 2006, p. 4).[1] It would have also been difficult to predict that Iran's Telecommunications Company (TCI) would potentially reach 25 million users by 2009, with approximately 1,500 cybercafés in the capital city of Tehran alone.[2]

However, the fact that Iran became the second country in the Middle East – preceded only by Israel – to gain access to the Internet would have not been anything astonishing to the clerical authorities.[3] By and large, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 was meant to put into practice the supposed affinity between scientific technology and faith. As Ayatollah Khomeini explained:

> "The claim that Islam is against modern (technical) innovations is the same claim made by the deposed Mohammad Reza Pahlavi that these people (Islamic Revolutionaries) want to travel with four-legged animals, and this is nothing but an idiotic accusation. For, if by manifestations of civilization it is meant technical innovations, new products, new inventions, and advanced industrial techniques which aid in the progress of mankind, then never has Islam, or any other monotheistic religion, opposed their adoption. On the contrary, Islam and the Holy Quran emphasize science and industry."
>
> (Quoted in Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996, p. 22)

As the founder of the Islamic Republic articulates here, the Islamic Revolution marks an unprecedented event in modern history in that it emphasized the significance of faith in the scientific pursuit of knowledge, and the use of the Internet fits this self-image.

Internet use in Iran was first promoted by the government to provide an alternative means of scientific and technological advancement during the troubled economic period that followed the Iran–Iraq war. Contrary to expectations at the time, the Islamic Republic originally welcomed the Internet by allowing commercial and educational sectors to access it without interference. Whereas in China the technology was largely developed by the state in the form of an intragovernmental communications network, Iran's first experience with the Internet occurred within the university system. Likewise, to this day most of Iran's domestic Internet connections are still based in academia, in the form of the national academic network (IRANET.IPM). Nevertheless, additional outside links were established by the Iranian Post, Telephone and Telegraph (PTT), which provides services to both commercial agencies and governmental organizations. Despite reductions in the growth of information technology in the early half of the 1990s as a result of tensions between the IPM and the High Council of Information (HCI), a state branch mostly responsible for the expansion of information technology, Iran was originally able to develop a dynamic telecommunications (or telecom) industry sector, relatively independent of state control.

Iran's communication infrastructure has been in the process of expansion since 1994, as the state has aimed to develop telecommunications technology for major economic reform schemes.[4] In the early 1990s, tensions existed between the bureaucratic agencies, such as the HCI and the Data communication Company of Iran (DCI) – a branch of the PTT – and the emerging private technology sectors. Rather than disagree about the extent of control over content, the parties differed primarily over how to improve the quality and availability of network access. Until 1997, the state had difficulty providing direct assistance to the commercial sector to develop the Internet. As a result, the state information agencies have increasingly become weaker players in the domestic telecom market as they face stern competition from the expanding commercial ISPs (Internet service providers).

ISPs and the Iranian public

Making their appearance in 1994, Iranian ISPs created dynamic institutional bases for the development of the Internet in Iran. Vibrant and innovative in outlook, Iran's over 650 ISPs are encouraging competitive commercialism and political activism on the Net, unprecedented in the Iranian experience with information technology (Telecommunications Company of Iran, 2003). The creation of IRANET (the information and Communication Network of Iran) in 1993 by N.J. Rad, a subsidiary of Pilot Iran, marked the first important step towards introducing the Internet to the Iranian public. Operating as a large bulletin board system and offering full Internet access, e-mail services, electronic publishing, and website design, IRANET has helped numerous organizations go online to conduct business in a relatively flexible market-driven environment. Between the academic sector and the help of ISPs such as IRANET, commercial industries in Iran have maintained an active presence on the Net. The rapid growth of the Internet in the commercial sphere has contributed to the development of entrepreneurship and the bolstering of the middle class by providing an opportunity to invest in domestic markets.

Internet access, particularly in Tehran, has developed in recent years to a level of sophistication which exceeds that of some European nations. For instance, the *Guardian* reported in February 2002 that ParsOnline, one of the biggest Internet service providers in Iran, was offering "Asymmetric Digital Subscriber line (ADSL) connections at 2 Mbps [megabits per second], four times faster than that available to home users here, and for people out of ADSL catchments area, there are wireless links available, running at 5 Mbps, something unheard of in the UK." In the words of an Iranian computer store employee, "there is a sort of fever here in Iran. All the families who can afford it have a computer. All of the children are taking classes, and we sell a lot of educational software" ("Iran nets another revolt," 2002).[5] In an economy dominated by the government, the demand for computer technology is an indication of the growing private technology market and a manifestation of deep-seated changes in Iranian society. It especially expresses the widespread belief that the Internet and technology in general may help overcome the numerous economic and political problems facing Iranian society.

Although exposure to influences outside Iran has played a crucial role in the spread of the Internet, the main reason behind the upsurge of public interest is the demographic shift that has taken place in Iran since 1979. The Iranian population has increased tremendously since the end of the Iran–Iraq War, and it is believed that currently more than 70 percent of Iran's population was born after the 1979 revolution. While in most countries it has been the youth that has led the Internet revolution, no industrialized country has a demographic structure where the youth are so disproportionate to the rest of the population.

As this post-revolution baby boom has come of age, it has led to a significant rise in both the number of universities (especially private ones) that have opened recently and the number of students enrolled in those universities (especially among women). And as is the case in most universities around the world, all these students receive Internet access from their universities. At the same time, the literacy rate has also increased dramatically since 1979, rising from 59 percent then to 77.1 percent in 2003, and steadily increasing up until the present day. As a result, universities are producing a large community of educated (though mostly unemployed) Iranians in search of new ways to express themselves.[6]

The growing non-academic public is also using the Internet as an alternative arena – especially the chat rooms and online entertainment services. As indicated above, by 2001 Tehran alone boasted 1,500 Internet cafés, making Iran one of the leading countries in the Middle East in terms of the number of Internet cafés per major metropolitan area. The recent decrease in the number of Internet cafés, in a sense, is indicative of how the acquisition of personal computers is increasingly on the rise among middle-class Iranians, paving the path towards a more private consumption of Internet technology. Although numerous Internet cafés still exist in Iran's major cities, especially near universities and shopping malls, most computer users are purchasing computers for personal use at home.

Along with a tradition of an internationally acclaimed film industry and clandestine use of satellite dishes, the Internet has become an added important medium for interacting with the rest of the world, and this interaction has helped spur several changes in Iranian society. For instance, the rise of "coffee-nets," voice chats and webcams that have become an inexpensive way for the young to converse online challenges the Islamic government and its oppressive imposition of *Sharia*-based moral guidelines for the separation of sexes in everyday public spaces.[7] Another related phenomenon is the 20,000 or more active Internet sites and weblogs (or blogs) – online journals where cyber-diarists meet to chat about the latest news in their personal lives, politics or sports, and enable young Iranians to keep in touch with each other and express themselves freely and anonymously on various subjects.

Probing the freedom provided by the Internet, Internet users – especially women – are finding in blogs an alternative medium for expression that is denied to them in physical public spaces. Every day, thousands of bloggers share their opinions and personal experiences with a global audience. The famous case of a former prostitute's weblog, detailing the underworld life of Iranian society, demonstrates how Iranians are defying the strict moral code imposed by the Islamic government.[8] Such unabashed online diaries offer a rare glimpse into the frustrated lives of Iranian youth who have grown up under strict Islamic laws. For the most part, the new generation has built online communities where couples meet to chat, young men dress as they wish, and young women go uncovered without being harassed.

The effect of these Internet technologies is extending beyond the major urban areas as well. The extent of information technology continues to expand in rural regions, where villages are brought into the Net sphere by the installation of thousands of digital communication outlets.[9] The establishment in 2004 of the first ICT center in the Iranian village of Gharan-Abad in the province of Gorgan serves as a good example of the ways in which the state has promoted the Net in rural regions.[10]

While former university students return to their villages from urban universities, they strive to remain connected to this new medium, and in the process introduce their rural families and friends to the Internet's possibilities as well. In doing so, the rural regions have become exposed to the outside world to a degree that would previously have been difficult to conceive. It is this phenomenon in particular that has made the Internet revolution reach far wider and deeper than would otherwise be expected.

The Islamist Republic and the Internet: 1994 to 2003

For most of its early history in Iran, the Internet was free of control and regulation. Unlike other Middle Eastern states, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Iran has encouraged the expansion of the Internet, and the state has participated actively in its development. While the conservative authorities have enacted tough policies to control the spread of other new technologies, especially satellite TV, it was not until 2003 that the Iranian government produced any systematic strategy to block Internet websites or filter content. For instance, when the regime did close down more than 450 Internet cafés in May 2001, just a month before the presidential elections, the decision was made not in order to prevent Internet access in general, but to limit use of low-cost "voiceover IP" (VOIP) telephone calls abroad because they were undermining TCI's revenues. The same rationale applied to the regime's policy towards ISPs. Although access providers have been responsible for preventing access to "immoral" and anti-government sites, for the most part these legal constraints existed only on paper rather than in practice.[11] From the late 1990s until 2003, many Iranian ISPs operated relatively freely, at times even openly defying the state by offering unfiltered services to the public.

There were several reasons, both practical and ideological, for the absence of Internet control under Rafasanjani and early Khatami governments. The most basic reason is that the Iranian government was simply unable to overcome the technical challenges involved. By comparison, even in the post-Khatami era, Iran has lagged far behind China's advanced techno-computer infrastructure, where a sophisticated system of technical control measures has affirmed state authority on the Internet. Second, the economic benefits, in tandem with the continuing privatization schemes encouraged by the government (especially since the election of Khatami in 1997), have remained a major factor contributing to the state's reluctance to control the Internet.

The regime was also unwilling to control the Internet because of its potential utility for the regime's own purposes. One of the earliest uses involved an attempt to design e-government programs in order to improve the efficiency of the state bureaucracy. This appeared to be the hallmark of the government's policy in 1994, as various major governmental agencies (e.g. Iran Air, Budget and Planning Organization of Iran, the Ministry of Energy, National Iranian Oil) developed an online presence to improve intra-governmental interaction and to generate efficient public services.[12] The e-government project continues to expand at present as additional state-run industrial organizations and government agencies are wired for full Internet access, allowing employees to surf the web under the pretext that "government business necessitates it" (Ansari, 2000, p. 67).

More generally, the Internet has impressed the Iranian state in ways that other ICTs have failed to do. In an attempt to alleviate political pressure while projecting an aura of "modernization" and engagement with advancing global technology, the conservative authorities have hailed the Internet as an innovative medium to promote the Islamic Republic. This is perhaps the most crucial point in Tehran's (at least initial) attitude towards the Internet. The main attraction for the authorities, and in particular religious civic institutions such as the clerical establishment in Mashad or Qom (which are associated with the regime), is its potential to serve the Islamic state as a forum for online discourse of revolutionary propaganda. Fulfillment of this goal has largely been undertaken by state-sponsored news agencies that aim to promote the interests of the Islamic Republic and the clerical authorities around the globe.[13]

In religious missionary terms, the Internet has also provided the Islamic state with a new means to promulgate the *Shi'i* Islamist ideology. The Internet, according to several clerics, is a "gift to spread the word of the prophet," and its potential benefit for Islam is immeasurable ("Iran nets another revolt," 2002). The state-sponsored religious centers in the conservative cities of Mashad and Qom have been busy building websites, and providing their interpretation (*tafsir*) of the Quran on their homepages.[14] One example of this activity was carried out in 1997 at the Ayatollah Gulpaybahane Computer Center in Qom, where clerics transferred over 2,000 Islamic teachings to CD-ROM and eventually to the Internet ("Islam, Iran and the Internet," 1997). As analyst Ali Ansari explains, "Internet use has been given a boost in the belief that it is the ideal vehicle for 'exporting the revolution.'" He adds,

> far from advocating an insular purity, many clerics began to argue that by embracing the new technology and harnessing it to good use as they saw it, a more confident Islamic Revolution would be better able to spread the word
> (Ansari, 2000, p. 66).

Lastly, by making the Internet available to the public, the state has found an alternative method to further legitimize its authority in the face of internal strife over the definition of the revolutionary state. The non-censorship policy concerning the Internet has remained in effect, mainly, to affirm the original ideology of the Islamic Republic as a supporter of modern technology as a means to promote and secure its authority. During the revolutionary era, the Islamic Republic was greatly aided by the mass media. The use of audiotapes and shortwave radios was particularly effective in spreading the word of Ayatollah Khomeini, and a major factor in the revolution's success. The audiotapes both encouraged the propagation of the *Shi'i* ideology that was the backbone of the revolutionary spirit during that era, and assisted political activists on the grassroots level, as young Iranians listened, recorded, and disseminated the tapes to their fellow revolutionaries to encourage dissent against the Shah's regime.

One could say that information technologies have been an indispensable feature of all major political movements in Iran. Likewise, mass media, in particular print media, has historically played a significant role, from the 1905 to 1911 Constitutional Revolution to the 1979 Islamic Revolution. As Ali Gheissari (1998) notes, in the absence of political parties, the media have provided the major, and at times the only, forum for political actors to express themselves and actively engage in political life (pp. 78–84). In fact, for over a century, revolutionary Iran has produced a virtual community of political actors who have expressed themselves through the mass media. The development of the Internet, therefore, has simply extended this historical process.

The Islamist state and the reformist press: 1997 to 2004

It was not until 1997 that the Internet began to emerge as a political threat to the regime, as Mohammad Khatami won over 70 percent of the votes in the race for president. Khatami's victory brought to life an energetic political movement that emphasized the rule of law and civil society (*Jama'ah Madani*) as prerequisites to a free society.[15] As part of this call for reform, thinkers such as Mohsen Kadivar and AbdulKarim Soroush advocated a pluralistic form of sovereignty. Their critique targeted the non-democratic institutions of the Islamic state, in particular the non-elected elites that made up the authoritarian base of the clerical conservative establishment. Meanwhile, the most important reformist activities against conservative rule, the protests during the summer of 1999 by Iranian students, exemplified the growing wave of popular discontent with the authorities. With the majority of the population backing the students and reform-minded intellectuals, the reformist movement (known as the May 23rd movement) created a distinct period in the history of revolutionary Iran, with the potential to undermine the authoritarian features of the Islamic Republic and replace it with a democratic one. Although the conservative authorities have reacted harshly, the movement has emerged to redefine the foundations of the Republic, and in the process cause a crisis of political legitimacy.

Since the 1979 Revolution, Iran has institutionalized two distinct spheres of political authority. On the one hand, there is the elected *Majlis* (Parliament) and the presidency. On the other, there is an appointed branch whose main component is the clerical office of *Velayat-e Faqih*, a deputy claiming to represent the Hidden Mahdi, the Twelfth Imam of the *Shi'i* religion, backed by the Revolutionary Guard Corps. The institutionalization of a paired system of state authority highlights the complicated coexistence of the elected branch of secular authority (subordinate), and the appointed clerical elite (superior), who claim to represent the ultimate source of authority. Since 1997 most of the conflict in Iran has largely evolved around this complex system of political and religious coexistence that has led to deeper problems as the two spheres of governance continue to redefine their political positions within the state apparatus and, more importantly, on the constitutional level. With the reformists winning in a landslide election in the Majlis in 2000, and then the re-election of Khatami as president in 2001, the crisis of legitimacy continued to intensify, as the dynamic reformist current re-emerged to overcome the obstacles that the conservative factions have put in the way of reform.

The predominant testimony to such a crisis was marked by the wave of closures and censorship enacted by the conservative judiciary against the reformist print media since 1997, and especially after the 2001 presidential election. Coupled with the rapid growth in the publication of magazines and newspapers since 1997, this process has been slowly progressing since Rafsanjani's term in office well into Khatami's second term.[16] However, the pressure became evident in the sixth parliamentary election in March 2000, when the conservatives launched a series of repressive measures targeting the reformist-dominated press.[17] While legitimizing their action based on the Press Law of 1986, which stated that "publications and news media shall enjoy freedom of expression provided what they publish does not violate Islamic principles or civil code," the conservatives banned news agencies and imprisoned some of those agencies' leaders.[18] The 2000 crackdown on the reformist press generated resentment between the political factions within the state institutions, such as between the Parliament and the Assembly of Experts (a branch that monitors and appoints the supreme leader). The conservatives were determined to block the reformist attempts to challenge the establishment via the mass media.[19]

Online political dissent

What role did the Internet play in the struggle between the reformists and the conservatives during the Khatami era? The fact that the Internet remained free of control for most of its early development in Iran since the mid-1990s highlights the unique role it played in the reformist–conservative factional strife following the 1997 presidential election. Similar to the print media, the Internet provided an alternative platform from which the reformist movements were able to challenge their antagonists – a war of words online, expanding the crisis in ways that were impossible in previous political settings. While politics became more of a limited pursuit in the "real" spaces of everyday life, where decision-making is constrained by the authoritarian religious state and closures of news agencies are rampant, the Internet opened a new domestic arena of contestation, accommodating numerous dissident groups online.

The famous case of Ayatollah Hussain Ali Montazeri, a dissident cleric once in line to be Iran's supreme leader, is quite illuminating. Montazeri shocked the conservatives in December 2000 when he put his 786-page memoir on the Internet (www.montazeri.com) to criticize the ideological foundations of the Islamic state.[20] The 84-year-old grand ayatollah, who came close to being chosen to succeed Ayatollah Khomeini, expressed his fierce opposition not only to the current leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, but also to the very political-theological notion of *Velayat-e Faqih*, a move considered blasphemous in the eyes of the hardliners.[21] In other cases, journalists, writers, and pro-reformist activists have all found space and freedom to express their dissension on the web. Akbar Ganji, a pro-reformist journalist, and Said Ibrahim Nabavi, a prominent reformist who has been jailed twice since the 2000 parliamentary elections, have gone online to battle with the conservative authorities.[22] Ganji, for instance, after being jailed for criticizing Rafsanjani and his possible role in the assassination of dissidents, wrote a bold article from jail, published secretly on the Internet. In the article, Ganji criticized the ideology of clerical rule, and demanded the expulsion of the clergy from the state.

An increasing number of reformist and dissident writers have chosen the Internet as an outlet for their discontent. In the summer of 2002, the reformist website Emrooz.org criticized the conservatives' plan to open a chain of brothels called "houses of chastity." The news became an embarrassment for the pro-Khamenei faction, as it revealed the corruption and hypocrisy of those in power. In 2001, Mohsen Sazgara, a leading reformist and manager of the news site alliran.net, put his critical letter to the supreme leader on the popular website: www.gooya.com.[23] The letter was later sent electronically to the Associated

Press to garner world attention. Still, the most significant step in making the Internet a powerful medium of communication for governmental political purposes occurred during the presidential campaign of 1997. For the first time in the political history of Iran, the two candidates, Mohammad Khatami (www.khatami.com) and the runner-up Majlis speaker, Natheg Noori (http://nategh.co.ir) went online to compete against each other.[24]

The Internet served as a powerful medium for grass-roots democracy advocates, which since 1997 have become synonymous with the student movement. During the summer of 1999, the Internet played an important (though limited) role in the uprising when Iranian students mobilized against the conservatives in chat rooms, organized meetings, and interacted and communicated electronically, as the state continued to close down public places of political interaction. During the student uprising in June 2003, similar activities were reported, as some students avoided encounters with the plainclothes militia and agents of the conservatives posted in public places by organizing street demonstrations in chat rooms and on weblogs, using the Internet as a mode of communication between activists. In June 2006, Iranian bloggers reported and even photographed women activists who were beaten and arrested by policewomen who disrupted a women's demonstration in Tehran (Usher, 2006). In this case, the bloggers served as a digital site for transparency in a political setting where the press is strictly under state supervision. Although still relatively limited in comparison with face-to-face interaction, electronically savvy student activists circumvented censorship of the print media by using e-mail and websites to express their opposition.[25]

Towards state reactive measures: 2001 to 2005

In response to the serious challenges posed by the Internet, the conservative authorities began to introduce tougher measures to assert control. In 2000, the judiciary shut down certain reformist newspapers and their websites, such as *Neshat*, *Jameh*, and *Tous*. In November 2001, the conservatives moved to restrict Internet use in much the same way that they have attempted to control satellite television. Their aim was not only to blot out the "immoral" sites transmitted from the West, but also political websites critical of the state.

On November 7, 2001, the powerful Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, a conservative-dominated body, declared that ISPs must remove anti-government and "anti-Islamic" sites from their servers, and that all Internet service providers be placed under state control.[26] While satellite TV dishes, still in use by the public since their ban in 1995, were to be confiscated immediately, Internet cafés, and ISPs were given six months to hand in their equipment to the state.[27] Although the ruling was never strictly implemented, another ruling followed a year later.

In January 2002, the Supreme Council ordered a new commission to create a list of "illegal" sites. At the same time, the Judiciary chief, Ayatollah Shahroudi, called for the "establishment of a special committee for legal investigation of

Internet-related crimes and offenses," and proposed the creation of a new legal office to deal especially with Internet offenses ("Iran cracks down on Internet journalists," 2003). Yet, it was not until the recent U.S.-led war on Iraq that the conservatives engaged in their most serious attack. In March 2003, the Iranian authorities began banning dozens of websites due to their political – and allegedly pornographic – content including those of U.S. radio and TV stations broadcasting in Persian.[28] With a total of 100 websites blocked, the conservatives engaged in censorship methods similar to those that are being used in Cuba.

By applying what Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor Boas (2001) call reactive measures, countries like Cuba and Iran have attempted to control the Internet by filtering net activity, arresting web designers and enacting restrictions over the Internet. The regimes monitor what is being produced online and prevent the flow of information by establishing state-run Internet sites and limiting private sector access to the Internet. In contrast, China uses "proactive" control measures, which work indirectly through devices that promote state authority (e.g., regime-sponsored web programs, e-government services, state-controlled ISPs, and above all, self-censorship to curb the democratic drive of the Internet).

The imprisonment of journalists like Ghasem Sole Sa'di at Tehran airport in February 2003 is indicative of the regime's increasing application of reactive measures.[29] In a similar case a week earlier, Sazgara, made famous due to his critical letter to the supreme leader, was arrested at his home. He was detained for accusing the supreme leader of becoming a dictator. In April 2003, Sina Motallebi, a journalist behind a prominent weblog (www.rooznegar.com), became the first blogger to be imprisoned.[30]

For the most part, reactive measures highlight the direct ways in which the state aims to clamp down on what may be published through popular websites, particularly the weblogs. The conservatives continued to hone their technological expertise to bolster their position ahead of the parliamentary elections in 2004. In summer 2004, Iranian-based sites and ISPs came under the direct surveillance of a special commission instituted by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution ("Iran blocks three reformist websites," 2004). With more than 499 sites out of 1,477 blocked, this surveillance tactic allowed the state to systemically employ the reactive measure of filtering websites through ISPs in a way to stamp out dissent (OpenNet Initiative, 2006, pp. 3–4). As a study conducted by OpenNet Initiative shows, since 2004 the regime has been using the U.S.-made commercial filtering package SmartFilter to censor and filter foreign and domestic websites believed to be potentially dangerous to the establishment (OpenNet Initiative, 2006, pp. 10–14). This filtering measure has not only enabled the state to monitor and directly control the official ISPs, but also enforces greater pressure on liberal and moderate online journals (e.g., www.Aftab.com) in promoting self-censorship.

Just ahead of the election of Ahmadinejad to power in summer 2005, the Internet media experienced a more updated surveillance by the conservatives in power. With the conservative consolidation, the state has maintained the capability to conduct surveillance of communication from viewing websites of dissidents and certain articles critical of the regime to pornographic material online. This is done as the regime increasingly shows a greater sophistication in filtering. Such adaptation of high-tech filtering components of Iran's content control signals the hardening of conservative rule as major ISPs have come under the direct supervision of the Revolutionary Guard. "Today," as Gheissari and Nasr explain, "Guard commanders are ubiquitous in decision-making circles, control of the police, the national radio and television, and Ministries of Defense and Intelligence, and are responsible for the security of the clerical leadership (Gheissari and Nasr, 2005, pp. 180–181). Internet control is no exception to this conservative control of the post-revolutionary public sphere.

As the hardliner grip on power tightens in the post-Khatami era, the regime continues to adopt extensive filtering techniques at a time of incredibly fast-paced developments in Internet technology. However, Iran's sophisticated Internet censorship regime continues to face ongoing challenges with the phenomenon of weblogs that perpetually defy state control while producing forums of dissent on both political and social levels.

Weblogistan and dissent

Iran's post-revolutionary weblog community has been the most exciting online phenomenon since the birth of the Internet in the country in the early 1990s. With more than 60,000 sites on the Web, Persian blogs are the third most popular language in the world of weblogs.[31] These blogs constitute what has been popularly named in Persian "Weblogistan," a distinct sort of public space wherein Iranians (particularly the young) assemble, express, and rearticulate themselves through cyber exchange and interaction.

Weblogistan forms the most expressive resource of the Internet surge in post-revolutionary Iran. The weblogs provide a virtual forum wherein Iranian authors can choose which aspects of their identities and everyday or imaginary selves they wish to present to others, while expressing themselves without the supervision of editors and publication regulations.[32] Female bloggers can anonymously interact, exchange ideas, and write freely about sex and other social taboos. Through discussion groups and online diaries, authors can interact with millions of other Iranians abroad, choosing to communicate "in English or a mix of Persian and English – known as Pinglish" ("Web sparks revolution in Persian," 2004). The ability to mix English and Persian has provided greater freedom of expression, as young Iranians creatively advance the realm of traditional communication, originally limited to the domain of print media.

Blogging took off in Iran after journalist Hussein Derakhshan wrote a user-friendly guide in Persian about how to design and start a weblog in September 2001 (Talaie, 2005).[33] In less than a year, Persian weblogs sprouted up all over the Internet. During the heyday of the reformists, bloggers communicated and voiced their criticism of the Islamic Republic. But these Weblogs also expressed social issues which also entailed dimensions of political protest. As an Iranian

English teacher writes about the deaths of the Iranian conjoined twins Ladan and Laleh Bijani in her blog on July 2003,

> I see a big irony comparing the sad death of these most-ever-loved-in-Iran twins with the current events of Iran. Some people are ready to die for having their individuality back; some people are ready to kill, to take some others' individuality away.
>
> (McLaughlin, 2003)

The key idea here is the relationship between "individuality" and life, mainly in the way in which others can take an individual's freedom away while such individuality could also be reaffirmed through death itself. This female blogger emphasizes the inseparable nature of life and individuality, while dissenting online against the Islamist regime. She is able to express opposition while focusing on a social issue that concerns Iranians alike.

With this view, it is not too difficult to understand why the regime responded harshly to the rise of weblogs after 2001. The state's clamp-down became intensified in 2004 when it targeted bloggers. Iranian authorities arrested and imprisoned dozens of bloggers, charging them with crimes such as espionage and disrespecting the Islamist Republic. Since December 2004, many online journalists and bloggers have been imprisoned, while others have appeared on television to confess to their alleged crimes (Fahti, 2004). Accordingly, most blogs have been filtered as the government tries to monitor and register every website based in the country.[34] Filtering has targeted individual blogs that set up and hosted various non-Iranian and Persian-language news, human rights and political organizations, including pornography, gay and other proxy websites deemed to be "immoral" by the regime.[35]

In the post-Khatami era, bloggers continue to face increasing state repression. On October 2005, Omid Sheikhan, a dissident blogger in northern Iran, was arrested and sentenced to one year in prison and 124 lashes for posting satirical cartoons of the conservative authorities (Swiff, 2005). The arrest of Sheikhan was followed by the imprisonment of a number of other journalists such as Javad Gholam Tamayomi of the daily *Mardomsalari* ("Democracy") and, earlier in September, Hanif Mazrol, Rozbeh Mir Ebrahimi, and Sharaham Rafihzadeh. Later in the year, on January 17, 2005, Arash Sigarchi, a cyber-journalist and a weblogger who had been updating a banned weblog, was arrested on charges of conspiracy.

Nevertheless, Iranian bloggers (including state official reformist groups) have also unleashed online dissent against government's measures (Glaser, 2004). In September 2004, numerous Iranian cyber-journalists and webloggers, both in Iran and outside, went online protesting state censorship by renaming their websites and blogs after pro-reformist newspapers that have been made illegal or banned by the authorities. The attempt was not only to express symbolic solidarity with the Iranian reformist movement, but also to demonstrate that the state cannot so easily censor the Internet as it has controlled printed media. Correspondingly, as the OpenNet Initiative study has shown, "When three prominent reformist news sites were blocked in August 2004, bloggers inside and outside Iran mirrored parts of the sites and used the increasingly popular Real Simple Syndication (RSS) technology to evade much of the blocking" (OpenNet Initiative, 2006, p. 12). This was done in such a way that state filtering would be circumvented by centralizing RSS and sending and posting news and banned websites via e-mail; Iranian bloggers were then able to receive information and news from filtered or prohibited blogs in their e-mail.

However, the most powerful form of dissident on the blogsphere continues to occur in the ordinary use of personal and individualistic expressions, which defy a state-sanctioned model of Islamist selfhood that has been propagated by the Islamic Republic since its establishment in 1979.

Consider the case of Sahar Maranlou. An Iranian journalist and a poet-scholar, Maranlou is able to creatively express herself, her views on life, politics, literature, cinema, music, and religion on her weblog, entitled "Sorry! I AM THINKING ALOUD…"[36] In her blog, she posts a series of ideas and views that deal with domestic and international affairs. Although she does not explicitly challenge the Islamist Republic, Maranlou reinterprets the notion of Muslim womanhood in her blog postings. In her April 2006 feature, for instance, she deals with the following polemical topic: "Please explain the crime of immodesty (or *bad-hejabi*)." While listing a number of examples in the diverse ways that various Muslim women dress across the world, she writes,

> by and large, it is my opinion as a devout woman that our most conservative Palestinian women would be upset at the fact that religious minority women in Iran are forced to wear the scarf… we want to say that it is not men that force the scarf on women but that it is the political will of the country (i.e. the government) that ordains women to dress the way it wants her to dress.

Although the state sanction of the Islamic code of female modesty is not the most important issue, Maranlou continues to argue that state imposition of veiling (*hejab*) continues to be a major problem facing Iranian women. However, what she also argues is that the main predicament regarding an imposed female dress code is that the state has failed to explain adequately why such enforcement should be a legal-state matter, or why the government should have the monopoly to define what is modest and what is immodest Islamic garb.

What Maranlou engages in her blog is a critical reinterpretation of female Islamic modesty as she questions the legality of imposing a state conception of ideal womanhood in terms of a strict *sharia*-based legal system, which ignores the cultural dimension of clothing traditions. Her blog, in a sense, provides the reader and the blogger with a space to rearticulate Islamic beliefs while subtly questioning the regime's socio-legal policies. In an e-mail interview, Maranlou describes her blog as a medium to publish her ideas and thoughts on a personal level. "I was a journalist in the Iranian reformist newspaper for several years just when Khatami was elected to office. Blogging provided me a great atmosphere to publish again my thoughts with others. Moreover, blog could make available an interactive relation with readers. They could publish their feedback in my blog and I could respond to them. I like this interactive relation." Maranlou's notion of "interactive relation" is the key component of the blogsphere. It is, in a sense, the "interactive" that defines the blogs as a political sphere of dissent. But how does dissent precisely take place not only in the blogosphere but also the Internet at large?

Informational politics and digital public sphere

Unlike other media forms, regulating the Internet remains an extremely difficult task for the conservative authorities. With some Iranian ISPs based outside of Iran, the clerical regime will be even less successful in its attempts to control cyberspace than it has been with the print media. As the defiance of the ban on satellite dishes has shown, any attempt to stop the proliferation of modern technology is ultimately bound to fail.

Even if the Iranian government finds a way to successfully implement both reactive and proactive measures to curtail net dissent, there will always be a way for the savvy net users to undermine the current state monopoly of the Internet. For instance, there are a number of proxy servers which enable users to visit blocked sites. Proxy servers use a technique in which a host answers address resolution protocol requests intended for another computer. In this way, a Net user is able to gain access to a "prohibited" site while using a private ISP service approved by the state. In addition to proxy sites, there is also the issue of Internet user anonymity. It will be extremely difficult to arrest dissidents online, as they can easily use nicknames or false identities on the Web. While visiting the city of Ilam in western Iran in August 2005, I met a young man at a local Internet café shop who showed me how to not only access state-prohibited Persian websites through a proxy site, but also to surf these restricted sites while remaining anonymous.

On the theoretical level, what the Iranian case highlights is the global emergence of a new form of informational politics which, through the virtual domain, makes it impossible for governments to monitor and dominate dissent. This is so since the cyber networks are simply too unmanageable and too widespread to enable the authorities to sustain significant control. With the emergence of the "information age" and the "networked society," where proliferation of information and connectivity are among the features of the society, the Internet makes possible the creation of new sites of dissent, wherein serious challenges to authoritarian states are produced (and reproduced) in cyber domains. These can be identified in terms of mobilization of effective individual and collective actions, both real and cyberactive, that defy state control.

To the extent that the Internet identifies a mediated form of digital communication, cyberspace can be recognized in terms of a fluid and sporadic domain, signaling an instantaneous interactive flow of feedback. This whimsical feature underlines a sense of a breakdown of space and time with the digitalization of communication and dematerialization of collective interaction. Such “breakdown” refers to a sort of *virtualization* process that is not corporally locatable, and is hence latent, though existing as a set-up of relations in an imaginary way. Each site exists in every other site, creating a ubiquity of network relations. The center is everywhere and yet it exists nowhere merely in one site. In this view, what is characteristic of a state-independent virtual reality is that it connects, redistributes, and, above all, distributes dissent from a locality, from a particular moment in time that is at once operating in the whole.

This decentralized process involves a thoroughgoing change in the conventional view of political interaction and state power over individual behavior at the political level. In this regard, the relationship between political agency and social movement can be identified in radically decentralized, disjoint terms. What the Internet produces is the subject-based transformation of the individual who engages with others in cyberspace. As the Iranian case demonstrates, the conservative establishment has pressed hard to resist the “immorality” associated with cyberspace, in particular with chat rooms and weblogs, especially the ways users alter names, gender, ethnicity, and nationality or their “authentic” identity, once they go online. However, the Internet resists a mono-centric formation of self by enabling Internet users to refashion them anew in digital space without bodies, while abandoning their socially constructed identities. The virtual act of subject transformation may be seen as an act of resistance against a set of established norms of identity and communication, which the state endorses and enforces on everyday institutional levels. Therefore, by the term “resistance,” we should acknowledge the ways in which the Internet accommodates multiple forms of selfhoods that would subsequently entail multiple trajectories of expression.

In this manner, the notion of “virtual communities” implies a social network of constructed sites wherein an invisible space of interaction and participation occurs with the exchange of imaginary relations. What the Internet does in this regard is to actualize this virtual process by further extending the globally inclusive non-place in which a set of social relations occur; in terms of imagination, it enables cyber participants to immerse themselves with one another for better interaction. “Internet,” as Hénaff and Strong remark, “makes real the virtual, not the reverse” (Hénaff and Strong, 2001, p. 224).

Virtual republic and post-Khatami Iran

With the control of the state bureaucracy, the judiciary, and Parliament, Iran of the post-Khatami era remains under the tight grip of conservative hands. While various political factions and dissident movements have gone underground in their opposition to the state, it is becoming harder for writers, journalists, and intellectuals to express themselves, let alone criticize the authoritarian ideology that underpins the Islamist government. As the May 2006 arrest of Ramin Jahanbegloo demonstrates, the conservative consolidation following the victory of

Ahmadinejad has now solidified full-fledged autocracy across not only state institutions but also civic associations and intellectual domains as well.

Despite Iran's expanding filtering regime, the Internet continues to remain the most significant public forum of dissident expression where possibly an opposition movement from Iranian Diaspora and native organizations could be mobilized online. Although the expectation of a democratic breakthrough via the Internet is unduly optimistic, if not naïve, cyberspace will provide the promise of a virtual dissident community in the absence of a coherent and united institutional and ideological block of secular and religious oppositional groups. For the most part, the struggle of reformists (both religious and secular) to overcome authoritarianism in Iran, either through the state institutions or civic associations, will continue to serve as the most pivotal feature of Iranian politics in the post-Khatami era.

In years to come, however, the best one can hope for is the bolstering of everyday forms of ordinary dissent and the subtle acts of subversion by many ordinary Iranians who seek a breakthrough to competitive democracy and the formation of a transparent society. An ever-changing Iranian public sphere, both in physical and virtual terrains, will shine the light of an open society on the Islamic Republic. In this struggle, the Internet will serve as the virtual battleground against authoritarian rule and a march towards democratic governance.

Notes

1 A PDF version of this report is available at www.opennetinitiative.net/studies/iran/ONI_Country_Study_Iran.pdf. This report was accessed in March 2006.

2 See Economist Intelligence Unit (2004), available at www.economist.com/countries/Iran/profile.cfm?folder=Profile-FactSheet.

3 For government figures on registered Net users in Iran see BBC, June 17, 2002, at http://newsbbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/2044802.htm.

4 See Madar Research Journal on Iran eLandscape at www.madarresearch.com/main/mpage.aspx.

5 It is interesting to note that this rapid growth in computer technology has been due in part to the importation of inexpensive computer products from South Asia. The use of cheap computer products in Iran is related primarily to the U.S. embargo on Iran. Since its inauguration during the hostage crisis, and extended with the Iran–Libya Act (ILSA) in 1996, the embargo has forced the Iranian private technology sector to acquire satellite and computer equipment, such as software and technical parts, from the pirate market of South Asia, where prices are cheaper.

6 See the World Bank Development Indicator at www.worldbank.org/ir.

7 See "Iranian Chat Welcome Page" at www.iranmehr.com/Chat.

8 Since its publication, the weblog has been disabled, "due to a terms of service violation." See www.fahesheh.persianblog.com. However, she now blogs at http://faheshe.blogsky.com. For a list of such sites, see www.topsiteslists.com/best-sites/hotpersianlinks/topsites.html.

9 See *The CIA World Factbook 2003*, at www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ir.html.

10 See www.shahkooh.com.

11 An Internet provider was originally required by law to ask the user to sign an agreement banning access to "immoral" material on the Web.

12 In 1994, 10 percent of governmental agencies were provided with Internet access. Since Khatami's election in 1997 that percentage has been increasing well into the 2005 presidential elections.

13 For other examples of state-run news agencies, see www.kayhanews.com or www.iran.com. For the official site of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the spiritual leader of the Islamic Republic, see www.leader.ir/.

14 See www.hawzah.net-eng-default.htm and www.balagh.net.IslamicPropagationOfficeoftheIslamicSeminaryofQom.com.

15 The political-theological doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih* was introduced by Ayatollah Khomeini in his 1971 book, *Hukumat-e Islami* (Islamic Government), where he argued that Islam is self-sufficient and capable of establishing laws for government and administration to shape a just society. In the absence of the Twelfth Imam, a *faqih*, or high cleric, is responsible for governing justly and ruling over Islamic society according to the sacred laws of the Quran and the Sunna. The political doctrine was put into practice following the 1979 referendum in support of an Islamic state.

16 For a general overview of the development of print media in Iran under Khatami's presidency, see Menashri (2001).

17 It is interesting to point out that during Khatami's first term in power, some of the independent news agencies went online, where they continued to produce printed versions of news articles while publishing them on the Web as well.

18 See Article 24 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, translation available at www.netiran.com/?fn=law14.

19 According to the 1980 constitution, the Assembly of Experts is the only body in the government placed over the supreme leadership, supervising his actions and checking his performances. Traditionally, the conservatives have dominated this branch, and the mounting resentment against the Assembly of Experts highlights the deep factionalism inherent in the political system of the Islamic Republic.

20 See also www.iranvision.com/pdf/khaterat.pdf, for extended excerpts from Ayatollah Montazeri's memoir in Farsi.

21 What highlights Montazeri's online presence is the use of his multi-languages websites. Montazari's memoirs have since been banned in Iran. Consider also the cases of Ayatollah Y. Saanei (www.saanei.org/) and Ayatollah M. Shirazi (www.shirazi.org.uk/), the two other dissent *Shi'i* clerics.

22 Akbar Ganji, one of the leading journalists and contributors to the reformist's journal of *Rah-e No*, a Tehran weekly, was jailed in April 2000 for accusing the former president Rafsanjani on the Internet of the serial murders of writers and intellectuals in 1998. Said Ibrahim Nabavi, a satirist and a writer, was jailed for his daring critique of the conservative establishment. For their personal websites, see www.akbarganji.com/ and www.navabi.online.com.

23 In the letter, Sazgara blames the supreme leader directly for the major political problems in the country. Sazgara argues that Khamenei's repressive policy against the journalists and intellectuals has produced suppression of freedom and animosity among the Iranian people.

24 It is interesting to note that the results of the elections were announced "live" on the website of the Iranian government, while non-governmental news agencies, like Hamshahri, and official press organizations, like Ettela'at, competed for the latest reports.

25 For instance, Amir Kabir Technological University's online news, based in Tehran, continues to cover a range of topics, some boldly critical of the government.

26 As the *Middle East Economic Digest* reports, all ISPs must operate with a government approved screening system to filter Net content *Middle East Economic Digest*, November 23, 2001.

27 Control of the Internet occurs on several levels. First, the Ministry of Information is

responsible for the government's ISP, known as the Data Communication Company of Iran (DCI). Second, the DCI filters, in turn, "un-Islamic" sites, both inside and outside of Iran. Third, private ISPs, which are expected to be approved by the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Islamic Guidance, also filter sites and e-mail.

28 The closures have led to a number of protests. In March 2003, the head of the national association of ISPs resigned, to protest at the recent government crackdowns. Despite measures to control satellite television, the authorities have been unable to suppress the popularity of the U.S.-based Iranian dissident TV stations. As the recent demonstrations show, these stations are on the front line of student protests. The protests were widely covered by Radio Farda, a 24-hour station set up by Washington to attract young Iranians to Western music and popular culture.

29 Sa'di was arrested for criticizing Ayatollah Khamenei in a Net commentary.

30 Although freed three weeks later, Motallebi continued to be threatened by the conservative authorities after his imprisonment.

31 See NITLE Weblog Census at www.blogcensus.net.

32 For samples of Iranian blogs, see Nasrin Alavi's *We are Iran* (2005). The volume provides a fascinating set of political and social blogs and cyber-diaries, designed and produced by young Iranians.

33 Derakhshan also provided tips on how to put legible Persian language online, which is right-to-left writing.

34 See Stop Censoring US, "Jahangad: Judiciary should stop unilateral filtering." http://stop.censoring.us/archives/013166.php.

35 See OpenNet Initiative, *Internet Content Filtering in Iran: Verification of Reported Banned Websites*, at www.opennetinitiative.net/blog/?p=62.

36 See http://saharmaranlou.blogspot.com/.

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3 Youth, politics, and media habits in Iran

Kavous Seyed-Emami

Research into the role of the mass media in various areas of political life dates back to the age of print media and has become a burgeoning field in the age of electronic media and mediated politics. Political scientists interested in understanding the political impact of the mass media have been particularly keen on assessing the role of the mass media in transmitting political information and knowledge. Moreover, they have debated over the extent to which the modern media of mass communication can shape political opinions and attitudes, and increase or diminish political involvement. An important line of inquiry has been to determine if the particular pattern of media use in a given population could have any direct or indirect effect on members' political knowledge, political opinions and attitudes, and on their modes of political action or inaction.

Political life in the Islamic Republic of Iran, like in any contemporary society, has become permeated to a great extent by the media of mass communication. The impact of the mass media on various socio-political developments in contemporary Iran has been well acknowledged by observers of Iran's modern political history. The rapid spread of anti-monarchical mass movements of 1978 to 1979 was made possible largely because of the effective use that was made of various media of communication, particularly of the international mass media. Pre-recorded audio cassettes of Ayatollah Khomeini's sermons and directives were distributed in all corners of the country in a matter of hours. The Persian-language broadcasts of BBC radio and other foreign radios immediately put all sections of society in touch with the revolutionary leader's latest directives, and with the latest developments inside Iran and in the outside world that were in some way related to the emerging mass revolution in Iran. In most other major developments in the country, including the hostage crisis and the eight-year war with Iraq, the mass media played a prominent role. A more recent example was the role played by pro-reform newspapers throughout Mr. Khatami's two terms in office as president. The landslide victory of Mr. Khatami against his conservative rivals marked the beginning of the so-called reformist movement in Iran. Soon afterwards, newspapers emerged as a viable political force, taking up duties in civil society which should normally have been carried out by political parties. To cite just one example: the list approved by prominent reformist journalists as the most suitable candidates for the *Majles* were, with only one exception, elected by the voters in Tehran during parliamentary elections for the sixth Majles in 2000. This clearly indicated the massive impact that the newspapers could make at the time directly or indirectly through opinion leaders.

Driven by an interest in the interplay between the mass media and youth political consciousness and involvement, and given the importance that the media of mass communication enjoys in contemporary Iranian politics, I have tried in what follows to describe patterns of media use for gaining access to political news among young Iranians and to discuss some general trends in their media habits. Understanding the existing patterns and trends in media use among young people who constitute a major demographic force in Iranian society is an essential step in making sense of their political attitudes and modes of political involvement. Based on data from a study on students' political participation, I will also try to look for possible interrelationships between media use and a few other measures of political involvement. However, no attempt will be made to determine the likely impact of the news media on the political attitudes or behaviors of the audiences. This would require causal studies for which I lack appropriate data.

The information used here is mainly taken from a survey of university students in Tehran that I undertook in January 2005. Other relevant empirical data are taken from studies that were available to me, including a few sponsored by the research centers of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB).

Theoretical discussion

Although I will not deal specifically with the impact of the mass media exposure on political attitudes and behaviors, such an impact is assumed in this study. Thus, a brief overview of theoretical perspectives about this topic should be pertinent. Early research on political underpinnings of exposure to the mass media concentrated on direct exposure. An early view that emerged in the post-World War I period and lasted until the late 1940s was the so-called "hypodermic needle effect," which attributed amazing manipulative power to the mass media. It was assumed that the recipients of mass communication messages were passive and prone to easy manipulation, and responded in predictable ways to direct media stimuli. Even though this view was hardly supported by empirical research, it was publicized by the popular press and was widely accepted by the general public (Lenart 1994). The path-breaking research done by Lazarsfeld and his associates in Erie County, Ohio, persuaded many researchers that the direct effect of mass media exposure on actual political behavior is not as great as was assumed, and attention was redirected to interpersonal aspects of political communication. Lazarsfeld's own model that envisaged a flow of influence through two stages – i.e., first on opinion leaders and, second, through them, on the general public – became widely popular in the field of political communication. The "minimal effect" perspective was found to hold sway over other perspectives in Joseph Klapper's review of communication research current by then (Klapper 1960).

The agenda-setting model of mass media impact on public opinion, as put forth by Bernard Cohen (1963), changed the minimal impact picture and reclaimed an important role for the mass media in actually creating public opinion by giving saliency to certain events and issues. According to this perspective, the media could not lead people directly to certain opinions and actions, but could effectively influence what kind of political issues the audiences think and talk about.

The line of inquiry and social theorizing on the mass media undertaken by members of the Frankfurt School was to show them as purveyors of dominant ideology and as instruments of hegemony of the ruling classes. Adorno and Horkheimer coined the term "culture industries" to denote the systematic way in which the ruling classes utilize the mass media to reproduce their hegemonic position in society. Louis Althusser too insisted on the ideological functions of the mass media in modern capitalist society. Among contemporary theorists, Stuart Hall emphasizes the role played by the mass media in the structure of dominance in modern society. Even news production is more or less compatible with "hegemonic readings" prevalent in a society, in spite of occasional departures from dominant definitions of reality (Moores 1993, p. 17). Although not claiming a direct impact by the media messages on audiences, all these critical analysts implicitly assume a strong impact on the audiences when they emphasize the cultural reproductive role of the mass media in modern society.

Mainline communication theory, however, insists on the active role played by the recipients of mass media messages in processing and interpreting these messages. Those adhering to this point of view warn that in no way can media content be equated with media effects. They refer to various researches which show that what the communicator has intended is not directly absorbed by those exposed to her messages. In actuality, those exposed to the mass media demonstrate "a formidable array of established beliefs, motives, social values and perceptual defenses that screen out, derail the intent, or limit the force of media messages." In short, no one-to-one relationship can be found between content of the communication or intention of the communicator and effects (Gollin 1988, p. 43).

In youth studies, various lines of psychological and sociological research have evolved to study the impact of the mass media, and television in particular, on youth behavior. Many researchers have attempted to show television's important role in transmitting information to children and young adults, and in socializing them into the adult world. Based on these studies, several theories have been propounded to explain the type and extent of influence that the mass media can have on young people's attitudes and behaviors. Some such theories include Bandura's social learning theory, Zillman's excitation or arousal theory, Berkowitz's cognitive neo-association theory, Huesmann's theory of cognitive scripting, cultivation theory as put forth by Gerbner and associates, and "the now discredited" catharsis theory (Strasburger 1995, pp. 8–10).

In political science, the minimal impact approach of the mass media on public opinion and on political attitudes in general is now criticized and thought to belong to an age in which television had not become so pre-eminent in the modern political arena. Besides, as Doris Graber aptly observes,

> Media influence is acknowledged only when messages are transmitted in multiple step processes, as often happen when they are diffused through interpersonal contacts, researchers routinely fail to credit the media as the original source of the information.
>
> (quoted in Lenart 1994, p. 9)

I adopt the assumption put forth by Lenart that the contemporary mass media play an essential role in the formation of political opinions and attitudes and hence in actual political behavior "because the content of most politically relevant information, as well as of conversations about politics, is dependent on information obtained from the media" (Lenart 1994, p. 4).

Patterns and trends of media use among Iranian youth to obtain political information

University students in Tehran roughly represent students from all across Iran, as they come from different cities and villages across Iran and are not necessarily original residents of the capital city. Using a sample of 460 students randomly drawn from 12 separate universities and institutions of higher education in Tehran, we conducted a survey in January 2005 (Seyed-Emami and Atai 2005) to gather data on the students' preferred news media and the level of trust they feel toward different news media, both domestic and foreign. Some of the findings that seem pertinent to this study will be described below.

Of all respondents, 51.4 percent indicated "high" or "very high" interest in "political news" as compared to 62.9 and 54 percent who showed "high" or "very high" interest in "science news" and "art and culture news" respectively. Domestic television was clearly stated to be the main channel through which the respondents access their political news, to be followed by newspapers. Specifically, 65.2 percent of the respondents indicated that they watched television news "several days a week" or "almost every day" as compared to 59.6 percent who said they read newspapers "several days a week" or "almost every day." Persian satellite TVs broadcasting from abroad, non-Persian satellite TVs, and foreign radio stations were not reported as highly preferred sources of political news.[1] Domestic radios too were not reported to be particularly important sources for obtaining political news. The Internet, however, clearly emerged as a new and important source of political news for many students, as 40.5 percent stated that they search the Internet "almost every day" or "several days a week" to gain access to such news (see Table 3.1).

Trust in different kinds of media to convey national political news, as reflected in combined percentages for response categories "highly" and "very highly" trustable, appeared to be highest for the Internet (50 per cent), to be followed by *Sharq*, *Hamshahri*, and *Iran* newspapers[2] (44.2 per cent, 32.3 per

Table 3.1 Sources used to obtain political news (in percentages)

	Almost every day	*Several days a week*	*1–2 times a week*	*2–3 times a month*	*Never*
Domestic TVs	39.5	25.7	15.5	8.0	11.4
Domestic radios	7.2	17.1	18.9	19.2	37.6
Newspapers	27.2	32.4	19.9	13.0	7.6
Foreign radios (non-Persian)	2.8	4.5	5.9	10.4	76.3
Foreign radios (Persian)	3.6	10.7	12.3	20.6	52.8
Satellite TVs (non-Persian)	5.9	7.5	6.6	9.2	70.9
Satellite TVs (Persian)	6.2	8.8	6.9	11.7	66.4
Internet	19.1	21.4	15.4	18.6	25.5

Table 3.2 Correlations between interest in political news and frequency of media use

Media	*Chi-square values*	*df*	*P value (2-sided)*
Domestic TVs	56.966	8	0.000
Domestic radios	36.946	8	0.000
Newspapers	66.343	8	0.000
Foreign radios (Persian)	20.829	8	0.008
Foreign radios (non-Persian)	12.925	8	0.114
Satellite TVs (Persian)	14.225	8	0.076
Satellite TVs (non-Persian)	7.522	8	0.482
Internet	12.259	8	0.140

cent, and 30.6 per cent respectively). This measure of trust stood at 29.8 percent for domestic televisions, and it was lowest for Persian-language satellite television at 13.1 percent. The remarkable trust in the Internet reflects the options that the users now enjoy in finding the right source of news for whatever political issue they wish to follow.[3]

Cross-tabulation of selected data showed that interest in political news significantly correlated with the use of newspapers, national television and radio stations, and Persian-language foreign radio (see Table 3.2). In other words, higher interest in political news leads students to follow news more frequently from the press, the national radio and television, and to a lesser degree from Persian broadcasting services of foreign radio. Interest in political news did not show a significant correlation with Internet use, which indicates that people with varying interests in political news use the Internet as a source of news (see Table 3.2).

Relationships between interest in political news, on the one hand, and trust in national television and radio, selected newspapers, and the Internet on the other, also proved to be statistically significant (see Table 3.3).

To draw a better picture of media use patterns among young people for accessing political news and to find out more about likely changes in these patterns, I use data from some previous studies and compare them with my own

Table 3.3 Correlations between interest in political news and trust in different media to get domestic news

Media	*Chi-square values*	*df*	*P value (2-sided)*
Domestic TVs	37.669	8	0.000
Domestic radios	45.741	8	0.000
Internet	19.768	8	0.011
Iran Newspaper	34.801	8	0.000
Hamshahri Newspaper	35.421	8	0.000
Sharq Newspaper	34.804	8	0.000

data. Since data gathering in each of these studies was for a particular purpose and for particular items, comparing data across studies would not be straightforward. However, I will try to specify the exact meaning of the data I will use for comparative purposes.

In a survey of students in Tehran that was conducted in 2000, 59 percent of the respondents mentioned "high" or "very high" interest in political news. The same measure of interest in "scientific and cultural" news and "sports" news stood at 79 percent and 51 percent respectively (Rabbani 2000a).[4] Results of another survey that relied on a national sample of all age groups indicated that 57 percent and 72 percent of the respondents in the age categories 18 to 24 and 25 to 29 respectively were interested in both national and international political news (Torabi 1998). Given the relatively equal number of respondents in the two age categories, we can use an average figure of 69.5 percent in this case to facilitate comparisons. Results from these two studies are compared with my data in Table 3.4.

A trend toward diminishing interest in political news (and in politics) may be concluded from these data. Irrespective of such data, this trend can readily be observed nowadays among Iranian students and youth in general. The 1998 study was done during the peak of the reform movement when there was a surge in interest in politics among young people after several years of political stagnation. The 2005 study, on the other hand, coincides with large-scale disillusionment, particularly on the part of university students, with the reform movement.

Changes in the pattern of media use to obtain political news may be discerned by comparing the data from previous studies with the data I have recently gathered. The 2000 survey of students in Tehran revealed that 61 percent of the respondents use newspapers "always" or "very often" compared to 46 percent who mentioned national radio and television. In another study that was based on a national sample and was done in the same year (Rabbani 2000b),[5] 69 percent of the respondents in collapsed age categories 19 to 29 indicated that they watch television news "always" or "very often," and 66.7 percent of the respondents were categorized in the study as "audiences of newspapers," without any frequency of use mentioned. Information from those studies are compared with my data in Table 3.5.

Table 3.4 Percentages of respondents highly interested in political news

Study	*Percentages*
1998 study, 18–29 age group	69.5
2000 study, students	59.0
2005 study, students	51.4

Table 3.5 A comparison of "heavy" viewers of television news with "heavy" readers of political news in the press (in percentage points)

	Newspapers	*TV channels*
2000 study, students	61.0	46.0
2000 study, the national sample	66.5*	69.0*
2005 study, students	56.5	65.2

Note

*Since this percentage includes less frequent users of newspaper and television, it should have been higher than what it actually is for users who would have chosen "always" or "very often" categories.

Table 3.6 Percentages of respondents who indicated "high" or "very high" trust in each news medium

	Television	*Newspapers*
2000 study, students	28.0*	47.0
2005 study	29.8	44.2 for *Sharq* 32.3 for *Hamshahri* 30.6 for *Iran*

Note

*In this study the question asked concerned trust in IRIB (Seda va Sima) and not in television per se. Yet, it can safely be assumed that the figure reflects trust in television alone too.

To make a more meaningful comparison between the relative weight of television and the press among young people seeking political news, we need to disregard the study based on the national sample and compare the data for students in the other two studies. Descriptive data show that newspapers, as avenues for accessing political news, have lost audience in the past five years, whereas national television channels have gained more audience. This trend is reflected in the overall drop in newspaper circulations in the same period too.

Changing patterns of trust in different news media may also shed some light on the new trends in media use to obtain political news. "High" or "very high" trust in national radio and television and in newspapers was reported by 28 percent and 47 percent of the respondents respectively in the 2000 survey on students. Table 3.6 compares the percentages with percentages found in the 2005 study.

Trust in the national television does not show much change over the past five years. Nonetheless, it seems that the newspapers have somewhat lost their position of trust among readers over this time period. As our study asked respondents to rate their trust in different newspapers separately, I had to cite percentages for three different newspapers. A relatively high level of trust in *Sharq* newspaper is rather exceptional. Although *Sharq* is a reformist newspaper, it does not boast any party or group affiliation and, as such, is viewed by many readers to be more objective and professional. *Hamshahri* and *Iran* (the first being a moderate conservative newspaper and the second a moderate reformist newspaper) better represent the general press. Trust in main conservative newspapers in the 2005 study was reported to be much lower (20.3 per cent and 14.4 per cent of respondents chose *Kayhan* and *Resalat* to be highly or very highly trustable).

The trend toward alternative news media may be shown by comparing data from past studies with my recent data. The 2000 study of students in Tehran revealed that 13 percent of the respondents listen to foreign radios and 8 percent use satellite TV "often" or "very often" in order to receive news. In the national study done also in 2000, 11 percent of those aged 20 to 29 said they use foreign media "often" or "very often" for political news. The percentages of respondents in the 2005 study who mentioned using "alternative media" were shown in Table 3.1. The data from these studies are compared below in Table 3.7. It is possible to see a growing trend toward using satellite TV more often for political news. The Internet, possibly not considered a significant source of news in the previous studies, is now clearly used by many students as a source of news.

The growing diversity of news media accessed by young people will indubitably reduce the power of the state to control information. However, IRIB services have been rather successful in maintaining their audiences or even increasing them at the expense of the press. One factor in the rising trend toward consuming TV news is the remarkable increase in coverage that various Iranian television channels have managed to get over the last 15 years or so. Such widespread coverage naturally brings many more young people into contact with TV news, especially if we consider the fact that newspapers are hardly found in villages or smaller towns, and may reach newsstands a day or so later in some other cities and towns.

It is a common observation that the majority of young people the world over use television as their primary source of news, as well as of political news. That is why exposure to television news is used as the main predictor in a majority of studies that attempt to show media impact on youth political knowledge,

Table 3.7 Percentages of respondents who use alternative media "often" or "very often"

	Foreign radios	*Satellite TVs*	*Internet*
2000 study, students	13.0	8.0	
2000 study, national sample		11.0 (foreign media)	
2005 study, students	14.3 (Persian) 7.3 (non-Persian)	15.0 (Persian) 13.4 (non-Persian)	40.5

attitudes, and behavior. This is especially so regarding current events knowledge for which the broadcast media, and TV in particular, are largely responsible. However, some researchers have suggested that the print media have a greater impact on fundamental political knowledge and show a stronger correlation with political participation. Television exposure, meanwhile, is more conducive to interpersonal discussion of political issues and, hence, may indirectly increase political participation (Garramone and Atkin 1986, pp. 76–78). Other studies have found that exposure to radio or print media, at least in the case of young people, has little or no impact on measures of political knowledge, whereas the kinds of television news programs watched tend to influence political knowledge. Exposure to news broadcasts from public television, for example, correlates positively with political knowledge, whereas watching news programs from commercial TV channels seems to correlate negatively with political knowledge (Aarts and Semetko 2003, p. 775).

In Iran too television is the main medium through which most young people receive their political news. The few studies that I could locate seem to confirm my own finding that national television channels are the main source of political news for most young people. In a 1998 study, 75 percent, 76 percent, and 72 percent of the respondents in the age groups 15 to 17, 18 to 24, and 25 to 29 respectively stated that they watch the news through national television networks (Torabi 1998). Another survey that was conducted the same year revealed that 38 percent of the respondents in the age category 15 to 24 and 35 percent of those in the age category 25 to 29 regularly followed the news through national radio and television (Foroughi *et al.* 1998). In our 2005 study, as mentioned before, 65 percent of the respondents said they watch television news "several days a week" or "almost every day." In another empirical study on youth political participation that I conducted recently, 58.8 percent of the respondents (students aged 18 to 29) stated that they use national television as their primary source of obtaining news about a political event or an important political issue (Seyed-Emami 2005). Those who mentioned newspapers and the Internet as their first priority to receive such news were 15.4 percent and 13 percent respectively.

The data presented here confirm field observations in Iran that national television is not only the main avenue of political news for the general public, it is also the main source of news for young people, including for university students. If we add to the present TV news audiences the growing number of people who seem to be getting their news from satellite TV broadcasts from abroad, television will no doubt become the primary medium to be considered for possible impact on young people's political attitudes and behaviors. Naturally, exposure to a medium does not necessarily mean that the material conveyed by it will have a predictable impact on viewers. Properly designed studies capable of determining causal relationships are seriously called for in Iran to measure the impact of particular news media or media political messages on political attitudes and behaviors of young people.

Studies that do examine media effects on political attitudes and behavior are indeed routinely done in Europe and the United States. Interestingly, the findings are often quite contradictory. Some researchers have demonstrated that media use, particularly TV viewing, has an adverse effect on political knowledge and involvement, and often leads to political cynicism. Others have found the opposite and have shown that media use not only increases political knowledge and involvement, it also increases viewers' sense of political efficacy. Aarts and Semetko (2003) in their study in the Netherlands found that the structure of media use among a particular group did indeed affect members' political knowledge, attitudes, and involvement. What made their study particularly interesting was that they could not find any significant impact by radio use and press use on subjects' particular measures of political knowledge. However, the kind of TV news programs the viewers were exposed to regularly showed an impact on their political knowledge. More specifically, public television news programs had a positive impact on the subjects' knowledge of current affairs, whereas commercial television news programs had an adverse effect. They also found that watching public television news programs regularly, compared to watching commercial television news, when controlled for other factors, positively influenced viewers' political efficacy and participation in the elections (Aarts and Semetko 2003, p. 776).

In the case of Iranian users of the mass media, it is to be expected that those who use television as their main source of political news are likely to be less politically participant compared to those using newspapers as their primary news media. Furthermore, it may be hypothesized that reliance on television news compared to reading the news in the press is inversely related to the users' sense of political efficacy. To check these relationships, I used the data from the youth political participation research (Seyed-Emami 2005). Statistical analysis of these data revealed a higher measure of political participation for those who had indicated newspapers as their primary source of political news compared to those who had mentioned television as their primary news medium. Levene's test for equality of variances and t-test for equality of means indicated a statistically significant correlation between the primary medium used to obtain political news and respondents' level of political participation. Similar tests, however, did not produce any significant correlation between primary news medium for political news and internal or external political efficacy. This, however, could be attributed to the fact that I had no measure of the frequency or extent of use of either media. Had such measures been available I would have expected to find a relationship between media use and political efficacy similar to that found between media use and political participation.

This claim is based on the fact that television in Iran inadvertently reinforces the sense of political distrust and cynicism that is so common in our political culture. Contrary to what is often seen in Third World political contexts, the monopolized national broadcast media, although a state-operated institution, has been openly critical of the executive branch's performance in the past eight years. As an institution controlled by the conservatives, the IRIB has tended to downplay the successes and to highlight the failures of the reformist government of President Khatami. The previous Parliament, the sixth Majles, which was dominated heavily by reformists, was also under fire from the IRIB. President

Khatami himself protested against this policy on a number of occasions and referred to it as *siyahnamayi*, or "showing the dark side of things." Negative campaigns against the executive branch and against a whole range of reformist parliamentarians and politicians, combined with widespread mistrust of conservative politicians that already existed in the populace, against a backdrop of cynicism toward politics and politicians in general that is very much ingrained in Iranian political culture, should have contributed to the general feeling of cynicism and political inefficacy among TV viewers.

Conclusions

Examination of the data taken from a number of empirical studies on youth media habits indicated that news programs shown on Iranian national television are still the main source of political news for most young people. There is a growing trend among young people to diversify their sources of news, and the Internet in particular seems to be emerging as a genuine alternative news medium for many people who seek information on political developments inside and outside the country. Trust in print media still seems to be higher than trust in broadcast media, although fewer young people trust the newspapers now compared to a few years ago when the newspapers had emerged as a genuine voice within civil society. The Internet seems to be gaining more trust among young people as a conveyor of uncensored "true" news. Persian-speaking satellite TV channels mostly draw their audiences from those who are not particularly interested in politics. Political participation is higher among newspaper readers compared to those who use television as their main source of political news; although a causal relationship is not assumed here. Analysis of data from an empirical study on youth political participation revealed that relying primarily on television news compared to using the print media as the main source of political news did not show a significant correlation with political efficacy, albeit my suggestion that this relationship should hold. Further studies are needed to verify such a relationship.

Notes

1 It should be remembered that, in spite of all precautions to prevent reactivity, it is quite possible that some respondents were afraid to report the true extent of their foreign media use, as possessing satellite dishes is officially illegal in Iran and the content of most media broadcasts from abroad is considered undesirable, politically or culturally.

2 *Sharq* is a reformist paper that tries to be professional and objective. *Hamshahri* has maintained the highest circulation among all newspapers even though its control was shifted to the conservatives after they won the city council elections in Tehran in March 2003. *Iran* still remains reformist as it is directed by appointees of to the current government. (Subsequent presidential elections will determine its future course.)

3 Further support for this trend may be found in the recent interest that some websites seem to have stirred among students and other people interested in Iran's internal politics. In the past few weeks, interest in the news about the candidates for the forthcoming presidential elections and behind-the-scene maneuverings of various individuals and political groups have been gaining momentum. Mainstream news media are reflecting some of the rumors and backstage news, but some Persian-language websites

linked to different political shades have let loose a continuous stream of news and rumors about the candidates' changing fortunes, their alliances, and their secret deals with powerful figures and so on. Students regularly visit these sites and monitor the kind of news about the elections that they think they normally cannot find in other news media. This is an astonishingly new development. In some magical way, the virtual reality of the Internet appears more real as it is assumed to be immune from censors and the undue cautiousness shown regularly by journalists.

[4] Further references to this study will be listed as "2000 study of students" only.

[5] Further references to this study will be listed as "2000 study of the national sample" only.

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4 The language of rock

Iranian youth, popular music, and national identity

Laudan Nooshin

Introduction

> There's a little spot
> In the heart of space
> It's a lovely planet
> Shining in its place
> On its holy face
> We are living together,
> Don't need the borders
> We are all one.
> Forever … we are all one…
> Forever

So begins the song "*Kabootarhā-ye Sepid*" ("White Pigeons")[1] from the 2004 album *Ta Binahāyat* ("Till Eternity") by *Arian*, arguably the most successful Iranian pop band in recent years. What makes this song so interesting is not just that it is the only example of a high-profile pop band in Iran singing in English, but that the song explicitly forefronts a kind of universalizing discourse which has become increasingly prevalent among the grass-roots rock music which forms the main focus of this chapter. While the music of Arian sits firmly towards the "pop" end of the "rock-pop" spectrum, the immense popularity of the band and the high profile of its music in the public domain raises interesting questions about the extent to which such discourses resonate with broader trends within Iranian society. I will return to *Arian* below.

In this chapter, I will examine the increasing use of English lyrics and universalizing discourses among rock musicians in Iran, and suggest ways in which such discourses serve to problematize prevailing notions about what constitutes Iranian national identity.[2] I am particularly interested in the role of music in mediating notions of place, belonging, and nationhood. As in other parts of the Middle East, mass-mediated popular music arrived in Iran on the wave of Westernization which swept the country in the period following the Second World War. Inextricably associated with modernity and Westernization from the start, Westernized popular music (or "pop") came to occupy the fraught intersections between local and global, between quasi-colonial dependence and independence, between tradition and modernity, and between religious and secular. As such, this music became increasingly caught up in a web of polarized and competing discourses which reflected deep-rooted anxieties about loss of national identity and self-determination in the face of Western economic and cultural power. It was mainly for this reason that pop music was banned following the 1979 Revolution and remained so for almost twenty years. However, with the cultural thaw that followed the election of President Khatami in May 1997, there was a gradual easing of restrictions, starting with a number of centrally promoted pop singers, but very quickly extending beyond this. By the summer of 2000, a new local pop music industry had emerged and pop music was everywhere in Tehran and the provinces, increasingly upbeat, to the extent that some of the music was indistinguishable from the imported ex-patriate pop which remained illegal. Like all musicians, regardless of style or genre, pop musicians were required to obtain a permit from The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (*Vezarat-e Farhang va Ershad-e Eslami*) for all live performances and commercial recording; but such permits were at least forthcoming, notwithstanding the usual bureaucracy, protracted process, and certain continuing restrictions.[3]

It is not within the remit of this chapter to discuss the full implications of the (re)legalization of pop music after 1997,[4] but I would like to focus on two points in particular. First, in legalizing certain types of pop music – that is, bringing pop in from the "margins" where it had been relegated since 1979 – the government effectively blunted much of the subversive cachet which pop music had acquired during the preceding two decades. There are some interesting parallels here with the situation of film, which like pop music was also branded as a form of cultural imperialism at the time of the revolution, something which led to attacks on a number of cinemas across the country. By the mid-1980s, however, film had been appropriated by the government for its own purposes, domesticated, and thereby rendered safe.[5] In fact, it seems somewhat surprising that the government took so long to adopt a similar strategy for pop music, particularly given that almost twenty years of prohibition did little to deter people from listening to pop music, and indeed served to encourage its elicit consumption. The differential handling of music and film was almost certainly a result of the centuries-long history of music's ambiguous status within Islamic doctrine, historical baggage with which film was relatively unburdened. For the post-revolutionary regime, the banning of pop music conveniently and simultaneously symbolized both its anti-Western and its Islamic credentials.

Second, the post-1997 legalization acted inadvertently as a catalyst for something else: the emergence of an unregulated grass-roots popular music movement, something quite new to Iran where popular music has, with a very few exceptions, tended to come from the "center" (of power) or from outside the country. Throughout the period when pop music was banned (1979 to 1998), a few musicians continued to work "underground," but following the lifting of restrictions and with increasing momentum from the year 2000, a growing number of young people began to form bands and to create their own music. It is this grass-roots music which forms the central focus of this chapter. A predominantly urban, cosmopolitan, and middle-class phenomenon, this music has effectively stepped into the peripheral and legally ambiguous space recently vacated by pop. While musicians draw on a range of (predominantly Western) popular idioms, the music is primarily rock-oriented. Variously termed *musiqi-e rāk* or *musiqi-e ālternātive*, the music is also known as "underground" rock (*rāk-e zir-e zamini*) since only a few bands have managed to gain authorization from the Ministry of Culture and also because so many, by necessity, rehearse in the private basement spaces so ubiquitous of Iranian architecture. Ironically, then, in seeking to extend its control over pop music by bringing it in from the "margins" and legalizing it, the government – unintentionally, it seems – left a vacuum which has been filled by this new music. One might say that rock has become the new pop: legally contested and problematic.

The emergence of a grass-roots rock music movement in Iran is particularly significant given demographic factors. Following the steep population rise after 1979, an estimated 70 percent of the population is currently under the age of 30.[6] This so-called third generation of young people mainly born after the revolution is predominantly urban and increasingly connected to a global youth culture, primarily through the Internet. Moreover, there is an emergent youth culture within Iran itself.

A note on terminology. Since its arrival in Iran in the post-war period, Western and Westernized popular music has been referred to using the generic term "pop." Indeed, while Iranian listeners distinguish between different styles of popular music (techno, heavy metal, punk, hip-hop, jazz, and so on), "pop" served as a catch-all term until relatively recently. However, the post-1997 legalization led to a bifurcation such that people now tend to talk in terms of two main categories: "pop" on the one hand (legal and largely accepted by the musical mainstream) and "rock" on the other (largely unauthorized and outside the mainstream). In reality, the situation is much more blurred than these bipolar categories suggest, and indeed the whole question of terminology is phenomenally complex, partly due to the fluidity with which such terms are used in Iran and the speed with which terminology changes. Part of the confusion comes from the fact that "rock" is used both in a broad generic sense (as a synonym for "underground" or "alternative") as well as in a much more specific sense as an indicator of musical style. In the first case, "rock" acts as a discursive category: what places something in this category often has as much to do with some subtle "alternative" quality as the actual musical sounds, and indeed musicians themselves use a wide range of stylistic indicators to describe their music within this broad category. In the second case, "rock" serves as a purely musical category. In the early days of the grass-roots movement, musicians felt the need to name the movement and hence the term "underground music" emerged. However, the term became increasingly problematic for bands seeking authorization from the Ministry of Culture (and, for the small number who managed to secure authorization, the term became redundant) and musicians have therefore gradually dropped it in favor of the slightly less problematic "alternative" or even more neutral "rock." Now, as the movement has expanded and matured, individual styles (such as metal, hip-hop, and so on) are gaining enough of a separate identity not to need the overarching labels which in the early days helped the fledgling movement develop a coherent identity.

In this chapter I use the term "rock" in its (broad) discursive sense; most of the bands referred to below also fall within the (narrower) musical category of "rock," but some examples will be taken from other styles such as metal which, while musically distinct, still continue to be subsumed under the broad discursive rock/alternative umbrella. Incidentally, it is ironic that while there is now a certain ambivalence about the term "underground" in Iran itself (due to the issues mentioned above), it has belatedly become fashionable in diaspora where musicians and promoters have adopted the term in order to make the music appear risqué, whereas in fact most run no risk at all by using it.[7]

Iranian rock and its audiences

Iranian rock musicians occupy an interesting, one might say quasi-liminal, position. Since few have had their music authorized by the Ministry of Culture they can only operate below the radar, rehearsing in private and circulating their music on pirate CDs or through the Internet. While most complain about the difficulties of working in this way, the lack of access to and feedback from audiences, not to mention adequate rehearsal, recording and performance facilities, at the same time many capitalize on their enforced underground status to enhance their "outsider capital," always useful to a rock musician's street credibility. But maintaining the balance is extremely difficult: musicians clearly relish the kudos which comes with being rejected by the establishment, as well as the control which it affords them over their own music; but it comes at a great price and the pressure of working in this way often proves too much for bands. As Milad Tangshir, composer and lead guitarist of power metal band *Ahoora*, states:

> It's very hard. It's the hardest deal in all history! You give all you got, like money, time, soul, feelings, etc., but there is nothing that you gain. No release, no gig, no support, no future. It's so strange to be an underground band in Iran.[8]

The result is that bands regularly form and disband, and only a handful have managed to maintain a long-term working relationship.

How, then, do Iranian rock bands reach their audiences? First, it should be noted that the official position of the Ministry of Culture remains characteristically ambiguous. There is no law banning rock music as such, but like all musicians, rock bands have to submit their music for authorization, and few have been successful to date. There are exceptions, though: the Ministry of Culture authorized recording permits for the album *Dār-e Qāli* ("The Carpet Weaver's Frame") by the band *Raz-e Shab* in 2001 and for *Meera's* eponymous 2004 album (the first Iranian rock album to be distributed outside Iran with the backing of Australian manager Nicholas Pattison). In addition to this, several bands have managed to secure permits for live performances. Moreover, a few university-based venues, such as the Milad Hall at the University of Tehran, lie outside the remit of the Ministry and do not require performance permits, and a number of bands have performed in these venues. Still, these instances are a drop in the ocean and, even for bands with authorization, concerts are often cancelled at the last minute or even disrupted at the time of performance. Even as this chapter was being written in the late summer of 2006, several bands were advertising forthcoming concerts, mainly in Tehran, online.[9] It is not clear how many of these actually took place, but at least one – the concert by *Ahoora* – was physically broken up by members of the *basij* voluntary religious militia, and the Beethoven Music Shop which had sold tickets for the concert was shut down.[10] In other words, while there are some public outlets for rock bands, these are highly contested and there is little logic concerning which bands have had permit applications accepted and which rejected. The machinations of the Ministry of Culture are not open to external scrutiny, something which has led to much speculation about the decision-making processes. And since the election of President Ahmadinejad in June 2005, the situation has become even more uncertain, particularly in view of his reported intention to clamp down on manifestations of Western culture, something which has bolstered quasi-official groups such as the *basij*.

In the face of official restrictions, most bands are forced to look elsewhere for ways of distributing their music. Some make recordings using low-quality home studio equipment or, if they can afford it, a private professional studio. Such CDs are then circulated through informal networks; some are even sold in music stores, available "under the counter" for those who ask for them. By far the most important medium of distribution, however, is the Internet. Indeed, it could be argued that the new grass-roots movement was only able to establish itself and expand because of the possibilities offered by the Internet.[11] Many bands now have their own websites, and there are also a number of generic Iranian rock sites. Musicians also link to and post their music on non-Iranian sites, including specialist genre sites such as ultimatemetal.com and such sites regularly post interviews with Iranian musicians. Thus, the Internet plays an important role in allowing musicians to communicate with audiences, but the communication tends to move in one direction only, allowing little in the way of feedback which musicians would normally benefit from in a live context. As a result, many musicians feel that they are working in a vacuum. To quote from another interview with Milad Tangshir of *Ahoora*, "when you don't have the chance to be heard and the chance to be seen, there will be no big improvements."[12] One website which played a crucial role in the early days of the grass-roots music movement and which continues to support this music is tehranavenue.com which hosted the "Underground Music Competition" (UMC) in 2002, an online music festival in which listeners could listen to tracks and vote through the tehranavenue website. UMC was unprecedented and served both to bring attention to the sheer number of bands operating underground and to give the emerging movement an identity. UMC was followed by two more festivals, "Tehran Avenue Music Open" (TAMO) in 2004 and "Tehran Avenue Music Festival" (TAMF) in 2005.[13] Significantly, the Internet also allows musicians to access audiences outside Iran, both in the Iranian diaspora and non-Iranians, and indeed the three tehranavenue festivals included both participants and voters from outside Iran.

Given the particular situation of rock music in Iran, and specifically the lack of live performance contexts, it is difficult to ascertain who the audiences for this music are, but the evidence (including my own interviews) suggests, not surprisingly, that Iranian rock appeals largely to the socio-economic and generational peers of the musicians themselves: urban, young, educated, relatively affluent, as well as modernist, internationalist, and secular in outlook, lifestyle, and aspiration. In many ways, these young people – with their mobile phones, their jeans, connected to the Internet, and so on – share as much with their cosmopolitan peers outside Iran as they do with their compatriots from the less affluent and more traditional, religious areas of south Tehran and the provinces. The audience for rock is relatively small, but is evidently committed and enthusiastic; for many, this music represents youth, freedom of expression, and is regarded as anti-authoritarian and anti-establishment.

In studying this music, I have become particularly interested in the verbal discourses which musicians use to position themselves and their music. In general, Iranian rock musicians are highly articulate (most are university students or graduates, but rarely *music* graduates) and are eager to define rock as an alternative space of youth experience. This is *their* music; for the first time in Iran, there is a music which belongs specifically to young people and to no one else, and over which they feel a sense of ownership.[14] What is particularly interesting about the discourses of rock musicians is the extent to which they project a universalizing and global consciousness which stands in stark contrast to the isolationist brand of nationalism which has been promoted by the government since 1979. Thus, statements such as "We have to become universal"[15] or "They think globally and see no geographical boundaries for their work"[16] are regularly encountered both in discussion with musicians and in published interviews. As well as representing a rejection of heavy-handed nationalist ideologies, such discourses are also clearly intended to link Iranian rock into a global marketplace. At the same time that musicians are seeking to nurture a local audience, they also aspire to attract listeners elsewhere. There is, of course, a significant diaspora audience, particularly among young Iranians who find in rock music a refreshing antidote to the nostalgia-laden excesses of ex-patriot *los angelesi* pop. But moving beyond diaspora, several of the musicians whose rehearsals I attended wanted to know whether their music might appeal to non-Iranian audiences in Europe and the U.S. Ironically, this seems unlikely unless the music becomes more obviously "Iranian" (and at the same time less Western) in its musical language. Balancing the local and the global is no easy task: for local audiences the meanings of Iranian rock lie largely in its peripheral, contested status, but also in its rejection of narrow nationalism; such meanings are likely to be lost on non-Iranian listeners seeking the innovative and exotic.

The language of rock: universalism in sound?

There are a number of ways in which Iranian rock music is subverting some of the long-accepted norms of Iranian popular music and I would like to mention three of these before moving on to discuss the question of song texts and language choice in greater detail. First, there is a new collaborative ethos with named bands and a collective identity which contrasts with the predominant "star solo singer and anonymous backing group" format of "mainstream" pop. Attending rehearsals, I was struck by how involved band members were in discussing and shaping each song. As Sohrab Mohebbi of the band *127* explains:

> Not much of a captain here; everybody takes a part … I write the lyrics and the music is usually a band collaboration. Anybody who comes with a good riff or an idea we take it in and make it around it.[17]

Indeed, it is interesting to reflect on the parallels between this new *musical* collectivity and recent discourses on civil society and democratic pluralism in Iran in which a variety of voices are accommodated and valued, in contrast to existing models in which the social arena is dominated by a single world view.[18]

Second, there are the lyrics, which offer subtle commentary on a range of social and personal issues, and which strongly differentiate rock from the predominantly clichéd nostalgia of pop love songs. Lyrics range from the surreal to the intensely personal, but are rarely directly political; those that do touch on social issues tend to be oblique and heavily veiled. *Raz-e Shab*, for example, sing of the poor working conditions of carpet weavers, usually young girls, in the title song of their album *Dār-e Qāli*, and the band *Fara* (which took first place in the 2002 UMC) has sung about runaway girls. These are unusual, however. Although many songs convey a sense of youth restlessness, most focus on the kinds of personal topics found in rock music the world over.

Third, there is a new musical aesthetic emerging quite unlike the somewhat formulaic nature of mainstream pop. Granted, rock musicians still draw predominantly on Western models; with so few local role models, at least until recently, bands have tended to look outside Iran for ideas and inspiration. However, musicians are drawing on a wide stylistic palate including blues, progressive rock, country, flamenco, metal, reggae, hip-hop, jazz, and many others. Even within a single song, one often comes across a mélange of musical styles; and published interviews and information on websites reveal musicians' eclectic tastes. Milad Tangshir, for example, lists a number of influences on his music including metal bands such as Iced Earth, Black Sabbath, Iron Maiden and King Diamond, and progressive rock bands such as Pink Floyd, Camel, Eloy and Dire Straits.[19] Attempting to describe the musical style of *127*, Sohrab Mohebbi states:

> Well, it's actually a blend of the sounds in our ears, born and raised in Tehran/Iran you come across lots of interesting material. From traditional melodies to the Los Angeles pop and also all the rock and roll and the poetry, basically everything. This music is like a raw, unexposed film and you can add anything you want … it's got the folk and the punk but it also has jazzy roots and funk but at [in] the end of the day who cares what it's called anyway[s].[20]

While such influences may not appear especially broad to Western audiences, in the context of Iran there is a clear widening of musical horizons in comparison with the period before 1997, and certainly in comparison with mainstream pop. Even though musicians had access to various kinds of Western popular music during the 1980s and 1990s, through the flourishing black market, the arrival of, first, satellite television, and later Internet technology, has allowed relatively easy access to a wider range of musical styles than ever before. One consequence of this is that Iranian rock has become increasingly detached from its local roots musically.

In the context of the long-standing debate over Westernized popular music as a form of cultural dependency in Iran, what reading might be made of the new eclecticism? While musicians clearly view rock as a space of youth expression, and even empowerment, critics dismiss this music as yet another manifestation of *Gharbzadegi* ("Westoxication")[21] and attempt to exclude it from the central space of cultural discourse. One particular line of criticism focuses on the fact that little Iranian rock sounds obviously "Iranian" in its musical language. This criticism rests on a deep-rooted but rarely articulated norm which places national identity (or at least, a particular view of what constitutes national identity) at the center of aesthetic debates on Iranian music, and according to which music's value is measured primarily by the extent to which it wears its national identity "on its sleeve," preferably a pristine identity unsullied by modernity or Westernization.[22] However, many rock musicians are refusing to be bound by such reductionist aesthetics and are formulating a new kind of aesthetic decoupled from national identity. Since most view themselves and their music as much in an international as in a local context, they unambiguously position this music and its meanings in terms of youth expression and cosmopolitanism, as well as an increasingly self-generating local expression of a more widely shared "global" culture. In other words, while dependency discourses have changed little since 1979, for a new generation of musicians "socialized within the cosmopolitan formation" (Turino 2003, p. 68), eclecticism means something very different from the self-conscious imitation of the 1970s. For one thing, many of the styles which musicians draw on are gradually becoming assimilated and authenticated, no longer regarded as "external," thereby shifting the boundaries between "Iranian" and "non-Iranian."

The rejection of more than two decades of rhetoric from both politicians and other (primarily traditional) musicians does not mean that national identity is unimportant to rock musicians. In fact, I would argue that the music itself becomes a space in which to explore what it means to be Iranian. *127*, for example, describe their music as:

> an Iranian brand of alternative, because it is made by us and we are all Iranian … when you listen to “Coming Around” … it has an Iranian air. Not the Iran of the past, but our Iran today, where we have lived for the last 20 years.[23]

Far from negating a national framework for their music, then, *127* seek to redefine it and move toward a new vision of national identity which is both rooted at home and is at the same time outward-looking and cosmopolitan. In the words of Turino, “Cosmopolitans project universalism, a common humanity unfettered by localized identities and locations, as basic to who they are” (2003, p. 62), a stance which in the context of Iran is wholly consonant with the broadening of the social sphere associated with an emergent youth consciousness and civil society infrastructure. Based on the evidence of interviews and discussions, it is clear to me that many rock musicians are deliberately forefronting stylistic diversity in order to transcend national boundaries, to engage in cultural dialogue and to force a debate about Iran’s relationship with the outside world, particularly the West, and her future in an increasingly global environment. In doing so, they engage in the ongoing process of contestation over national identity, what Rahimeh (2002) calls “The contradictory and ambivalent discourses of nationalism” (p. 242), and which has been played out in the public domain for decades as those in power have successively sought to promote certain aspects of national identity over others (Islamic/pre-Islamic, traditional/modern, religious/secular, Persian-centric/multi-ethnic, and so on). In the case of rock, musicians are downplaying the very elements of national identity promoted by the government since 1979 (in particular, religious identity),[24] instead projecting a different kind of national identity which reflects a growing secularism and cosmopolitanism among young people and which draws on very different signifiers (including occasional references to Iran’s pre-Islamic heritage, for example, in band names such as *Ahoora*). And the government, deeply divided on this issue, is caught between seeking to appease those who accuse it of abandoning the original aims of the Revolution and its intense awareness that “the enfranchisement of this very generation is essential for the continued political existence of the Islamic Republic as a nation polity” (Alinejad 2002, p. 35).

While the musical language of Iranian rock music is indeed predominantly Western, it should be noted that some bands do draw on more localized sounds. For some, the rejection of a nationalist determination of aesthetics has led to what might be called a “placeless music,” a term I borrow from Taylor’s (2000) discussion of U.S. and European advertisers’ use of a mélange of quasi-“world music” sounds to evoke an exotic and “timeless Other and Elsewhere” (p. 167), but which instead often create a timeless “nowhere.” In such cases, the Persian lyrics and the vocal style and timbre are often the only “codes” of belonging, that which gives the music a sense of place. Other bands draw more directly on local sounds, with Iranian modal and rhythmic structures, as well as traditional instruments (particularly percussion), and even setting words by medieval mystic poets (such as Molana and Hafez) to music.[25]

The language of rock: lyrics

I have established that the *musical* language of Iranian rock is predominantly Western. When it comes to lyrics, however, rock musicians have tended to set Persian words to music, with the exception of some cover versions of Western songs, particularly in the early days of the rock movement.[26] However, even early on there were a few who used English lyrics for their original compositions, and it seems that a growing number of bands are now choosing to sing in English. Whether this is a trend or not is hard to say – certainly, these songs are still a minority – but one does regularly come across Iranian rock bands singing in English and more than a quarter of the bands which entered TAMF in 2005 sang in English (25 out of 88 entries).[27] The second half of this chapter will consider some of the reasons why rock musicians are choosing to sing in English and present specific examples of such songs, as well as exploring some of the highly emotive issues raised by language choice. The information is based on personal interviews and correspondence with musicians, as well as published interviews.

One the main reasons which rock musicians give for setting English lyrics to music is that the natural rhythms of Persian do not suit rock. A review of *Meera*'s CD in the Iranian national newspaper *Iran* (11th *Tir* 1383 [July 1, 2004]) says it all: "*She'r-e Fārsi Barāy-e Rāk!*" ("Persian Lyrics for Rock!"), and this sentiment is echoed over and over again by musicians themselves. Metal band *Ahoora* worked for two years attempting to set Persian lyrics to music, but eventually gave up and started singing in English because, according to Milad Tangshir, the structure (*sākhtār*) of the Persian language is incompatible with metal.[28] He explains,

> Persian is a melodic language which has many extended sounds and a lack of short, detached sounds, whilst rock and metal (and perhaps Western music in general) has the ability to break into different rhythms and beats. In general, in my view, this combination has no natural basis and is doomed to failure.[29]

Gay Breyley reports a similar response from metal musicians Damon and Farhad who considered Persian lyrics "soft" and therefore less suited to their music than the more "decisive" rhythms of English.[30] Elika, guitarist and composer, formerly of the band *Kam*, claims that no one really likes to hear Persian lyrics in rock music because of the inherent incompatibility, and that the only reason why most bands sing in Persian is that the Ministry of Culture is unlikely to authorize English lyrics.[31] According to Elika, there were differences of opinion between members of *Kam* (now disbanded) regarding the choice of lyrical language. Pooya, another member of the band, points to two further dimensions of this debate: first, the historical absence of local role models; and second, the central importance of lyrics to Iranian music of all kinds:

> When Kam first started, our goal was to sing in Farsi, because it was new at that time and we wanted to be progressive. We had 12 Farsi songs and we tried our best to avoid singing in English. On the other hand, singing rock in Farsi is not so easy; we didn't have any model from the past and all of us used to listen to rock songs with English lyrics. All of these issues made the job harder. And, as you know, Iranians have always been interested in the lyrics rather than the music in a song . . . so we were very picky about the lyrics and tried to attract our listeners by lyrics and music equally.[32]

While I have been unable to corroborate Elika's claim regarding the Ministry of Culture,[33] it is significant that a large number of bands are choosing to avoid lyrics altogether, largely it seems because of the difficult issues which they raise, particularly in relation to permits. Twenty-one of the 88 entries to TAMF (2005) were instrumental pieces without lyrics (that is, almost as many as were sung in English; the remaining 42 were sung in Persian); indeed, going back to the initial period following the relaxation of restrictions on commercial popular music, a concert which I attended in July 2000 comprised only instrumental cover versions of Western pop and rock songs, including John Lennon's "Imagine."[34] While the absence of lyrics is not unusual for the kinds of musical styles closely followed by rock musicians, particularly progressive rock, it is fairly unusual in Iranian music generally. Despite the gradual acceptance within the classical tradition of instrumental music without a vocalist in recent decades, Iranian listeners still usually expect to hear a singer in a musical performance. The question of role models in also important, as Sohrab Mahdavi, editor of tehranavenue, explains:

> Most of these musicians are young and as such only want to imitate their favourite bands, which happen to be Western ones. In a few years, however, when these musicians start to develop their own styles, we will be able to say how this trend will develop.[35]

While Mahdavi was responding to a question about lyrical language, clearly his statement applies equally to the music as well.

In contrast to the views expressed above, there were others who did not accept that Persian lyrics are incompatible with rock music. Most were aware of the arguments, but countered them by pointing to the many groups who have successfully combined the two. For example, Ramin Behna, composer and leader of the band *Raz-e Shab*, the first rock band to gain a permit for its album

Dār-e Qāli, regarded the combining of Persian lyrics and rock music as something which has enriched Iranian rock by "creating new accents and rhythms for this music" and by helping to develop the music, thereby making it better known outside Iran.[36]

Another reason for the use of English lyrics is that it completely severs music from the nationalist discourses, discussed earlier, to which it has been tied for centuries; and at the same time resonates with a desire to be accepted into a transnational community which goes beyond national and ethnic boundaries. Interestingly, I found this viewpoint articulated less often and less explicitly than the justification based on purely musical reasons. However, some musicians are up-front about this and even use the verb "*jahāni shodan*" ("to become global") to describe the process. In part, this relates to the neo-colonial inheritance and the global spread of English as an "international" language, an important dimension of which is musicians' awareness of the cultural power associated with the English language and the access it givens them to a potential global audience; the importance of this is no doubt heightened by the difficulties in accessing audiences in Iran. If Iranian rock musicians want to reach audiences outside Iran, then English is clearly the language of choice. To quote again from Milad Tangshir, "because we wanted our music to be recognized on an international level and to be able to compete and be heard globally. And using Persian lyrics would be a strong factor working against this."[37] Some even regard the setting of English lyrics as a potential ticket out of Iran.[38] Babak Khiavchi of Bamahang Productions in Toronto reports that he regularly receives demos and samples from musicians in Iran, including some who sing in English, "with the goal of reaching a global market and the justification that rock music should only be sung in English, which I totally disagree with." He goes on to complain that "The effort to write and sing in English is impressive, but sadly the thick and heavy Iranian accent … overshadows the lyrics by making them totally indiscernible."[39] Several of the "expert" judges for TAMF (2005)[40] commended the song "Oriental Request" (set to English lyrics) by the band *Puzzle*, but significantly it was only US-based singer Mamak Khadem whose judgment was based primarily on the fact that the song could be enjoyed by anyone outside Iran and for whom "Listenability anywhere in the world" was an important criterion.[41] It is also interesting to note the number of bands which have adopted English names, even those which sing only in Persian.

The few bands which have managed to achieve some level of international visibility evoke very conflicted responses from audiences and other musicians in Iran, as the following quotation from Pooya (formerly of *Kam*) illustrates:

> There are good bands in Iran like 127 who play good music and sing good lyrics. I don't want to criticize them. They have chosen their way smartly and they know what they are doing. And they have enough ingredients to do so. But there are lots of bands in Iran which try to have English songs and they sound horrible!![42]

In fact, *127* has divided opinion strongly by the decision to sing only in English and the fact that the band has, since 2005, been invited to perform at a number of festivals outside Iran (something which is no doubt related to the choice of lyrical language).[43] Lead singer and composer Sohrab Mohebbi defends the use of English:

> We have to become universal. In our opinion, even if we want to demonstrate our native and regional spirit in any kind of music the way to convey it would be through the music itself and not the language of the lyrics … Using Persian lyrics on Western music doesn't necessarily bring about the Iranianization of that music; many have tried that and although the language has changed to Persian the feeling remains Western.[44]

As well as illustrating the internationalist stance, Mohebbi raises an important question: Why, for many rock musicians, the use of "foreign" lyrics is problematic but a "foreign" musical language is not. In part, the answer would seem to lie in the centrality of language to notions of Iranian national identity, at least a Persian-centric view of national identity. Thus, English lyrics touch a raw nerve which Western musical styles do not. This relates closely to the question of audiences: there is a fine line between appealing to listeners abroad and alienating those at home. In Iran, those most likely to listen to this music are from a social class where some understanding of English is not unusual; but there are others who are undoubtedly excluded by the shift from Persian to English, a shift which perhaps represents the ultimate move toward (or pandering to?) an international audience and a global market. As Farzam Rahimi (vocalist and composer in the band *Meera*) comments:

> I myself wrote some rock songs in Farsi just for Iranian people who wanted to feel what rock music is talking about; and for those guys who were walking their first steps to know this style, it was better to have an opportunity to understand the lyrics. The second reason was I just wanted to trial and error on Persian lyrics in rock music, and I found that Farsi lyrics has its own potential for this style; I mean I like that and the feedback from the fans proved it much better.
>
> It depends who your audiences are; you're gonna say something internationally or are you just sharing your thoughts with your own people? Till now I shared my thoughts with my own people, but nowadays I'm thinking that there are some elements which I have to share internationally!! Americans and Europeans don't know today's situation of many of the people in Iran: they think most Iranians are terrorists or instead of cars they're using camels.[45]

For *127*, success abroad may come at a price. Despite their growing international profile, and despite having come third in the 2002 UMC, *127* did not even make the top 20 in TAMF 2005, even though other groups singing in

English did. Finding themselves on the defensive, *127* have made clear their frustration at being questioned so often about their lyrics and have pointed to the original roots of rock to justify their position, as well as to examples of rock bands in other countries:

> I am so tired of answering this question. Do you guys ask Sepultra or Air or Bjork why they don't sing in their native tongue?[46]
>
> … that's the language of Rock music.… This phenomenon started in England and the U.S. For instance, German Rock is never sung in German, and if it is, it will never go beyond German borders. Prominent bands such as the Brazilian Sepulture [*sic*], the German metal groups Jane and Eloy that are famous worldwide, make use of English lyrics.[47]

Others have made the same point. Milad Tangshir suggests that:

> rock and metal are musical genres which much more than other genres are rooted in the culture and society of the West, so how can this music be combined with the Persian language which has arisen from very different roots?[48]

Another reason for singing in English, and which again relates directly to the issue of audiences, is where bands want to convey a specific message to listeners outside Iran. A good example is *127*'s "My Sweet Little Terrorist Song" (2003), which Mohebbi describes as "a lament from [a] bunch of middle-eastern second class citizens of this planet. Under pressure from both sides of the fuss," a dylanesque critique of Western foreign policy in the Middle East.[49] Ironically for a song directed primarily at audiences abroad, this track was dropped at the last minute from inclusion in *The Rough Guide to the Music of Iran* CD.[50] Another example is the anti-Iraq war music video "Fed Up" by the band *Mute Agency*, the text of which begins as follows:

> I'm fed up
> Yeah, I'm fed up
> With the humdrum of the war.
>
> I'm going deaf,
> Yeah, I'm going deaf
> Leave me alone, I can't stand it anymore.[51]

Although less sophisticated poetically than "My Sweet," the simple message of this song is reinforced by hard-hitting images of tanks, war planes, and exploding bombs.

In a similar vein, but using more positive imagery, there are songs such as that with which this chapter began – "*Kabootarhā-ye Sepid*," ("White Pigeons") by the pop band *Arian* – with its message of global harmony and its universalizing discourses: "Don't need the borders; We are all one." Each of the three verses of this song is in a different language: English, Arabic, and Persian, returning to English at the end. What sets this song apart from much of the rock music discussed above is that *Arian*'s musical language lies firmly within the pop domain and is heavily coded as "Iranian"; for Iranian listeners, there is no doubt as to where this music belongs.[52] Moreover, far from challenging dominant discourses on nationhood in the ways that many rock musicians do (primarily through their musical language and English lyrics), the Persian lyrics of the second half of verse 3 serve partly to reinforce such discourses with the reference to the Iranian flag, although it should be noted that this is framed explicitly within a projected message of peace, something which has particular resonance given the current international relations situation.

> **Verse 3**
> *Too āsemoon-e tarānehā mā kabootarhā-ye sepidim*
> (In the sky of songs, we are white doves)
>
> Gozashtim az tanhāiā o be shahr-e eshgh residim
> (We've passed loneliness and reached the city of love)
>
> Bā golhā-ye sorkh, bā barghā-ye sabz
> (With red flowers, with green leaves)
>
> Bā harir-e sepid-e solh, bā seh rang-e Iran
> (With the white silk of peace, the three colours of Iran)
>
> Parchami too delhā keshidim
> (We have drawn a flag in the hearts)
>
> **Postlude**
> We are white pigeons, white pigeons
> Which fly through the sky of your hearts
>
> We are white pigeons
> Which bring peace when our love song starts
>
> We are white pigeons, white pigeons
> Which fly through the sky of your hearts.

Thus, this song seems to be simultaneously addressed to a dual audience: on the one hand there are the discourses of universality which can be understood by audiences both at home and abroad; on the other, there are the more nationalist sentiments of the Persian lyrics understandable only to local audiences and Diaspora Iranians.[53] It should be noted that as well as being one of the rare instances of Iranian pop musicians singing in English, this is also the only example I have come across of such universalizing discourses within Iranian pop music.

Returning to rock, quite often there is no particular reason for musicians to sing in English in terms of a wider message. As already mentioned, many rock lyrics are highly personal and are often enigmatically surreal to an extreme. Sohrab Mohebbi is a master of such poetry, as evidenced by the lyrics available on *127*'s website[54] and by Appendix 1 which presents the words of "Coming Around" (2001), the song which came third in the 2002 UMC and which helped to launch *127's* career. According to Mohebbi, this is one of his favorite compositions.[55] An example of a song which draws on a much darker, almost psychedelic, and quite disturbing surrealism may be seen in Appendix 2, the lyrics of "Beyond the Reasonable Doubt of a Lunatic" by Milad Tangshir of the metal band *Ahoora*, a song which was entered for the 2005 TAMF. Emulating the kinds of imagery used by metal bands outside Iran, the lyrics convey a strong metal identity, in this case the use of English allowing the band to establish a genre identity which connects it with metal musicians elsewhere.[56] It is interesting that while *127* have hitherto eschewed social comment in their songs (with the stunning exception of "My Sweet"), they have recently started to move in this direction, as seen in the lyrics to "The Gift" in Appendix 3.[57]

While the main focus of this discussion has been on English – since this is the language which bands choosing not to sing in Persian have tended to use (unless they eschew lyrics altogether) – it should be noted that other languages are also used. For instance, the rapper Salome came fourth in TAMF (2005) with a dual-language song "*Mayoos Nasho*" ("Don't Lose Hope"), a collaboration with German-based Iranian rapper Shirali, with whom she established a "cyber" working relationship without ever having actually met. In the online commentary which accompanies the results of the TAMF voting, Mamak Khadem praises the "blending of two languages with a similar purpose."[58] Salome has also worked with the underground Turkish rapper Pusat, with whom she wrote a Persian-Turkish anti-war song called Petrolika.[59] Another interesting dual-language and virtual hip-hop collaboration is between UK-based Iranian rapper Reveal and Iran-based Hichkas, with Reveal rapping in English and Hichkas in Persian.[60]

Such collaborations touch on the complex relationship between musicians in Iran and those in Diaspora. As far as rock/alternative music goes, musicians in Iran have certainly led the way, although a Diaspora rock scene has now established itself, following developments in Iran. Until recently the only Iranian popular music produced in Diaspora was a nostalgia-laden pop music which has changed little since 1979. This music exists in "an ethnic-linguistic 'closed circuit' " (Hemassi 2006) in which musicians have tended to emphasize their "Iranianness" in order to appeal to diasporic audiences. The few pop musicians to have crossed over to the mainstream have done so by using "languages other than Persian and they have not made ethnicity the basis of their artistic persona" (Hemmasi 2006).[61] Thus the move from "racialized" margins to a "de-racialized" and "naturalized" center has generally been marked by a shift from

Persian to English. Hemmasi (2006) discusses an interesting exception to this, namely Swedish-based singer Arash Labaaf, the "first person to ever have a Persian-language song top the pop charts in Sweden," and indeed across Europe, with his first single "*Boro Boro*" ("Go Away, Go Away," 2004). Having persuaded a skeptical Warner Sweden to take a risk by allowing him to sing just in Persian, Arash chose lyrics that would be relatively easy for non-Iranian audiences to imitate and assimilate, even if they did not understand the meanings. Thus, unlike rock musicians in Iran who attempt to erase difference in order to enter a global market (by singing in English and sounding like Western bands), Arash *uses* difference to sell his music – not just his "Iranianness" but also by drawing on other exotic imagery, particularly Indian – and difference is what the Western capitalist thirst for exoticism demands. However, as Hemmasi points out, foreignness has to be mediated to make it acceptable, and Arash's "crossover success has depended on making difference *palatable*" (2006). It is interesting to note that there is a similar debate among contemporary visual artists and filmmakers in Iran. Some have been criticized for using exotic imagery aimed at Western audiences, while others have over-compensated for this by avoiding local elements so as not to be seen as exoticizing (Keshmirshekan 2006). The outcome is remarkably similar to the situation of much rock music, with art devoid of local references, but the motivations are very different. In the case of rock musicians, it comes partly from a misreading of what Western audiences want: many seek to make their music sound more Western, apparently unaware that it is precisely their *difference* that is most likely to attract listeners outside Iran.

Concluding comments

Ultimately, the question is what all of this means, both to musicians and to audiences. The late 1990s thaw in Iran's international relations, the diaspora network, the emergence of a cosmopolitan youth culture, and, of course, the Internet, have all served to link Iranian youth into a transnational cultural network. In this context, do English lyrics, stylistic diversity, and universalizing discourses represent a calculated pandering to international markets and an inevitable consequence of the global power of Western culture; or a genuine attempt to challenge isolationist discourses of nationalism, to forge transnational identities, and to stake a claim in a new outward-looking vision of what it means to be Iranian in the twenty-first century? In this chapter, I have suggested a number of reasons why rock musicians are choosing to set English lyrics to music. While most still continue to sing in Persian, the use of English certainly tells us a great deal about the desire of young Iranians to participate in a global culture, and it also raises questions about how we understand transnational social formations in an increasingly interconnected world.

It is clear from published interviews and my own discussion with musicians that the level of agency is high. At the same time, such agency should not eclipse the significance of center–periphery dynamics. The fact is that the West continues to hold immense prestige value for Iranian rock musicians, who tend to look "Westward" rather than to other peripheries for their musical ideas.[62] In practice, being "universal" or "global" usually means drawing from the "center"; indeed distinguishing between what is "global" and what is "Western" is not always easy.[63] Nevertheless, in seeking to understand the cultural inheritance of neo-colonialism, what Lipsitz (1994) calls the "Postcolonial Politics of Sound" (p. 22), we are compelled to ask whether Iranian rock is fated to remain a symbol of cultural dependency for evermore. If so, there is a central irony in the fact that the self-imposed isolation which resulted from Iran's reaction against neo-colonialist influence was itself a product of colonialism. In the words of Dabashi (2002), there has been a "failure to recognize the formation of the so-called 'native' or 'traditional' mode as something of itself deeply colonial" (p. 122).[64] And, since "Cultures have always borrowed from each other then appropriated what is borrowed and transformed it into their own style" (Tapper 2002, p. 20),[65] at what point does the appropriation of what most rock musicians regard as a form of global culture – that is, available to all – become transformed into a local cosmopolitan aesthetic?[66]

Whatever the reasons for linguistic and stylistic choices, it is clear that the recent emergence of a grass-roots rock movement in Iran is providing a space for music which blends a cosmopolitan consciousness with a sense of being rooted "at home." In the words of Alinejad (2002), "The growing critical, and inevitably modern, discourses of civil liberty, political pluralism and individual rights … [are] being increasingly articulated in terms of a discursive field of public expression where new identities are constructed and seek recognition, at both symbolic and political levels" (p. 26). Thus, through their music, Iranian rock musicians are imagining and projecting new understandings of national identity which embrace modernity, plurality, and cosmopolitanism. Not only does this allow for the symbolic expression of a particular vision of Iran's future in a global context but through the act of performance itself such a vision becomes one step closer to reality.

Appendix 1

"Coming Around" (2001)
Lyrics and music by Sohrab Mohebbi
From www.127band.com/lyrics.html

coming around
was just a coming around
"us" going around
it was just a coming around
a "me," "you," an "us," "we weres"
a coming around, falling around
thoughts walking around
things going around, all together

someone, somewhere, seeing things
knowing, there ain't nothing
that i'm not
"you weres," "they weres," "i was"
seashells, sun shine
ain't nothing
that i'm not
was just about words
when words are wordless
was just about time
when seconds timeless
actions wrongless
harm, harmless
walking around thoughtless
it's about between
weight and lightness
feeling thoughts
and think senses

Appendix 2

"Beyond the Reasonable Doubt of a Lunatic"
Lyrics by Milad Tangshir, Music by Milad Tangshir and Kiavash Kia
From the album *Ahoora* (2006)
www.ahoora-band.com/beyondlyric.htm

I love the moon, more than any sun
Every time I see the sun I have to close my eyes
But moon is kind, I can watch her now
As long as I want, and how I like
Me, moon and my shadow, play together for hours
Sometimes I rest and they play and play
I can't hide it anymore, wanna be alone,
You shadow, I hate your dark look
You're with me since dawn of my time, same look and smile
How can I love you with that ugly smile
Time slowly passed me by, but you're still here
You shadow, why your sick eye doesn't leave me alone
You leech, if you'd go one step further
I wouldn't hate you like this
Every time I close my eyes, I dream of you
Dead, with no eyes and no mouth
Filthy vision of your smile: the nightmare of truth
Stay … away, you stay away from me
Stay … no … away, you … no … no … oh god

Now, that I've hung myself, I can't believe you're standing by me, smiling
I smile too, but not as ugly as you…
Me, moon and my shadow, play together for hours…

Appendix 3

"The Gift" (2005), verses 4–8.
Lyrics and music by Sohrab Mohebbi

I've got a right to live
Isn't that a gift, isn't that a gift
And on through the days I drift
Isn't that bliss, isn't that a bliss
Have a right to be hit by the bats
Hold the rights for my teethe to be smashed
And when I finally go insane and will nothing remain
I gain the rights to go sing in the rain
Have a right to be report and deported
Have a right to follow the orders
Have a right to take the scorn and a right to be torn
Have a right to regret being born
Have a right to be ignored and neglected
Have a right to be segued and be raided
Have a right to be dammed a right to be jammed
Have a right to be sanctioned and banned
And we're all brothers in times of blitz
We're all brothers in times like these
But where are my brothers in times of blitz?
Where are my brothers in times like these?

Notes

1 Music by Ali Pahlavan and Ninef Amirkhas; lyrics by Simon Amirkhas, Ninef Amirkhas, and Ali Pahlavan.

2 This research is based on several periods of fieldwork undertaken between 1999 and 2004, during which time I interviewed and talked informally with a large number of people, both musicians and others, as well as attending concerts and rehearsals, and following relevant debates in the print and broadcast media.

3 Such as the ban on dancing in public and on solo female singing (except to all-female audiences).

4 For discussion of this, and the situation of pop music in Iran in the 1980s and 1990s, see Nooshin (2005, 2005b).

5 See Naficy (2002).

6 The last Iranian census was in 1996, at which time 60.04 per cent of the population was under the age of 25. See www.sci.org.ir/portal/faces/public/sci_en/sci_en.Glance/sci_en.pop (accessed September 17, 2006). The extent of change since 1996 will become clear after the 2006 census (currently in process).

7 For example, witness the appearance of a (UK-based) "underground band" – but which was in fact nothing of the sort – at the BBC Symphony Orchestra festival "Persepolis: Discovering the Music of Iran," February 2006. www.bbc.co.uk/orchestras/symphonyorchestra/learning/Iranproject.shtml (accessed June 12, 2006). Similarly, in October 2006, the London-based Iran Heritage Foundation held an "Iranian Underground Night" featuring a number of musicians, only one of whom was based in Iran. Despite this, the event publicity attempted to play up the link with "home"; and "underground" was clearly being used as a marketing label. See www.iranheritage.org/iranianhiphop/default.htm (accessed October 12, 2006). The fact that the main website (based in Gothenburg, Sweden) serving Iranian alternative/underground/rock music is called zirzamin.se has effectively preserved the term where it might otherwise have fallen out of use entirely.

8 Interview with Milad Tangshir (May 2006) on www.zirzamin.se/interviews/inter_2006/ahoora.html (accessed September 12, 2006). There does also tend to be a certain naivety among Iranian rock musicians about the realities of life for rock musicians in Europe and the U.S.A.

9 *Hypernova* at the Taraneh Institute, Tehran, 11th Mordad 1385 (August 3, 2006) (www.zizamin.se/index.html); *127* and *Sarakhs* at the Taraneh Institute, 12th and 13th Mordad 1385 (August 4 and 5, 2006) (www.127band.com/news.html); *Ahoora* at Rahil Concert Hall, Tehran, 28th Shahrivar 1385 (September 19, 2006) (www.zirzamin.se/index.html); and *Seven Deadly Sins*, 23rd and 24th Shahrivar 1385 (September 14 and 15, 2006) (www.zirzamin.se/index.html).

10 Personal communication with concert attender, September 2006; www.ahoora-band.com/news.htm (accessed 26.09.06).

11 For more information on Internet use in Iran, see Chapter 2 in this volume.

12 Interview with Milad Tangshir (June 2006) on www.ahoora-band.com/globalmetal.htm (accessed August 17, 2006).

13 See http://tehran360.com/main.php (accessed July 15, 2006).

14 In contrast, Iranian pop music is "multi-generational," consumed primarily in family and other social gatherings, including weddings.

15 Hesam Garshasbi (2003) "The story of the elephant and rock music," Interview with *127*, www.tehranavenue.com/article.php?id=175 (accessed May 23, 2005).

16 Shadi Vatanparast and Zebra (2002) "Mess to Amertad," www.tehran360.com/12–02-amertad.htm, December 2002 (accessed March 4, 2003).

17 Interview with Sohrab Mohebbi (June 2006) on www.zirzamin.se/interviews/inter_2006/127.htm (accessed August 12, 2006).

18 There is an extensive literature on this topic; the reader is referred to Banuazizi (1995), Amirahmadi (1996), Kamali (1998), Bashiriyeh (2001), Gheytanchi (2001), Kamrava (2001), Alinejad (2002), and Chaichian (2003).

19 Interview with Milad Tangshir (May 2006) on www.ahoora-band.com/ InterviewWithUltimateMetal.htm (accessed August 14, 2006).

20 www.zirzamin.se/interviews/inter_2006/127.htm (accessed August 12, 2006).

21 A term which originally entered the national consciousness primarily through the book of the same name by Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1973).

22 The same criticism has been leveled at pop music. See Nooshin (2005a, pp. 255–258) for examples of published critiques which focus primarily on pop music's alleged lack of identity above other measures of quality. It is important to understand that such discourses are themselves directly rooted in, and represent a reaction against, the experience of identity loss associated with neo-colonialism.

23 Hesam Garshasbi (2003) "The story of the elephant and rock music," Interview with *127*, www.tehranavenue.com/article.php?id=175 (accessed May 23, 2005).

24 The absence of religious signifiers in Iranian rock is striking. In contrast, a number of pop musicians have used religious imagery and texts (some musicians that I spoke to suggested that this is a way of more easily gaining government authorization).

25 For example, see the music of *Barad* which has a strong local flavour, particularly influenced by regional folk music traditions (*Bārād*, 2003, Hermes Records, HER-014). One of the songs entered for TAMF 2005 – “Oriental Request” by the band *Puzzle* – includes a quasi-orientalist, quasi-“tongue-in-cheek” emphasis of Middle Eastern sounds, but with English lyrics (see below).

26 In fact, the practice of “covering” Western popular songs dates back to long before the Revolution when a number of singers did so, including Farhad, Viguen (singing in Spanish), Mehrpooya and Leila Forouhar, among others (personal communication, Amir Mansour, August 2006). See www.persiandiscography.com/45S.htm (accessed August 10, 2006). There were even a few original songs in English, including Googoosh’s 1972 “Sixteen Dandelions” backed with “I Believe,” recorded in Italy. See www.geocities.com/googooshdiscography/ (accessed September 21, 2006). I am grateful to Amir Mansour and Dario Margeli for bringing these sources to my attention.

27 I am grateful to Sohrab Mahdavi, Editor of tehranavenue.com, for providing this data.

28 www.ahoora-band.com/interview.htm (accessed August 14, 2006).

29 Personal communication, September 2006 (translation by the author).

30 Personal communication, September 2006.

31 Personal communication, August 2006.

32 Personal communication (in English), September 2006.

33 Although it should be noted in this regard that the album *Meera* (2004) was given a permit despite including a track in English, an unacknowledged cover version of the song “Soldier of Fortune” by Ritchie Blackmore and Dave Coverdale (formerly of the hard rock band Deep Purple), originally released in 1974.

34 Concert by the group *Imaj*, Ebn Sina Cultural Center (West Tehran), July 2000. Milad Tangshir makes the same point, specifically in relation to contemporary metal bands: “in order to gain more chance to perform, most of them decided to be instrumental bands!” www.ahoora-band.com/globalmetal.htm (accessed August 17, 2006).

35 Personal communication (in English), August 2006.

36 Personal communication, August 2006 (translation by the author).

37 Personal communication, September 2006 (translation by the author).

38 www.ahoora-band.com/ InterviewWithUltimateMetal.htm (accessed August 14, 2006).

39 Personal communication (in English), September 2006.

40 The competition was judged by a combination of online lay audience voting and a panel of “experts.”

41 www.tehran360.com/main.php?page_name=articles&article_id=10 (accessed September 14, 2006).

42 Personal communication (in English), September 2006.

43 Although, like all Iranians, musicians face great difficulties in obtaining the necessary permits and visas to travel abroad, as seen in the following statement issued by *127* in the summer of 2006 ahead of its proposed tour:

> Announcement to the fans! Dear friends: We will never make it to these dates and the future seems too vague. It’s both because of the TWI (travelling while Iranian) issues and also LID (living in Iran dilemmas). We hope someday we can tour like a normal band, but we don’t see that much of a bright future.
> (www.zirzamin.se/index.html accessed (September 16, 2006)).

44 Hesam Garshasbi, “The story of the elephant and rock music,” Interview with *127*, www.tehranavenue.com/article.php?id=175, 2003 (accessed May 23, 2005).

45 Personal communication (in English), September 2006.

46 www.zirzamin.se/interviews/inter_2006/127.htm (accessed August 12, 2006).

47 Hesam Garshasbi, “The story of the elephant and rock music,” Interview with *127*, www.tehranavenue.com/article.php?id=175, 2003 (accessed May 23, 2005).

48 Personal communication, September 2006 (translation by the author).

49 Quotation from www.zirzamin.se/index.html; See Nooshin 2005b (pp. 489–493) for a detailed discussion of this song.

50 Largely due to sensitivities over the word "terrorist," particularly following the London bombings of July 7, 2005. The CD was published shortly after the bombings. World Music Network RGNET1165CD (2006).

51 Available on www.zirzamin.se (accessed September 16, 2006).

52 *Arian* have elsewhere reinforced the link between their music and discourses of nationhood, for example, in the song "Iran" on the 2001 album, *Arian II – Va Amma Eshgh …* ("Arian II – And Now Love…") (see Nooshin forthcoming); and more recently in the song "Ey Jaavidan Iran" which they wrote for the 2006 World Cup Iranian national football team (see www.arianmusic.com, accessed July 20, 2006).

53 This song also raises the question of what gets lost in (poor) translation. *Arian* have translated "*Kabootarhā-ye Sepid*" as "White Pigeons" rather than the more accurate – and more meaningful to English-speaking audiences – "Doves."

54 www.127band.com/lyrics.html (accessed July 28, 2006)

55 Personal communication, September 2006.

56 These connections are clear on Ahoora's website which lists interviews and reviews of the band's music on generic metal sites such as www.ultimatemetal.com and www.metalsites.net See www.ahoora-band.com/ (accessed September 12, 2006)

57 I am grateful to Sohrab Mohebbi for permission to print these lyrics which are not yet available on the *127* website.

58 www.tehran360.com/main.php?page_name=articles&article_id=10 (accessed 14.09.06)

59 Interview with Salome on www.kolahstudio.com/Underground/?p=192 (accessed September 12, 2006).

60 Hichkas's first solo track, "Flame," was also dual-language Persian and English.

61 Hemmasi cites the examples of the U.S.-based dance music team *Deep Dish*, and the Swedish-based rock singer Laleh.

62 Notwithstanding recent critiques of "center–periphery" discourses (see, e.g., Featherstone 1995, pp. 12–13), such discourses continue to play an important role in Iranian cultural life.

63 It is interesting to compare the kinds of "universality discourse" used by Iranian rock musicians with Taylor's (2000) work on the use of "world music" sounds in advertising. Composer Karl Jenkins, for instance, claims to have wanted to "create a sound that is universal and timeless" (p. 169) in the piece *Adiemus* composed as advertising music for Delta Airlines. Clearly, "universality" can have quite different meanings for different musicians in different contexts, a topic which warrants further exploration in its own right.

64 And indeed, deeply modern. See Abrahamian (1993) on the modern nature of the 1979 Revolution.

65 Or, in the words of Leila Ahmad (quoted in Rahimeh 2002), "After all and in sober truth, what thriving civilization or cultural heritage today, Western or non-Western, is not critically indebted to the inventions and traditions of thought of other peoples in other lands?" (p. 252).

66 There are many examples of this. Cohen (2005), for instance, discusses the ways in which musicians in 1960s Liverpool appropriated and transformed American country music (as an expression of transnational popular culture) into a form of local heritage.

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5 The politics of satellite television in Iran[1]

Fardin Alikhah

Introduction

Receiving transnational television networks has been fraught with challenges in many Middle Eastern countries since the advent of this technology.[2] These challenges were generally caused by restricted political contexts, where critical, pluralist, and secularist content of satellite television programs were unwelcome. In this regard, Iran is not an exception in the Middle East. The Iranian government became more sensitive to satellite television technology with the emergence of the dishes on citizens' rooftops, and began attempts to defy this new technology. The Iranian Parliament passed a law against using and trading in any kind of satellite equipment in 1995. The status of that law, however, has been ambiguous and often subject to the political currents of the day. During the past two years, the government has decided not to reinforce the law. This permissiveness has caused an increase in the ownership of satellite dishes.[3] Even a cursory inspection of rooftops in Tehran reveals a proliferation of satellite dishes.[4] It should be noted that the status of satellite television in 2007 is markedly different from the time when it was officially banned in 1995. First, the digitalization of analog broadcasting has improved the quality of the signal and has increased the capacity for transmission (the number of available channels has increased as a result). Second, there were no Persian-speaking channels at the time of the ban. Currently, there are 37 Persian television channels available in Iran, many of which oppose the Islamic Republic.[5] Third, there are Persian channels whose activities are in accordance with the principles and policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The majority of their programs are produced in Iran but broadcast from abroad.

This chapter first outlines a brief history of satellite television technology and its development in Iran. It will then explore the discourse on satellite television by members of the Iranian Parliament who were for or against the technology, and examine other commentaries on the subsequent law that banned satellite dishes. It also introduces Persian satellite television networks and their status in Iran. Finally, it examines the impacts of satellite television in Iran. I argue that within the next decade satellite television networks will pose serious challenges to the Islamic Republic given the current political environment and sociocultural conditions in Iran, which are outlined in the arguments below.

The emergence of satellite dishes in Iran

Iranian citizens began using satellite dishes around 1991 when those who lived in the affluent northern part of Tehran installed dishes on their rooftops. These dishes were clearly visible to people on the streets. They had been previously used by many people from border regions like northwestern (near the Turkish border) and southern (near the Persian Gulf area with its Arabic-speaking populations) cities. The "accessibility" (the popularity) of trans-border television networks was based on, among other things, geo-linguistic proximity, as Turkish and Arabic provided common linguistic frameworks for those living near these borders. Other factors encouraged the big cities like Tehran to embrace satellite television.

There were two critical factors involved here. The first was the ending of an eight-year war with Iraq that had begun in 1980. All wars create unique socio-cultural contexts. In this context, the possibility of cultural exchange, access to information in neighboring societies, and vicarious traveling to other countries by means of mass media were severely, if not entirely in some cases, restricted. Moreover, the political climate of the war era had created a context of social and cultural constraints. These satellite television networks offered new horizons for a population whose cultural life had been limited to war imagery and discourse. They provided sounds and images of life lived differently in the world outside their own borders. Moreover, in the war years escape via entertainment was limited. Satellite television allowed escaped from the pain, suffering, and destruction the war had brought upon the nation.

Second, as the country entered the post-war reconstruction era at the end of the 1980s, various modernization and development projects got underway. The Iranian government initiated projects to interact with the world economic system, to develop imports and exports, to restrict the size of the government and its activities, and to enhance industrial capitalization by depending on foreign technology, finance and cooperation with international economic organizations. A certain degree of tolerance and openness became the order of the day, which spread throughout the socio-economic fields. The aim was to increase confidence for investment and to absorb the educated class with sympathies toward the Western world. One of the effects of this openness on people's everyday life was to embrace satellite television.

With the proliferation of satellite dishes and their growing visibility in certain parts of Tehran, a public awareness of the technology and the contents of satellite television networks was notable in 1990. That visibility opened up discussion about this new technology in the press and other media, which lasted for two years. During this period, the print press, which contained both conservative and reformist-oriented newspapers, became a forum for a debate about satellite technology and television. The conservatives voiced opposition and called for the banning of satellite television. As a result, the legislative authorities picked up on these discussions. This issue provoked the first reaction by a senior member of government, the Interior Minister. He claimed that satellite television was another cultural invasion by the enemy, and that Western countries had beamed satellite television to Iran to weaken people's religious beliefs.[6]

Other conservative voices gradually expressed their disdain toward the new technology. Parliament began deliberating a law on banning satellite television. Since the majority of the MPs were conservative, imposing a ban seemed immanent. The position of proponents and opponents in Parliament predictably reflected two views.

First, the conservatives insisted that satellite television was a cultural invasion by the West, and that it should be banned because it corrupts the youths and weakens their religious beliefs. Second, the minority opinion of the reformists in Parliament stated that we should view this new technology from the perspective of the experts and the professionals and recognize it as a modernizing tool. Furthermore, they argued that banning this technology is not going to prevent people from using it. Moreover, taking such an action is bound to fail, as it did with another technology earlier, namely video-cassette recorders.[7] They believed that, regardless of its negative impacts, they should consider ways to use the technology with the government's supervision and regulation. Eventually, the majority of MPs imposed a ban on the use of satellite dishes. According to Article 1 of this law, the import, distribution, and any illegal use of satellite is prohibited. According to Article 2, the Ministry of Interiors is empowered to use any force such as police or other organizations (e.g., *Basij*) to confiscate satellite equipment. The law was to come into effect 30 days after its passing, on February 12, 1995[8] (see "Vije-nameh Mahvareh," 2000).

With the passing of this law, many citizens removed their dishes from the rooftops. Some handed them over to the police or hid them somewhere inside their houses. Many others, however, continued to use their satellite dishes but camouflaged them on their rooftops to avoid detection. In the 1997 presidential election the law became a campaign issue as Mohammad Khatami, the reformist candidate for president, began deploying the rhetoric of open cultural and political atmosphere. He criticized the existing law in his election campaign and promised to revise the law in the event that he won the election. In Khatami's presidential era, some government officials such as the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance ignored it and regarded the law as useless. As the criticism increased, some Members of Parliament felt that banning satellite dishes was not the solution and that they had to find another way. During the last days of the five-year ban most of the conservatives were not inclined to revise the law and tried to leave it behind. Those last days coincided with the victory of the Iranian national team in the preliminary World Cup competitions. After each victory by the Iranian national football (soccer) team, Iranian youth would engage in euphoric and raucous celebrations on the streets in big cities. The satellite television networks that opposed the Islamic Republic tried to exploit these celebrations by inviting the youth to express political sentiments and to voice dissatisfaction with their government. As more celebrations continued, and as the satellite television networks tried to inflame the excited youth for political purposes, Members of Parliament were pressured to extend the law.

It should be noted that with the advent of Farsi channels, the number of people who bought satellite equipment rose gradually, especially as Khatami's government policy of tolerating satellite dishes allowed a more open embrace of satellite television networks. Moreover, the smaller size of the new dishes, which was between 60 and 100 centimeters, made it easier for people to purchase, install, and use them inconspicuously. When the reformists won the majority in Parliament in 2000, they tried to annul or at least revise the ban. Each time they introduced a bill in Parliament to abolish the law, their efforts coincided with political unrest and protests instigated by the opposition from abroad via Persian-speaking satellite networks.[9] Yet the reformists continued their efforts to introduce new legislation. The reformists finally presented a bill on how to use the satellite equipment after eight years of political wrangling. According to the new law, it would be legal to import, trade, and use the equipment for receiving satellite television programs with strict government oversight and regulation. However, the conservatives inside and outside Parliament opposed it and the Guardians Council did not approve the draft. As a result, the pre-existing law was extended again and it has remained the law ever since.

Recently, receiving the satellite television (and radio) signal has become difficult or impossible at specific times. This difficulty has been attributed to the transmission of jamming signals by some conservative forces to prevent reception of content from outside Iran. The reformists in Parliament made unsuccessful efforts to identify the source of jamming signals and threatened those responsible with legal action. They even criticized such signals as a threat to citizens' well-being and a matter of public health.

The conservatives gained a sweeping majority in the Iranian Parliament in 2004. At the start of the new session, the conservatives promised to revise the law. The issue received little attention until the presidential election in the summer of 2005. Some candidates even used satellite television (e.g., PMC) for publicizing their platform. One of the consultants for candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad suggested that Ahmadinejad would not opposed access to satellite receivers. Recently, some conservative deputies have worked on a draft regulation of "managed access to satellite televisions." According to this draft, the private sector can invest in the satellite industry, establish networks, and broadcast content under the direct supervision of the state.

Today a dish and a digital receiver cost approximately $120 in Iran's market. The price has continued to come down given the mass production of such equipment. Star Sat, Strong, and Samsung receivers are more popular than other brands in Iran's market. The installation of satellite equipment is a lucrative occupation for unemployed youth. Although the installation of dishes and selling receivers is a risky occupation, the financial incentives in selling and trading small dishes are hard to ignore. Meanwhile, signal jamming of Farsi channels continues. In Tehran it often starts early in the evening and continues into the early morning. The transmitted jamming signal does not affect all the television networks uniformly; neither does it cover all areas in Tehran. According to experts, the high cost of transmitting jamming signals means that such transmission takes place continuously in some areas, and intermittently in others.[10]

The status of receiving satellite networks in Iran

Among the various satellites that broadcast radio and television signals, Hotbird is the most commonly viewed by Iranians for its variety and superior signal quality. It has a greater number of channels in different languages, including available channels in Persian. Since most of the stockholders of these networks are from Italy, France, and Germany, they are broadcast in Italian, French, and German languages. However, there are other packages that include Arabic, English, Indian, and Russian language programs. This satellite broadcasts about 800 television and 500 radio channels. About 350 networks are free to receive and the rest are scrambled.[11] Among the different channels on Hotbird, Bomrang, Vox, RTL, Fashion, Multivision, Action, M6, Eurosport, Cinefx, and Cinepolar are the most popular with Iranian audiences.

Currently, Nilesat and Arabsat are the second most popular among the satellites providing content to Iranian audiences. Furthermore, over the past few years, entertainment programs have become popular with young audiences, as they seem to have turned way from overtly political programs. Channels such as MBC1, MBC2, MBC3, MBC4, ONE TV, Nojoom, Rotana, Arabic Melody, and LBC have become sources of entertainment for the youth by providing American movies, variety shows in Arabic, and other entertaining programs. The popularity of Arabic songs and music videos and the superior quality of the signal for these networks make such offerings appealing to Iranian audiences.

After Hotbird, Nilesat and, Arabsat, Turksat and Telstar 12 offer equally popular networks. The interest Iranian youths show in Turkish channels dates back to 1992 when the broadcasting system was analog, and the first available network received by them containing entertaining and lively programs were those on Turksat channels. Iranians preferred to watch the Turkish television networks because the quality of the Arabic channels was poor at the time and only a few European channels were available. This interest still exists among some of them. Fewer American movies and fewer channels are the reasons why Turksat lags behind the other two satellites in terms of popularity.

Telstar 12 generally broadcasts Persian television networks. These networks were at the peak of their popularity in Iran between 1996 and 2001. The popularity of these networks has waned gradually in the past few years as many audiences have grown tired of politics and the political squabbling prevalent on these networks. In addition, the fewer number of channels, the weaker quality of signal, lack of variety, and studio-based productions that are mostly limited to "talking-heads" format are the other factors in their loss of popularity. These Persian-speaking television networks are mostly minimalist studio-based operations and often little more than a platform for individuals with resources to launch a "network" against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Persian television networks

As of November 2006, there are 37 Persian satellite television networks available for reception in Iran. Table 5.1 lists these networks and includes information regarding their country of origin, content, political orientation, year of launch, and current status.

The politics of political networks varies from Pan-Iranism to a politics that resembles reformism inside the country. For instance, PARS network criticizes the current political establishment sharply and demands the direct or indirect re-establishment of the monarchy in Iran. Channel One insists on new democratic and republic systems along with supporting the idea of re-establishing a monarchical system. VOA (Voice of America), which supports reforms in Iran, advocates a republican system. Your TV is sharply critical of the Islamic Republic and Islam, and is strongly nostalgic about pre-Islam Iran. New Channel promotes the Iranian Proletarian Communist Party. Simay-e Azadi represents MKO (Mojahedin Khalgh Organization), which is in armed struggle against the Islamic Republic, and violently rejects the current political system in Iran. Finally, Rang-a-Rang criticizes all other political orientations of Persian satellite channels and the current political establishment in Iran. The political stance and posturing of these networks may be summarized as a mix of modernism and secularism (emphasizing the separation between religion and politics), defying the Islamic Republic, denouncing the 1979 Revolution, and rejecting Islam.

The non-political networks, on the other hand, contain light entertainment programs, commercial advertisements, and movies. These networks generally played the music produced in America until recently. Over the past two years they play the pop music that is produced in Iran due to its recent growth and popularity. Another noteworthy feature of these networks is the degree to which they rely on films that were produced before the 1979 Revolution, which tend to attract the older generation of audiences. Over the past three years, Iranians see on satellite television networks films that were produced after the 1979 Revolution, a trend that has been criticized by filmmakers inside Iran because the video clubs lose business.

Another notable feature of programs on these networks is a certain "instructional" quality of much of their content. Shows devoted to such topics as hairdressing, medical consultation and advice, dance lessons, and immigration counseling attract audiences with various interests. Recently there has been a growth in the number of networks devoted to specific contents or genres. ICC, for example, shows only films. PMC shows Iranian, American, Arabic, and Turkish music videos only. These are the main competitors for the networks with mixed programming formats.

Channels such MNTV, IM, and Mohajer TV are the products of a new approach and a changing attitude toward satellite television by the Islamic Republic. Mohajer started broadcasting in 2004. Although its offices are located in Germany and Iran, the majority of its programs (90 percent) are produced in Iran. It is also the first private satellite television which has been authorized by

Table 5.1 Persian satellite television networks (updated November 2006)*

Channel	*Country of origin*	*Content*	*Political orientation*	*Current status*	*Date of launch*
NITV	U.S.A.	Politics	Opposition groups	Unavailable	1999
ITN1	U.S.A.	Entertainment		Broadcasting	2000
PARS TV	U.S.A.	Politics	Opposition groups	Broadcasting	2001
CHANNEL ONE	U.S.A.	Politics	Opposition groups	Broadcasting	2002
VOA PERSIAN	U.S.A.	Politics	U.S.A. policies	Broadcasting	2003
APADANA	U.S.A.	Politics	Opposition groups	Unavailable	2003
NEW CHANNEL	England	Politics	Opposition groups	Broadcasting	2003
SIMAY-E-AZADI	England	Politics	Opposition groups	Broadcasting	2003
IPN	U.S.A.	Entertainment		Broadcasting	2003
JAM-E-JAM International	U.S.A.	Entertainment		Broadcasting	2003
TAPESH 1	U.S.A.	Entertainment		Broadcasting	2003
YOUR TV	England	Politics	Opposition groups	Broadcasting	2004
MOHAJER TV	Germany	Entertainment		Broadcasting	2004
ICC	U.S.A.	Movies		Broadcasting	2004
TAPESH 2	U.S.A.	Music		Broadcasting	2004
HOMA	U.S.A.	Politics	reformist	Unavailable	2004
ITC	U.S.A.	Education		Unavailable	2004
RANG-A-RANG	U.S.A.	Politics	Opposition groups	Broadcasting	2004
PMC	UAE	Music		Broadcasting	2004
OMID-E-IRAN	U.S.A.	Entertainment		Broadcasting	2004
PEN	U.S.A.	Entertainment		Broadcasting	2004
DIDAR TV	U.S.A.	Entertainment		Broadcasting	2004
AZADI	U.S.A.	Politics	Opposition groups	Broadcasting	2004
MTC1	U.S.A.	Music		Broadcasting	2004
TASVIR-E-IRAN	U.S.A.	Politics	Opposition groups	Broadcasting	2005
TAMASHA	U.S.A.	Entertainment		Unavailable	2005
SALAM TV	U.S.A.	Religious		Broadcasting	2005
ITN 2	U.S.A.	Entertainment		Broadcasting	2005

ARYANA	U.S.A.	Entertainment		Broadcasting	2005
EBC	U.S.A.	Music		Broadcasting	2006
IRAN MUSIC	Germany	Music		Broadcasting	2006
PERSIAN MUSIC	UAE	Music		Unavailable	2006
MNTV	Germany	Entertainment		Broadcasting	2006
TAPESH 3	U.S.A.	Sports		Broadcasting	2006
MTC2	U.S.A.	Fashion		Broadcasting	2006
WIND	UAE	Education		Broadcasting	2006
NEJAT TV	U.S.A.	Religious		Broadcasting	2006
ANDISHEH TV	U.S.A.	Culture		Broadcasting	2006
ARYA TV	U.S.A.	Entertainment		Broadcasting	2006
ME SHOP	UAE	Shopping		Broadcasting	2006
GUNAZ	U.S.A.	Politics	Pan-Turkism	Broadcasting	2005
AL-AHWAZ	U.S.A.	Politics	Pan-Arabism	Unavailable	2005
ROJHELAT TV	Sweden	Politics	Kurds independency	Broadcasting	2006
KOMALA TV	Sweden	Politics	Kurds independency	Broadcasting	2006

Note
*Where a network is marked “unavailable” it means that the network has stopped broadcasting at the present time (December 2006), and the reason for halting operation in all likelihood is financial.

Khatami's government. The head of this network declared that its activities would be in accordance with the principles and policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Its programs covers women's sport, pop music, hairdressing, and singing contests in which only men compete. Women appear on its programs dressed modestly with semi-veiled appearance. This network is similar to both Persian television networks and IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting) culturally and socially, except that it includes a wider range of acceptable Islamic dress code and popular social norms of conduct.[12] Acquiring authorization to operate a satellite television network was difficult, as the conservative forces in Parliament and the Cultural Revolution Assembly opposed such a development and threatened to shut down the network. This objection obliged the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance during Khatami's presidency to draw up a draft plan on the procedure for issuing permits for Persian-language television networks to beam programs to Iran via satellite. Such television networks are not allowed to air programs against religious, cultural, and national values, while respecting national aspirations. They should also avoid any form of anti-government propaganda and shun laxity in the required dress code in the programs they broadcast (see *Iran Daily*, February 22, 2005).

In 2005, Homa, the second station after Mohajer, started broadcasting programs into Iran. This network airs programs that have been produced in Iran. Its reporters interview people in different cities and ask their opinions about Iranian customs. The political round-table talk shows do not oppose the Islamic Republic and tend to be more subdued.

The impacts of Persian satellite television networks in Iran

The rapid growth of satellite television networks has caused a great deal of concern for many governments in the Middle East. Lack of democratic institutions along with weak democratic political cultures makes satellite television, which is entering uncharted territories for many Middle Eastern political systems, a threat to the ruling establishments throughout the Middle East. Scholars and analysts have viewed the impacts of the new technology as the emergence of a new ideology (Darouny, 2001), the weakening of the governments' control on information (Kraidy, 2002), consolidation of Arab ethnocentrism and regionalism (Ayesh, 2002; Alterman, 1999), and the growing demand for freedom and political reforms (Al-hail, 2000). Although the changes in the cultural and socio-political dynamics that are taking place in the Middle East are not always simply caused by satellite television, the technology intensifies and accelerates many of these transformations.

The impacts of satellite technology in Iran on the political and socio-cultural registers are particularly noteworthy. The following section addresses political impacts of satellite technology in terms of (1) disruption in political socialization, (2) desacralization of clergies, political leaders, and politics, (3) the increasing sense of political deprivation, (4) organizing the opposition, (5) erosion of political legitimacy, (6) increasing political awareness, and (7) the rise in ethnic identity. The last section addresses socio-cultural impacts in terms of (1) an increasing gap between tradition and modernity, (2) contributing to Iranian identity, (3) the presence of globalization in Iran, (4) lifestyle changes and consumerism, and (5) secularist perspectives.

Political impacts

Disruption in political socialization

Political socialization may be defined as the processes by which individuals in a given society become acquainted with the political system, one that greatly shapes their perceptions of politics and their reactions to political phenomena (Rush, 1992, p. 92). Socialization is a dynamic and continuing process that contributes to the persistence of particular values and attitudes, and to their modification and transformation (p. 98).

During the past two decades in Iran, major agents of socialization such as the educational system (textbooks and curriculum) and mass media (radio, television, cinema) have been subject to rigid governmental control and censorship. The government has maintained strict control of the decision-making processes and entities that determine the content of school textbooks, curriculum, and even mass media. These agencies have tried to create a (youth) population with a character saturated with Islamic percepts and faithful to Islam, the Islamic Republic, and its religious leaders. With the advent of rival media such as satellite networks this trend will be disrupted. Persian-speaking channels offer a different interpretation of Iranian history (e.g., why the 1979 Revolution happened), competing narratives of national identity (e.g., pre-Islamic national identity), and alternative political philosophies (e.g., democratic values and religious principles). In their attempts to articulate a different narrative of origins of the Islamic Republic and its establishment, an alternative history of Islam and its embrace in Iran, and the positive features of the monarchy under the Pahlavi regime, they destabilize the hegemony of the Islamic Republic throughout the social field.

Desacralization of clergies, political leaders, and politics

Within the past two decades, we see that politics has become invested with sacred authority of clergy and religious values. The positions of some of the officials with authority have come to be equated with divine power and Islamic in essence. The Persian television networks have criticized figures of authority and have begun to counter claims of sacred and divine positions. They admonish, ridicule, and insult figures of authority. These networks often mock clergymen in their satirical programs. Actors who portray menacing or farcical clergymen who may violate basic tenets of Islam or humanity in satirical contexts have become well known. Some characters have played satirically the role of clergymen who host call-in shows to answer questions on matters of faith. Such a discourse and portrayal will tend to demean clergymen and destroy their aura and social grandeur in the public eye.

The increasing sense of political deprivation

The Persian-speaking networks often highlight positively the performance and efficiency of the political institutions of European countries and the Untied States in news, commentaries, political documentaries, and political round tables. The rhetorical question they put to their audiences asks, "Do you Iranians know under what social and political conditions you live?" On television networks which oppose the Islamic Republic, the refrain is hard to miss: "Isn't it a pity for us Iranians that the clergymen should be the rulers of our country?" This type of discourse, the questioning of the Iranian political system, and the denigration of its political figures continues relentlessly. It is likely that such a discourse adds to the sense of political deprivation or helplessness. We must consider the brain drain, political apathy, and even violent opposition to the ruling establishment as the potential consequences of this sense of political deprivation.

Organizing the opposition

During the past few years, Persian satellite television networks that oppose the Islamic Republic have played a role in instigating political unrest and oppositional political mobilization. In June 2000, one month before the anniversary of the attack on students' dormitories in Tehran by militias and fundamentalists, these networks replayed footage of those attacks to instigate protest. Many news agencies and newspapers inside Iran started their report the day after the anniversary with this phrase: "Despite the propaganda by anti-government TV cannels…." The fact that this phrase was used widely by news agencies shows that there was a widespread belief that these networks might have more power in organizing the opposition than the government was willing to admit.

According to many domestic press and some officials, these programs have contributed to the political unrest inside Iran. In one episode, for example, the host of a television program associated with the "Hakha movement" had announced that he would visit Iran in 2004 as a member of the opposition to overthrow the Islamic Republic. While talking to the audiences on Rang-a-Rang television network, he urged people to gather in Enghelab Square in Tehran in order to show solidarity with him and greet him upon his arrival. This rumor spread rapidly among the people in Tehran and throughout the country and was discussed widely. Interestingly, around 500 people assembled to rejoice by bringing flowers and offering sweets to the pedestrians following his advice. In cities like Urumieh, Isfahan, and Shiraz, there were gatherings outside the universities where people demonstrated by chanting anti-government slogans. Although this episode was dismissed in the mainstream media, and the TV host was ridiculed for phony promises, it demonstrated explicitly, albeit on a small scale, the kind of political mobilization satellite television networks are capable of exerting.

In recent years, some of these networks have begun recruiting active participants as if they are political parties. Your TV, for example, asks audiences to send copies of their passports as proof of nationality and to join the opposition. On Pars TV, to cite another example, audiences are recruited to join *Jonbesh Iran Farda* (The Movement of Future Iran). Their stated objective is to topple the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Erosion of political legitimacy

Legitimacy is generally accepted by the political system as the source of authority in society (Reading, 1977, p. 119). Although the concept of legitimacy may be taken for granted by citizens, it is a crucial concept in a democratic society, where citizens accept the rule of the law and its rulers. The fact that they accept the rulers and the political system and consider them legitimate means that citizens embrace the laws of society. The crisis of legitimacy is caused when citizens do not regard their government as entitled to rule their society.

Changes in political socialization via satellite networks, desacralization of clergies and political leaders and politics, an increasing sense of political deprivation, and a vociferous political opposition that does not recognize the existing political system all contribute to a crisis of legitimacy, where citizens begin to lose faith in the rules and the political system that governs them. Moreover, these television networks try to change people's attitude toward Islam, the Islamic government, religious authority, the existence of liberty and human rights, and so forth. Changing perceptions and attitude regarding key concepts in the political arena causes cynicism about the Islamic Republic and a decline of its political legitimacy at the end.

Increasing political awareness

The political programs on satellite television networks are not very sophisticated. They often act as a platform for individuals to opine on a topic of their choosing and for audience provocation. It is unlikely that such programs contribute to their viewers' analytical skills in dealing with political matters with any degree of sophistication. However, the exposure to different points of view and opinions could contribute to their political awareness or lead to politicization of matters that might otherwise be left out of the political realm. As an example, we could cite their commentary on an impending legislation. Upon hearing that Parliament was about to pass laws further restricting dress code for women, different programs on satellite television networks with political inclinations rushed to opine on the subject. The topic became the subject of endless commentaries and sometime conversations among opinion-makers inside Iran. Activists such as Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian lawyer and human rights advocate who won the Noble Peace Prize in 2003, and Mehrangiz Kar, another activist who now lives in exile, and other activists working on women's rights inside and outside Iran joined in the debate. People expressed their points of view by calling in to these programs to voice their opposition. Such programs contribute to a climate in which audiences exercise freedom of expression, experience engagement with critical decisions made by political leaders, and learn how those decisions might affect their lives. In short, politically inclined satellite television programs that disseminate commentaries and allow audiences to join in a debate contribute to citizens' political awareness.

Rise in ethnic identity

As will be discussed in the next section, satellite television viewing strengthens Iranian national identity. However, receiving satellite programs directed at an ethnic group in a neighboring country with a common culture and language might lead to a rise in ethnic identity or ethnic divisions. This is especially the case when such programs provide the chance to compare social and political opportunities that exist across the border. Here opposition to one's local government might be caused by ethnic identification. For instance, in one of Iran's provinces, Kurdistan, many Kurds own satellite equipment and receive "Kurdestan TV," "Kurdsat," "Roj," and "Med." Audiences in this province receive Kurdestan TV and Kurdsat, which are directed at Iraqi Kurds. Satellite television networks have highlighted for Iranian Kurds their cultural and historical roots and heritage by emphasizing Kurdish dialect and culture. Kurdish audiences in Iran receive entertainment, news, and commentaries on programs broadcast by these satellite networks. During the past three yeas, there have been incidents of political unrest in Kurdestan as local Kurdish groups have come to sympathize with Iraqi Kurds. In sum, satellite television programs contribute to ethnic identity, which might be exploited as ethnic divisions by political forces in particular contexts.

Socio-cultural impacts

Equally noteworthy in considering the importance of satellite television networks in Iran are its socio-cultural impacts. These impacts might be considered in terms of (1) an increasing gap between tradition and modernity, (2) contributing to Iranian identity, (3) the presence of globalization in Iran, (4) lifestyle changes and consumerism, and (5) secularist perspectives.

An increasing gap between tradition and modernity

One of the basic fissures in Iranian society during the past century has been caused by the clash between tradition and modernity. While some social groups have embraced modernity, others have shunned it and have retained tradition. These tendencies exist in their social behaviors and in their outlook on life. The Persian satellite television networks, which tend to contribute to socio-cultural developments, deepen the gap that separate forces of modernity from those of tradition. In this respect, satellite television networks are only a part of a larger force that Iran, along with many other societies throughout the world, is facing.

Contributing to Iranian identity

Following the 1979 Revolution, and with the establishment of the Islamic Republic, those aspects of Iranian society, history, and culture that were pre-Islamic or had no relationship to religion were ignored, devalued, or even destroyed. Positive references to a pre-Islamic Iran or pre-revolution Iran were often removed from school curricula, mass media, and other public agents of socialization. Religious symbols and discourse began to dominate all spheres in the post-revolution Iranian society. In this context, religious identity was emphasized at the expense of other forms of identity.

For a young population with no memory of the 1979 Revolution, and especially for those who do not identify with religion or valorize religious identity, there has been little positive discourse regarding Iranian heritage, a glorious past, narratives of nation and nationalism, and past cultural achievements. The absence of such a discourse inside Iran has created a context for the Persian satellite television networks in which they can appeal to the youth inside Iran by providing such a discourse. For those networks that oppose the Islamic Republic, this is an opportunity to create, for the disaffected youth, a sense of alienation from their political leaders and the system that sustains them. In much the same way that such a discourse strengthens national identity for the opposition abroad, it provides the young people inside Iran with a narrative of origins, a sense of belonging, and a glorious past, all of which are essential for the creation of national identity.

Presence of globalization in Iran

Transnational broadcasting has been identified as a clear sign of a shrinking world, and an accompanying feature of globalization in many parts of the world. Much to the dismay of religious conservatives or other traditionalists, Iran is no exception in this regard. Transnational broadcasting provides globalization processes and forces the mechanism or the structure to effect the local socio-cultural transformations that are often criticized by the local conservatives. Transnational satellite television and the Internet have allowed Iranian youths to be a part of larger global cultural phenomena and movements. They are aware that there is such a phenomenon as "global youth culture," of which they are a part. Their cultural outlook increasingly partakes of that larger global youth culture. As an example, let us consider the rising price of roses in Iran. Within the past few years, Valentine's Day has become a part of the cultural vocabulary of Iranian youth. In the context of globalization, a thoroughly banal and overtly commercialized enterprise in one setting becomes, in the eyes of the Islamic Republic, a corrupting cultural influence in another.

Lifestyle changes and consumerism

Living in the Islamic Republic of Iran with limited exposure to the outside world, experiencing an eight-year war, and living in a country with difficult economic circumstances have all entailed a lifestyle that is relatively free of the pressures of consumerist trappings. In the absence of such pressures, a lifestyle free of "luxuries" and other "lifestyle choices" might not cause discontent. Satellite television networks with their display of those desirable consumerist trappings create demands for lifestyle changes inside Iran. Enticing displays of pleasurable consumption of all kinds have contributed to a context in which consumption has become a matter of one's identity and identification with transnational cultures and movements. From the benign forms of consumerism such as possession of objects of all kinds, displaying brand names, to the more demanding forms such as the ability to travel abroad (cosmopolitanism), cosmetic surgery, and body modification, today's youth is conscious of such "choices" and is increasingly demanding them.

There is, however, a socio-political price to pay for the spread of consumerism or the demand for lifestyle changes. The exposure to the lifestyle choices and other consumerist trappings available in other societies that might be beyond the reach of another society may contribute to social discontent. The fact or perception of being deprived of necessities, luxuries, and other lifestyle choices could cause dissatisfaction and restlessness. Transnational television networks and their message of happy consumerism in the context of globalization, intentionally or inadvertently, exert socio-cultural pressures on Iran.

Secularist perspectives

Since the 1979 Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic religion, religious figures, and religious rhetoric have dominated politics in Iran. Recently a number of officials and intellectuals have begun to raise questions regarding civil society, rule of law, and the presence of religion in the political domain. However, secularist perspectives have largely been absent from the political discourse in Iran. Transnational satellite television networks have often presented a forum in which secularist perspectives provided the framework for addressing political issues. On their programs, one might find perspectives that clearly separate religion from politics, unambiguously raising a wall of separation between state and religion. Exposure to coherent secularist political perspectives, the proliferation of competing ideologies that are not grounded in religious doctrines, and observing tolerance for those competing viewpoints contribute to the separation of religion and politics, desacralization of politics and international affairs, or secularism in general.

Conclusion

Transnational satellite television networks arrived in Iran in 1992. Three years later Parliament passed a law forbidding satellite television. The government has chosen to enforce the law only against those who sell or trade satellite dishes, and not those who merely use them. Although there have been sharp exchanges between the conservatives and the reformists regarding the use of satellite dishes, the government has not been as eager to enforce the law, demonstrating a certain political expediency. The unwillingness to enforce the law strictly has led to a rapid increase in the sale and use of satellite equipment. The proliferation of Persian-language satellite television networks has also contributed to the demand for satellite equipment. Over the past two years we have seen the number of Persian satellite television networks rise to 37. These networks offer a range of programs, from entertainment (e.g., music videos, movies, variety shows) to news and commentary. Several of these Persian networks, which originate in the United States, have a political orientation and oppose the Islamic Republic of Iran. The political orientations of these networks include positions that promote Pan-Iranism, reformism, secularism, monarchy, and republicanism. To various degrees, they highlight what they see as the shortcomings of the Islamic Republic and its leaders, the plethora of social problems, economic hardship, lack of personal freedom, and political persecution. They have tried, sometimes successfully, to mobilize their audiences into political unrest inside Iran.

Although the immediate impacts of these networks might be viewed as short-lived or superficial, it is in the long term that their impacts will be far-reaching and significant. It is likely that these networks will be a factor in the political, the social, and the cultural destiny of Iran. It is also conceivable that they will become either irrelevant or insignificant in several regards. Which scenario materializes will largely depend on the developments inside Iran. When Khatami was elected president in 1997, the political networks lost their popularity in the relative socio-political openness that ensued. As conservatives have gained ground at the expense of the reformist movement, so have the satellite television networks that oppose the Islamic Republic. This is not to suggest that satellite television technology will cease to exist in Iran. Communication technologies will certainly be used in the coming transnational cultural formations. It is to suggest that in a society that is free of political repression, one that accommodates democratic institutions and processes, oppositional political satellite television networks will be either irrelevant or merely amusing.

Notes

1 *Editor's note:* I have edited this chapter for style, organization, and language. I have made efforts to preserve the author's voice.

2 The analysis in this chapter is based on insights from an ongoing research project sponsored by Iranian state television. Although his data are subject to proprietary restrictions, the author's analyses and conclusions are informed by his investigation

of television consumption in Iran. He would like to thank Mr. Yazdanparast for his suggestions and advice.

3 Unofficial statistics show that 20 to 30 percent of households in Iran, and 30 to 40 percent of households in Tehran, own satellite equipment.

4 It must be noted that many people who do not own satellite equipment still watch the recorded satellite programs.

5 The Persian-speaking TV stations do not include the governmental ones.

6 See the report on this legislation in the Persian daily *Salaam* (July 27, 1995), entitled, “Majlis tarh-e mamnooeyat-e mahvareh ra tasvib kard” [Parliament passed the law on satellite ban].

7 Owning VCRs and videotapes was strictly prohibited in Iran for more than a decade. The government lifted the restrictions after the Iran–Iraq war.

8 See the special issues of *Gharn-e Bistoyek* [Twenty-first Century], a Persian monthly devoted to satellite television entitled Vije-nameh Mahvareh (2000, March 19).

9 In some areas, satellite dishes were confiscated as a result.

10 See a report by Mehr News Agency on the explanation of the Chair of the Communication Committee in majlis on efforts to jam satellite signals at www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=11903.

11 For more information, see www.kingofsat.net.

12 Television networks owned and operated by the state inside Iran do not show individuals who do not follow the approved dress code and make-up.

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6 The Iranian moral panic over video

A brief history and a policy analysis[1]

Mahmood Shahabi

Introduction

This chapter examines the development of concerns, debates, and policies over video in Iran in relation to the politico-cultural climate that influenced these concerns and subsequent policy-making. The private use of video and the operation of video clubs were initially considered by certain authorities to be a danger and a threat to the moral fabric of society. Such episodes of collective attitudes, fears, and actions framed as competing moral values have been differently theorized in different settings. In the United States, cultural sociologists have accounted for such public moral debates with the notion of "culture wars." In Britain, such moral debates have been framed as episodes of "moral panics" within the context of deviance and criminology (Cohen, 1972). The analysis undertaken here of the reactions by Iranian elites and the public to video adopts a certain version of the theoretical models developed to examine episodes of moral panics. In the first section, this chapter consults the literature on theories of moral panic. In the second section, it explores a history of video in Iran in three episodes: the years of suspension (1979–1983); years of the ban (1983–1993); and the Islamization period (1993 onward). In the third section, I discuss the rhetoric of the official debate in order to assess the video controversy as an episode of moral panic. In the fourth section, I offer some explanations about the specificity of this case of "moral panic" in Iran. In examining the history of this communication medium in Iran, and the social-cultural contexts of its reception, I hope to offer a perspective on Iran that sheds light on its contemporary socio-political transformations.[2]

"Folk devils" and "moral panic"

The term "moral panic" was launched by British sociologists Jock Young (1971) and Stanley Cohen (1972). Cohen used this term to describe public reactions to the emergence of various forms of post-World War II youth culture (Teddy Boys, Mods and Rockers, Hell's Angels, Skinheads, Hippies) in Britain and to address issues such as drug abuse, political demonstrations, student militancy, football hooliganism, vandalism, and various other "deviant" or "delinquent" activities. In his book *Folk devils and moral panics: The creation of Mods and Rockers*, Cohen (1972, p. 9) argues that moral panics appear in society when a

> condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media, the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions.

In his account of the anatomy or the temporal course of the development of a moral panic, Cohen (1972) suggests four criteria according to which one can recognize a moral panic. These are "warning," "impact," "inventory," and "reaction." Cohen argues that after various warnings about the imminence of a catastrophe and following its actual occurrence, mass media's pivotal role begins with providing an inventory of what has happened. To him, the excessive media coverage of certain youth groups coupled with excessive symbolization and exaggeration – to dramatize the issues at stake and to manufacture consent – lead to an amplified public fear or moral panic, which ultimately results in certain suppressive measures on behalf of the social control agencies.

Charting the temporal course of development of a social problem was by no means a novel idea. Three decades earlier, constructionist sociologists like Fuller and Myers had addressed the genesis or dynamics of specific social problems. In an article entitled "*The natural history of a social problem*," Fuller and Myers (1941) argued that all social problems go through three consecutive stages: "awareness," "policy determination," and "reform." First, the public is awakened by a segment of people to the realization that certain cultural values are under threat. In the second stage, the issues at stake and the solutions to them are crystallized, and the pros and cons (among the general public, various interest groups, and experts) of every single solution are debated. In the third stage, policies are put into practice both at public and private levels. The public level of action involves the institutionalization of the social problem, where the various branches of the government become involved. The private level of action is represented by "the activities of private clubs and organizations, private charities and other benevolent associations, and church groups" (p. 326). The authors admit that in "practical reality" these three stages of development of a social problem "are not mutually exclusive and that they tend to overlap" (p. 327).

My account of the social history of video in Iran generally confirms the usefulness of the thesis that every social problem has a natural history. I have identified three phases in the development of reactions to the private use of video and the operation of video clubs which are more or less similar to the three phases described by Fuller and Myers. The three phases I have identified are: the years of suspension or negotiation, the years of outright ban, and finally the liberalization of the private use of video and the Islamization of video activities and supplies. Moreover, in examining social reactions to the use of video in Iran, I have preferred the concept of "moral panics" to the notion of "social problems" due to some disadvantages of the latter. These disadvantages, according to Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), are threefold. First, unlike the concept of moral panics, the notion of social problems does not require any specific *Folk devil* to point to (for example, in the study of aging or the threat to the ozone layer). Second, the *discrepancy* or disproportionality between the objective threat and the perceived threat is not accounted for in the study of social problems. Third, these studies do not detect *fluctuations* in the degree of seriousness of a threat over time in the study of social problems (p. 103).

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) suggest another set of indicators in characterizing a moral panic that is, in my view, more "indexical" than temporal. These indicators are: a high level of "concern," a growing level of "hostility," a widespread agreement or "consensus" on the reality and seriousness of the threat, "disproportionality" between the felt threat and the objective harm, and its "volatile" nature. Only when these criteria are met can we talk about moral panic. It is according to these five criteria that we shall decide whether there was a moral panic over video in Iran during the period 1983 to 1993.

Two alternative perspectives have been developed on the causes of moral panics: the interest perspective and the moral perspective (Ben-Yehuda, 1986). In its original formulation, moral panic has been linked to the power relationship between different groups in society. Cohen (1972) argues that one must relate panics to "conflicts of interests – at community and societal levels – and the presence of power differentials which leave some groups vulnerable to such attacks" (p. 198). Ben-Yehuda (1986, 1990) has reformulated this theory, "in the direction of American interest group theories, which draw on Gusfield and Becker" and is based on "value conflicts" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 8). According to Ben-Yehuda (1985), the interest perspective argues that "morality may be used for nonmoral issues," while in the moral perspective it is argued that moral panic "reflects a societal moral struggle" (p. 496).

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) observe that theories of moral panics are distinguishable in terms of two dimensions: "motive" and "level" of actors or agents involved. The first dimension refers to the "morality versus interests," and the second refers to the number of people responsible for the creation and maintenance of the panic: "elitism versus grassroots dimension" (p. 124). The first dimension refers to the question whether a concern over a given issue is motivated by ideological and moral considerations based on sincere and deeply felt attitudes and sentiments, or by "material interests including jobs, power, resources, respectability, wealth, recognition, ownership of a domain of expertise" (p. 124). The second dimension refers to who defines or initiates it in different layers of social stratification including elites, pressure groups, and the general public. Combining these two dimensions, Goode and Ben-Yehuda identify six possible theories of moral panics (p. 125).[3]

The first category represents those theories that attribute moral panics to a sincere – if perhaps mistaken – belief on behalf of political elites or leaders as to the seriousness of a given threat. According to Goode and Ben-Yehuda's model, the elite's and general public's "war against western values and behavior" in post-revolutionary Iran was motivated by "moral, ideological and religious reasons" (p. 126) and hence it falls within this category. The second category, or "elite-engineered model," represents a Marxist approach according to which moral panics are motivated by insincere concerns aimed at material interests. The third and fourth categories address the argument that moral panics are created by independent pressure groups who mobilize public opinion in order to influence the decision-making process. Campaigners in the third category are motivated by sincere – if perhaps mistaken – morality or ideology, whereas campaigners or activists in the fourth category are motivated by material interests. This last category represents "the interest-group model" (p. 126). The fifth category, which represents "the grassroots model," argues that the public's sincere – if perhaps mistaken – feelings and beliefs are behind their fears. In the sixth category, the argument is that the general public is aware of the triviality of a given threat but creates moral panic for material purposes.

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) admit that these models are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, they argue that the "theoretical separation between interests and morality is difficult to make in practice," and that "the two are very often found in the same package" (pp. 140–141). It is within the framework of moral panics provided by these models that I address moral panics over video in Iran.[4]

The historical trajectory of video in Iran

What follows is a case study of video policies in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The official discourse of video in Iran will be examined during its three phases of development: the years of suspension or pre-prohibition period (1979–1983); the years of the ban on video (1983–1993); and the years of Islamization (1993 onward).

The period of suspension (1979–1983)

Politically, this period is marked by the volatile and uncertain political conditions of the years of revolutionary transition, which began with the fall of the Shah in 1979 and continued with the power struggle during the interim government of Mehdi Bazargan and the period of the presidency of Bani-Sadre. The Provisional Government (composed of the nationalist Islamic modernists and secular nationalists) of Mehdi Bazergan (the Republic's first prime minister) fell in the aftermath of the takeover of the American Embassy in Tehran, on November 4, 1979 by a group of young Islamic radicals. At the end of the first year following the victory of the Revolution, another Islamic nationalist (Abolhassan Bani-Sadr) was elected as Iran's first president in January 1980. Due to profound disagreements between Bani-Sadr and Prime Minister Rajaii and his clerical supporters in domestic and international affairs, Bani-Sadr was dismissed in June 1981 by the Majles, which led to more volatility in the political context. To add to this mix, Iraq entered into a war with Iran on September 22, 1980.

The confusions, suspensions, and indecisions on video between 1979 and 1983 were due to this volatile political atmosphere in Iran. By suspension I mean that video's legal status was left unaddressed and thus remained in legal limbo. Moreover, video's penetration rate had not reached a sufficiently critical point during the early years of the revolution to be of concern to the government. During the provisional government of Mehdi Bazargan there was no legislation on video. According to official statistics, prior to June 1979, there were only 1,000 VCRs in the country. By September 1980, the VCR market had rocketed to 430,000 VCRs[5] among a population of 36 million.[6] A VCR cost approximately 120,000 to 150,000 Rials (each US dollar was worth 70 Rials at the time).[7]

The VCR appeared in Iran as soon as it was available in the world market. During the revolutionary years (1977–1979) and before the "video epidemic,"[8] VCR was considered a luxury commodity used by public or private organizations and companies as a training aid or for commercial purposes. It attracted the attention of passers-by when it appeared in the first video shop in an affluent upper-middle-class area in Northern Tehran.[9]

In March 1980, Hojjatoleslam Ali Khamenei, Tehran's congregational weekly praying leader, criticized the Voice and Vision of Islamic Republic (VVIR) for broadcasting "improper" entertaining programs during the Iranian New Year celebrations. In the aftermath of his warning, "vulgar" programs were cut off from broadcasting, and the quality and quantity of broadcast programs were affected (Kaveshgar, 1983).

Immediately, the banned films and musical variety shows which had been smuggled out of the archives of the National Iranian Radio Television (NIRT) and the country's cinemas before 1979 were copied on to the videotapes.[10] At that time, cinema screens were dominated by inexpensive revolutionary films imported from the former Soviet Union and other communist countries, followed by Italian and American films (Naficy, 1987, p. 449). However, these videos were mostly popular American, Western European, Indian, and Iranian pre-revolutionary films and filmed concerts (the newly outlawed Persian music videos were most in demand). Thousands of copies of these films were duplicated, sold, and distributed via video clubs.

In the late 1980s, the importation of VCRs into the country was banned but the authorities ignored the activities of video clubs, which were supporting the existing 500,000 VCRs.[11] The task of controlling the video market and supervising the functioning of the video clubs was initially entrusted to the Department for Combating Social Corruption. The illegalization of video importation caused a booming smuggled-VCR business. The price of a VCR exceeded 400,000 Rials. VCRs were smuggled in through the country's southern, western, and eastern borders via boats, trucks, and even trained unattended camels! As demand for VCRs grew, their price rose to 1,000,000 Rials. Some people even traveled to the southern ports (notably Bandar Abbas) to buy cheaper VCRs. Because of the high prices, few people could now afford to buy a VCR. This situation created another business for video clubs, that of renting a VCR for a fee of 3,000 Rials per night (Kaveshgar, 1983). A social by-product was that the households with VCRs had to entertain their video-enthusiast visitors, just as had been the case in the early days of television.

The profits in the video trade tempted wholesale dealers to invest their capital in the video market. Furthermore, it drew others to this underground economy (video pirates duplicated the circulating tapes and sold them to individuals or video clubs at a reduced price). In response to public demand for the newly banned films, hundreds of domestic video rental outlets mushroomed. As a result, the rental fee for videotapes dropped from 300 to 500 Rials to 150, or even to 50 Rials. Clubs were delivering the tapes to their eager customers without requiring any membership fee or deposit (Kaveshgar, 1983).

In September 1981, for a short period, video shops and video clubs were shut down by the Revolutionary Prosecutor's office aiming at planning and organizing clear-cut guidelines for the functioning of the video clubs, hurt by video piracy and circulation of illegal contents (even the open video rentals had no official license for their activities).[12] In order to combat video piracy and to control for content, a number of companies and some major video clubs formed a syndicate and forced the video clubs to buy and circulate only those tapes which bore the syndicate's label. The Department for Combating Social Corruption licensed the syndicate on the condition of following Islamic Republic's regulations. This development helped video clubs to proliferate.

Soon, the control of video clubs was entrusted to the Ministry of Islamic Guidance. As the first task, the Ministry urged all video clubs to register, which entailed changing their clubs' names from foreign to Persian names. It also banned a number of existing films as illegal. The Ministry of Islamic Guidance, under the new minister Mohammad Khatami in the Cabinet of Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi, was initially uncertain what to do with video clubs. This suspension provided an opportunity for the video clubs to flourish during 1982 and 1983, and to enjoy a period of freedom and autonomy, not knowing that their luck was about to change.

The years of the ban (1983–1993)

On May 24, 1983, during a broadcast interview, Culture Minister Mr. Khatami (who would later become president) announced the video clubs as illegal, claiming that video clubs are "one of the centers and sources of corruption and dissemination of immorality in our society." He characterized video clubs as corrupting, and that the enemies of Iran had hoped to hurt the Islamic Revolution through video clubs.[13] Between the time that this interview was aired and the action by the Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office 48 hours later, the video clubs had the opportunity to remove and hide their stocks. Yet, during consequent raids by the authorities in 1983, thousands of videotapes were "discovered" and confiscated from warehouses that belonged to the newly banned video clubs. About 160 trucks were used to transport these videotapes.[14]

Before proceeding any further, it should be clarified that it was home video or the private use of video (rather than the medium or the technology itself) and the source of supplying video materials (openly operating but hard-to-regulate video clubs) that were subjects of concern and prohibition. The use of video in official settings never ceased. Even during the years of the ban on video, this medium was used as a training aid in numerous governmental settings (e.g., the Revolutionary Guard).

The Iranian revolutionaries were divided on the question of video. This division was due to the fact that the VCR, unlike alcohol, was not deemed as inherently forbidden (*Hara'm*) by the Islamic jurists (*Foqaha*). The reason that we cannot consider the ban on alcoholic drink after the revolution as the consequences of moral panics is that *the very existence* of alcoholic drinks are considered as inherently forbidden (*Hara'm*) by the *ulama*. The concern over such items is/was based on religious teachings. Similarly, the sudden and short-lived ban on the use of tobacco in 1891 by the *ulama* cannot be considered as created by moral panics because the ban on tobacco was motivated more by "fears of growing influence of foreigners" (Keddie, 1966, p. 114) than as a result of discovering a new harm in smoking tobacco or a new interpretation of religious texts. The *ulama*'s treatment of VCR was unlike their treatment of alcohol or tobacco. Thus, we are talking here about the concerns over the extent of the misuse of video (e.g., exposure to content deemed inappropriate), which led to the ban on the personal ownership or the private use of this medium and the operation of video clubs by the Islamic government. This allows me to limit my analysis to the state's video policy and its rhetoric.

The year 1988 was a turning point. Iran's acceptance of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 598, which ended the war in the summer of 1988, and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 marked the beginning of a period of relative cultural relaxation that has been called the "Second Republic" (Ehteshami, 1995). In terms of economic policy, the direct control of the economy by the state during the war gave way to the structural adjustment policies of economic liberalization, relative deregulation of economic activities, and privatization of a number of industrial and non-industrial sectors. But unlike Gorbachev's experience in the former Soviet Union, and similar to the economic reforms in post-Mao China, these economic reforms did not bring about deep political reforms. Yet, the newspapers and other publications that were critical of the government began to flourish. In the absence of the institutionalized political parties, different opinions which could not find a safe outlet for expression during the war appeared in new magazines, newspapers, and books in the years following. Newspapers and journals started criticizing anyone except the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. They sharply criticized the President, Parliament, individual clergies, and government policies. Even this exception was sometimes violated, implicitly or explicitly, by rival political factions and even by some university lecturers or students. Newspapers and magazines routinely identified politicians by their faction, and there were the first open debates on the possibility of legislation of political parties. In foreign policy the notions of the exportation of the revolution and confrontation gave way to the notions of compromise and re-integration into the international system, and normalization of relations with the outside world (Ehteshami, 1995).

The new politico-economic climate was reflected, more or less, in the socio-cultural arena. In September 1988, Ayatollah Khomeini declared the playing of chess and musical instruments permissible, which had been banned following the revolution. The Voice and Vision of Islamic Republic (VVIR), the national broadcasting entity, reoriented itself and began to reduce politico-religious programs to include classical music and other entertainment programs. The restriction on women's dress code has also been relaxed, allowing the use of cosmetics, a diverse range of clothes in brighter colors and new designs, and expensive Western clothes in store windows. The importation of consumer goods was encouraged and their ads appeared in public places, on public transport vehicles, and to some extent, on radio and television. Among other pragmatic approaches to the social issues was the government's positive attitude and policy on birth control and family planning issues.

The year 1989 marked the beginning of a change in, to use a Durkheimian terminology, the "collective conscience" of Iranian society with respect to video. In the proposed annual budget bill for 1369 in the Iranian calendar (1988–1989), under Article 20, it was envisaged that VVIR could establish video clubs for selling and distributing its films as a source of revenue. The Iranian Parliament (Majles) ratified this bill and submitted it to the Council of Guardians for final consideration. The Council of Guardians found some faults with this proposal. As a result, Parliament dropped this proposal from the final draft of the 1989 budget bill,[15] and therefore an attempt for reopening video clubs failed, and the ban on video and video clubs remained the official policy.

Three years later, on May 23, 1992, Khatami was forced to submit his resignation as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance for policies that were perceived by conservatives as too liberal. Although his replacement, Ali Larijani, was another conservative voice in the Islamic Republic, the desire for change would soon bring back Khatami and his cultural policies.

Taming the devil: the years of Islamization (1993 onward)

Amid hopes and fears about the approaching "satellite television invasion," debates on video were revived in 1992. The authorities, national press, intellectuals, and ordinary people entered a new debate on video. The first official position was declared by the new Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Ali Larijani. During a speech in late October 1992, he declared the imminent lifting of the bans on the private use of video, video transactions, and the reactivation of video clubs. He also questioned the unwise past policies that were based on a "lack of proper understanding of the country's conditions and global circumstances." He declared video "a technological phenomenon," and claimed that the "ban policy was wrong. It caused the underground use of video, and inflamed the society's demand for it. We can present our thoughts and ideas to the world via video."[16] A few days later, President Rafsanjani stated that "we have to transform video into a desirable medium by offering good, attractive, Islamic, and entertaining" content.[17]

In late December 1992, Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, joined this debate by instructing the High Council of Cultural Revolution to examine the video policy comprehensively. The speaker for Parliament, Hojjatoleslam Nategh Noori, soon joined in the debate, questioning the past policy, and claiming that, "we have to expand cultural work in society." Moreover, "we cannot solve these problems by force," adding that "the sword cannot cure a pain."[18]

In early January 1993, the establishment of the Institute for Visual Media (Moassese-e Rasanehay-e Tasviri) paved the way for the Islamization of video activities and the reopening of video clubs. In January 1994, 1,000 video clubs (out of a planned 4,000) started their operation across the country (300 of them in Tehran). The authorities have been reluctant to call these outlets video clubs. They prefer to call them "shops" presumably because they also sell other audio-video supplies.

While the reversal of video policy is to be considered as the consequence of bureaucratic or organizational changes in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and also that of a shift in the national priorities in post-war Iranian society, one cannot ignore the role of satellite television in this regard. In Iran, the appearance of satellite television ushered in changes in the national television and video policies. What was previously seen as a tool for cultural invasion, was now being billed as a tool for cultural defense. Official video clubs were reopened in order to counter the hegemony of global television and to counter underground video clubs.[19] An official of the Institute for Visual Media justified the new video policy as a response to global satellite television, claiming that in the new context, marked by the presence of satellite television, video is no longer the threat it once was. In his view, satellite television is now the medium that has replaced video in that regard. Video may now be used, in his view, for cultural, scientific, and educational reasons.[20] It is clear that transnational satellite television is a more difficult challenge for the state than the video has been as a domestic issue.

It should be pointed out that even licensed video clubs have to adhere to the guidelines that regulate content, as ratified by the High Council for Cultural Revolution.[21] Some of the subjects that are not permitted include the following: Desecration of Islam; unequal treatment of human beings on the basis of color, race, language, and nationality; inciting ethnic divisions; violations of human rights and human dignity; encouraging corruption, prostitution, drug addiction, and smuggling; propaganda against the Islamic Republic; explicit depiction of murder and torture; and sexual imagery. Lifting the ban on the importation of video machine and camcorders into the country by individuals was another step in liberalization of the video policy. In July 1996, Iran's first domestic videocassette factory started operations in Kish Free Trade Zone with a production capacity of five million videotapes per year.

Moral panic in Iran

In the first part of this section I discuss the kinds of rhetoric used in the debates over video by officials. Speaking for or against video entails a set of assumptions that are revealed through the analysis of such rhetoric. In the second part of this section I explore the debates in search of indicators of moral panic over video.

The rhetoric of the crisis: The official video debate

While the proponents of the operation of video clubs were mostly concentrated in the Plan and Budget Organization, the opponents came from the Ministry of Islamic Guidance. A report[22] published six months after the banning of video clubs in December 1983 reflected the debate among the officials. The Plan and Budget Ministry, which later became an "organization," is responsible for general policy-making and the allocation of appropriate budgets to the governmental ministries. The cultural experts of this organization had pointed to the existence of an underground black market in Iran, and argued that the ban policy has not halted the sale and distribution of video machines and tapes. On the question of why people resort to VCR, they had pointed to the role of video in filling people's leisure time in a period when the import of foreign films had been banned and "drab" programs had dominated television and cinema screens. Rejecting any cynical exaggeration of negative video effects, they emphasized the potential of this technology, and urged the government to intervene actively in this economic and cultural activity in order to counter the black market profiteers.

In contrast, the pro-ban campaigners accused video clubs of circulating unauthorized video materials, and argued that if a black market for video machines and tapes exists, we have to blame the customs department and the legal system! Within a framework similar to that of the "hypodermic needle" model of media effects, and from a protectionist perspective, they considered the video audiences as passive and vulnerable in the face of "devastating" and "disastrous" effects of video. In addition, they argued that cinema and television programs are "drab" only for a minority of the Iranian population: video audiences. Opponents of the video clubs' activities based their opposition on their perceptions of the presumed political and socio-cultural effects of video in Iranian society. They pointed to three types of effects: political, socio-cultural, and economic, and accordingly called for protecting the newly established revolutionary Islamic Republic, Islamic family, and national film industry. I shall examine their rhetoric next.

Protecting the Islamic Revolution

The advocates of the ban policy on the private use of video pointed to a document obtained during the takeover of the American embassy in 1980, according to which the "embassy has had the mission to support the importation of video recorders and tapes and their diffusion throughout the country."[23] Thus, the import of video to Iran was considered to be part of a wider "imperialist conspiracy" along with attempts at coups, encouraging ethnic or religious separatism, and imposing war. Hence, a new communication technology which might have passed unnoticed (or with less attention) at another time became something of a "folk devil" (Cohen, 1972).

Protecting the Islamic family and community

On the other hand, it was believed that the Islamic Revolution of 1979 had aimed mainly to "cleanse" the Iranian society of the "profanities" of the pre-Revolutionary "pseudo-culture" and to protect Iranian society from the perceived threat of Western culture. The content of videos was considered subversive to a revolutionary nation at a sensitive time when Iranians were struggling to define and project a new cultural identity. It was feared that an overwhelming video counter-current would have thwarted these ideals. A variety of dangers were attributed to this new "threat" in Iranian society. Among them are the following: the presence of video is destructive to the Islamic family; video weakens interpersonal communication of Iranian family members and encourages them to waste their time; undesirable foreign cultural elements enter our homes; video causes schizophrenia and identity problems for children and adolescents who are under Islamic teachings in schools; video alienates Iranian families from national radio and television and other ongoing societal processes.[24]

The concern over video was further inflamed by another campaign launched by the local press against the popularity of "punk style" among a section of Iranian youths during 1983 and 1984. It was believed that Western music videos were the main source of inspiration for Iranian youth's style of dress and hair. Videos and video clubs were blamed for popularizing punk style among Iranian youths. It was in the face of "such corrupting influences in mid-1982" that, as Naficy (1987) argues, "the government first sharply curtailed the activities of the video stores by requiring them to carry only licensed films, and then banned the sale of cassette altogether" (p. 462). This decision was taken at a time when the Iraqi-imposed war against Iran had already started and the individual and social life had to support the war effort. While the so-called Iranian punks, as Naficy (1987) argues, attempted to emulate the dress code and hairstyles of their Western peers as part of their search for identity and escaping the surrounding harsh realities, the authorities and the national media described them as duped and victimized by Western culture. In this context, video clubs were seen as a negative source[25] of inspiration for the youth at a time of war. In this context, shutting down video clubs was seen as a sensible solution.

Protecting Islamic cinema

The declared objective of the ban on open video rental, as outlined by the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, was combating corrupting effects of video and its potential subversive power. However, apart from political and moral reasons, it became apparent that this policy was also justified by rational economic reasons. Government nominees in charge of cinematographic affairs had accepted their administrative posts on the stipulation that video clubs should be banned.[26] The rationale behind the ban was the economic profitability of the video industry in the private sector, which was believed to be second to drug smuggling among the underground economy. It was feared that video clubs could kill the national film industry by making film producers hesitant to venture into costly new productions. According to the existing documents, in 1983 there were about 1,100[27] video clubs operating openly in Tehran, with annual business of 30 billion Rials (each US dollar was worth 400 Rials at that time) in rental fees alone. This concern seems justified when we compare these figures with the annual box-office gross of the Iranian film industry in 1994, which was less than 30 billion Rials.[28]

In 1983 a new law was passed, banning the importation of foreign films on the part of the private sector for screening in the country's cinemas to protect the domestic film industry (see Naficy, 1987). It was argued that the video ban policy would help the Iranian national film industry to stand on its own feet without being challenged, at least openly, by its rival, video.

Indicators of the moral panic over video in Iran during 1983 to 1993

As mentioned earlier, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) have suggested five criteria in order to recognize a moral panic: "concern," "hostility," "disproportionality," "volatility," and "consensus." Based on these criteria, we shall see whether the anti-video reactions by the Iranian elite and a segment of the public may be characterized as a moral panic.

The criterion of "concern"

It was shown that both the Iranian elite and the general public have had reasons for their concern over video. The elite expressed certain concerns on possible threats of video and video clubs for the country's political stability or the fate of the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic family, and the future of Islamic cinema. These threats were taken seriously by the policy-making body in Iran (The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance) and other governmental organizations. This provides us with the first criterion of moral panics, a high level of concern.

The criterion of "hostility"

Reviewing the claims made by the elite campaigners, one can see that their primary concern is that the diffusion of video in Iran is part of another country's wider foreign policy against the newly established Islamic Republic. The VCRs and video clubs were seen as "agents" of the country's enemies. They were considered to be the major source of social and cultural corruption, and a threat to national cinema. This provides us with the second indicator of a moral panic, "hostility." The attack on video was the subject of many commentaries and articles appearing daily in the press after the declaration of the ban policy, which sustained the moral panic through support of the ban policy. The vocabulary for describing the imminent "threat" included a "sewer for Western cultural invasion," a "virus," "corrosion," "parasite," "nightmare," "opium," and "monster." This hysteria was surely a sign of official and public moral panic concerning the rise of video's popularity among (young) people. Although the concern over new media technology is not unique to Iran, its demonization is open to criticism. Moreover, although the hostile intention of foreign powers toward Iran is justified given its history, to attribute such intention to video in some conspiratorial fashion is to stretch the limits of conspiracy theories.

It should be pointed out that the so-called vulgar (*Mobtazal*) videos, for which the private use of video was prohibited, involved more than erotic, pornographic, and violent materials. In an official report (1989),[29] the Iranian revolutionary police (*Komiteh*) classified the following contents as illegal: some Western "inappropriate" films; Turkish "inappropriate" films; Indian "inappropriate" films; music variety shows (including American, European, Indian, and Turkish ones); Iranian underground music; some Iranian pre-revolutionary films; and finally video programs produced by Iranian expatriates' TV channels in Los Angeles. As may be seen from this list, the word "inappropriate" covers a wide range, including all aspects of cultural differences which contradict the Islamic moral order, or contain any subversive ideological or political messages. Therefore, the list of "inappropriate materials" indicates that the main concern on video has been the disapproval of popular culture, regardless of its origins.

The criterion of "disproportionality"

Attributing massive harmful effects to the medium was evidently not based on any social scientific evidence, but on widespread speculation about the video's imminent impacts on Islamic society. In other words, the threats have often been "future-oriented" (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 43). There is no evidence to suggest that, for example, video has weakened interpersonal communication. Neither is there any evidence to prove that video has caused "schizophrenia." Many causes contribute to other social ills such as prostitution and drug abuse. Listing video as the cause of such social ills leads us to the third criterion of moral panics: disproportionality. It should be immediately noted here that I do not suggest that video has no impact in society or on individuals' attitude and behavior. However, I argue that the scale of the reaction was not justified by the existing information regarding video technology or contents.

The criterion of volatility

Moreover, it was the official policy that changed rather than the video viewers' behavior or their tastes. The fact that the official video policy changed over time in Iran without corresponding material or objective changes in the "threat" posed by the video or a radical change in audiences' tastes provides a criterion for "volatility" (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1984), the fourth element in the definition of a moral panic. Thus, according to this criterion**,** the pro-ban activism in Iran during 1983 and 1984 that led to the ban policy for a decade, and the subsequent decline of concerns over the private use of video, represent a moral panic.

The criterion of "consensus"

Apart from the elite's concern over video, a considerable portion of the Iranian general public (mainly among traditional conservative segments of the population) shared the elite's concerns, and expressed their concerns as parents, teachers, and intellectuals. In other words, the concern over video was not an overnight cultivation of fears by the Islamic clergy or a segment of the ruling political elite. Rather, the public debate, attitudes, and feelings over this medium have had some socio-cultural bases in the society. This provides us with the fifth criterion of moral panics, "consensus."

A great number of people avoided video viewing just as they or their parents had done in the case of television viewing many years before. According to religious teachings, the mere "attendance" to "inappropriate" voices or images is inherently wrong. Moreover, among Muslim families, the home (along with the mosque and the religious school, or *Maktab*) has been traditionally a sacred place, where observing Muslims pray five times a day, and instil religious values into their children. There can be little doubt that parents took an active role in monitoring their children's consumption of videos. Yet, VCR created uneasiness among some Iranian families. Parents were complaining that children's minds were being tarnished because of watching video.

Even among some members of the Iranian intellectual community video was regarded with suspicion and distrust. Some Iranian film critics attacked the VCR and video culture as part of their elitist criticism of mass culture and their belief in the distinction between high and low culture. An Iranian film critic, for example, admired the "respectable" cinema for the "rituals" and social rules inherent in group-viewing experience in cinema as opposed to the solitary viewing context of television or video (Dolkoo, 1994). According to this argument, film viewing requires "discipline," and involves spatial and temporal experience that is unique to cinema. Video and the viewing of video in this context is an inferior form of activity. In short, such views provide us with the fifth criterion of moral panics, "consensus."

Discussion: the Iranian moral panic over video

In order to understand the Islamic Republic's communication policies, we need to put them in their larger socio-political contexts that have shaped contemporary Iranian history. That history is invariably a history of the relations between Iran and the West. Video inserted itself into an already politicized context in Iran. It was inserted into a politico-cultural climate dominated, on the one hand, by anti-imperialist feelings, and on the other, by the quest for reviving a religious identity disrupted by the Pahlavi-style modernization. The roots of Iran's ban on the private use of video and the operation of video clubs in 1983 can be explained in terms of two interrelated and overlapping sets of discourses of traditionalism-vs.-modernism discourses and anti-imperialist discourses in Iran. On the one hand, it should be related to the forces of tradition that resist cultural and technological changes and/or innovations. On the other, it should be linked to the (resistance to the) Western imperialist interference in Iran in the form of, for example, supporting the Pahlavi monarchy whose modernization projects were accompanied by authoritarianism and suppression of the country's religious identity. The ambivalence in the reception of this technology is not unusual in the context of ambivalent, contradictory, and selective attitudes by intellectuals and religious authorities toward the West or its technological and cultural influences (see Abrahamian, 1991).[30]

It is evident that a combination of factors contributed to the ban on the private use of video during the period 1983 to 1993: religious disapproval of video; the anxiety over the influence of video on the young by some segment of society; and the government's commitment to protect the Islamic Revolution, Islamic family and community, and Islamic cinema. Unlike the original formulation of moral panic theory by Young (1971) and Cohen (1972), the video panic in Iran was far from being engineered or orchestrated by the dominant social order as a pretext for political control. If we are to search among the theories of moral panics, as described in Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) typology, to find the best explanation for video panic in Iran, it would be a combination of categories one and five where elites and grass-roots public outcry expressed a sincere (if mistaken or exaggerated) anxiety over video for ideological and moral reasons, independent of their material interests. The opposition to video by some conservative religious authorities does not necessarily constitute opposition based on material or class interests. Iran's official reaction to the private use of video and the operation of video clubs can best be understood if one compares it with a series of moral campaigns in the West (e.g., the "clean-up TV campaign" launched in 1964 by Mrs. Mary Whitehouse, a British housewife who campaigned for morality in broadcasting).

Although the passive video policy might have helped the national film industry, it did not halt the "video invasion." Rather it submerged the video activities in the underground culture. The state and the more established media in their fight against the media contents from outside (e.g., Hollywood) drove the consumption of smaller media such as video into the black market, where no contents could be regulated. Banning VCRs and video clubs served as excellent advertising for these forbidden items. In effect, the very prohibition of such cultural activities made them especially enticing to the youth. To those involved in the underground video market (including importers, duplicators, distributors, and consumers) the video panic was not a panic at all. Indeed, moral panics, as Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994, p. 34) argue, need not be widespread throughout society. Rather they could be localized in a certain segment of that society. The passing of time and the growing popularity of VCR in Iran showed that there are genuine disagreements in Iranian society about video.

During the years of the ban policy on video, the presence of videos in Iranian households never ceased. Viewing pre-recorded videotapes has been the key use for most VCR owners. When the video clubs were shut down in 1983, hundreds of domestic underground video outlets proliferated. The so-called "video-men" (mainly young people aged between 18 and 25) were serving a growing underground audience. They delivered videotapes through a door-to-door home delivery system. They carried their videotapes (around 15 to 20 tapes) in a bag and distributed them each day from early morning to midday. The customers usually rented five tapes per week. The old customers introduced the new customers to the video peddlers. Therefore, the customers were dependent on the video-men's information and taste because their mobile video clubs offered a limited range of choices. There was very little room for customers to exercise free choice.

It must be pointed out that, contrary to popular opinion, it was not only the affluent upper (middle) class who welcomed the VCR. The less affluent segments of Iranian society also embraced video. According to a report by the syndicate of video clubs, the number of applicants for video club licenses and also the number of pre-recorded videotapes sold or rented was higher in the southern and central parts of Tehran (far from the affluent northern parts).[31] In addition, after video clubs were declared illegal most domestic or underground video club owners and tape distributors (video-men) came from the southern and central part of Tehran.[32] In uncertain economic times such sources of income proved irresistible to many young men who were otherwise without a steady income.

Therefore, despite the official ban and other difficulties, video spread throughout society during its years of existence in underground networks. According to one report, "by 1989, it was estimated that the number of VCRs has exceeded two millions."[33] There was really no choice but to tame the "devil."

Conclusion

In 1993, following a decade of public concern, ambivalence and panic about the private use of video, Iranian society and policies regarding video began to change. The initial treatment of video as a threat and an instrument of cultural invasion forced it into an underground existence. It is now an established source of entertainment, along with its utility in educational and industrial settings. The stigma attached to the private use of video has disappeared and the Islamic Republic has now accepted it, even if the concern with content still persists.

Legalization of the video activities, one may conclude, was recognition of a reality that the state had to accept; the reality that the private use of video was here to stay. It also ended the legal confusions; while the importation of video machines during the period 1983 to 1993 was illegal, the sale and distribution of blank videotapes was not. Furthermore, it was an implicit recognition of the needs and desires for greater cultural freedom on the part of the Iranian people. No longer existing in the shadows, the Islamic Republic has been hoping that the people's moral and religious codes dictate their video consumption habits and practices. The active intervention of the state in the video industry indicated that the Islamic Republic is willing to adopt more pragmatism in the face of undeniable realities and socio-cultural imperatives. Banning the private use of satellite television two years later, however, indicated the limits of pragmatism and flexibility that the Islamic Republic is willing to tolerate. Indeed, having accepted the reality of video while denying that of satellite television may have been a case of accepting the lesser of two evils.

Notes

1 *Editor's note:* This chapter was extracted by the editor from a much larger manuscript based on the author's dissertation. I have edited the chapter for style, language, and organization. I have tried to preserve the author's voice.

2 This chapter is based on a larger study that was conducted for the author's doctoral dissertation (see Shahabi, 1998).

3 These categories represent cells within a table made up of two axes divided along three points. See Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994, p. 125).

4 For more on moral panic see Beisel and Donovan (1998), Thompson (1998), Waddington (1986), McRobbie and Thornton (1995), and Jenkins (1992).

5 *Soroush*, 661, 20/6/1372 [September 11, 1993], p. 52. *Soroush* is the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting's official weekly magazine.

6 This was documented in a report originally prepared by the "Iranian National House of Film" (*Film khaneye Melli-e-Iran*), and was reprinted by The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Cinema Affairs Division (Azar mah 1363 [November to December, 1984]), *Video va ma' mouriat-e an dar Iran* [*Video and it's mission in Iran*]. I will refer to this document henceforth as MCIG (November to December, 1984). All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

7 See world video markets review: Statistical Analysis, *Screen Digest*, November, 1987, pp. 249–253.

8 The state-owned weekly *Soroush* described the spread of VCRs in Iran as epidemic (No. 658, 30/5/1372 [August 21, 1993]).

9 Sony first introduced the home-consumer version of the VCR in late 1975. Up until the year 1988, the Betamax format (developed, sponsored, and released by Sony) dominated the Iranian video market, but it was replaced later by the VHS format (with JVC at the center).

10 In the course of an interview with the author, a video club owner said to me that 1,800 Iranian pre-revolutionary film titles have been smuggled out of the radio, television, and cinema organizations during the years of revolutionary transition.

11 At the time of the ban, there were around 85,000 VCRs in the duty customs, which were mainly granted to the revolutionary organs for organizational or personal use. MCIG (November to December, 1984).

12 *Soroush*, 685, Mordad 1372 [July to August, 1993].

13 This radio broadcast on May 24, 1983 was cited in *Soroush*, June 5, 1983, vol. 194.

14 This information has been obtained from an official report prepared by the Center for Social Studies and Researches, affiliated to the Governor of Tehran, entitled *"Video and Video clubs"* (1990 [1369]). I will henceforth refer to this document as CSSR (1990).

15 See CSSR (1990).

16 *Soroush*, 656, 16/5/1372 [August 6, 1993], p. 40.

17 *Soroush*, "*Video, Parvande-hi Ke Basteh Shod* [Video, a closed case], 656, pp. 40–42 (16/5/1372) [August 6, 1993].

18 *Soroush*, 656, 16/5/1372, [August 6, 1993], p. 41.

19 See the statements by Sadat Nejad, an official of the Institutive for Visual Media in *Soroush*, 665.

20 Said Fakhr-aldin Anvar, deputy minister of MCIG in audio-visual and cinema affairs. See *Soroush*, 656, 16/5/1372 [August 6, 1993].

21 *Soroush*, No. 656, 16/5/1372 [August 6, 1993], p. 42.

22 *IN Iran* (in Persian).

23 MCIG (November to December, 1984).

24 MCIG (November to December, 1984).

25 Since 1991, MTV Asia has served as a dominant source of popular youth culture. Music genres such as Rap and Heavy Metal are now popular among Iranian youths.

26 See *Film*, Ordibehesht 1373 [April to May, 1994].

27 This statistic is based on an open estimation reported by the "video clubs Syndicate." The officials in charge of cinematographic affairs of the MCIG estimate the number of video clubs to exceed 3,000. See MCIG (November to December, 1984).

28 *Film*, Ordibehesht, 1373 (April to May, 1994) p. 99.

29 MCIG (November to December, 1984).

30 For a detailed exploration of these issues see Shahabi (1998).

31 Cited in *Soroush*, 658, 30/5/1372 [August 20, 1993].

32 *Soroush*, 659, p. 45, Shahrivar 1372 [August to September, 1993].

33 See CSSR (1990, p. 1).

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7 Sociolinguistic aspects of Persian advertising in post-revolutionary Iran[1]

Mohammad Amouzadeh and Manoochehr Tavangar

Introduction

The ubiquity of advertising is a fact of life in all modern societies. This public discourse provides, in its various forms (e.g., radio and television, newspaper and magazine advertisements, and the Internet), a wealth of data which can be investigated from a sociolinguistic perspective. All types of advertising discourse aim to persuade their intended audiences to buy the goods and services they publicize. In this sense, their use of language, either verbal or visual, is goal-directed, value-laden, and ideologically loaded. This chapter examines the types of socio-cultural values that are reflected and constructed in Persian advertisements in the post-revolutionary era.[2]

There are a number of studies in the area of Persian advertising (e.g., Amouzadeh, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, in press; Amouzadeh and Tavangar, 2004) that have investigated the sociolinguistic and semiotic aspects of Persian advertising. They primarily adopt a contrastive approach to compare the verbal and visual genres of pre- and post-revolutionary advertisements. Moreover, the analyses of post-revolutionary advertisements in Iran are focused exclusively on the period of the post-revolutionary era that is known as the "economic reconstruction" (*sazandagi*) era (1989–1997). This means that there is no scholarly study of Persian advertisements in the "political reform" (*eslahat*) period (1997–2005). This chapter focuses on this period. It gives a more comprehensive account of post-revolutionary advertising in Iran by building on, and integrating, the previous research that had addressed earlier periods of post-revolutionary Iran. In examining the advertising discourse, this chapter aims to highlight the socio-cultural changes of contemporary Iranian society as they are constructed in Persian advertising, and to show how that discourse contributes to the prevailing ideologies in the social sphere.

Theoretical preliminaries

Advertising discourse is a complex phenomenon in terms of its linguistic styles (e.g., colloquial, literary, and sometimes scientific genres, disjointed grammar), media, implicitness, brevity, image building, and modes of texts (e.g., visual and verbal). Such a complicated form of communication cannot be explored adequately by focusing on a single analytical framework. The current study, therefore, takes a multifaceted approach, drawing from semiotics to critical discourse analysis in order to achieve its objectives. Nevertheless, the theoretical foundations on which our analysis of data is based share the idea that advertising communication should be regarded as a social practice; and that it is mainly persuasive and ideologically loaded. Thus, the discourse characteristic of advertising must not be viewed as a neutral tool designed to convey mere factual information. In keeping with such a theoretical position, the authors supply a general account of the relationship between language and ideology as envisaged in linguistic literature. However, before discussing the interrelationship of language use and ideology in linguistics we should note that in this chapter we are deploying the terms discourse, ideology, or worldview interchangeably.

Ideology in language and advertising discourse

There is a vast literature on the interrelationship between language and ideology (e.g., Fairclough, 1992, 1995, 2001; Kress and Hodge, 1979; Lee, 1992; Van Dijk, 1993, 1995, 1998). Strictly speaking, we need initially to draw a distinction between the relationship of language structure and worldview on the one hand, and between language use and ideology, on the other. The former relationship refers to the general characteristic of all languages in that, based on their specific structures, they carve up the world in terms of lexical, semantic, and grammatical categories. For example, the kinship terms or gender categories in Persian and English differ from each other, and these differences are to be construed as different worldviews. This trend of thought has been known as the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, and nowadays is mainly referred to as linguistic relativity. The latter relationship, in contrast, refers to those linguistic resources and options that a particular language makes available to its speakers so that they may make those choices which construct an ideologically particular perspective. Borrowing the terminology of the Prague School of Linguistics, the first type of relationship deals mainly with the "structure" (i.e., syntagmatic relations), while the second type concerns itself with the "system" (i.e., paradigmatic relations). A rather comparable distinction between "classification" and "selection" in language has been drawn by Lee (1992). Such distinctions, however, do not represent two separate entities; instead they hold a complementary relationship to each other. That is why the theory of systemic-functional linguistics, initiated and developed by Halliday (1994), integrates, in a complicated way, both language structure and language system to explain how linguistic features work together to constrain and facilitate the speaker's ability to construe a particular perspective.

By defining language as "social semiotic," Halliday's (1994) theory of grammar must be regarded as a theory of language use, which incorporates all socio-cultural and pragmatic issues to explain the use of the systemic and structural apparatus of a language in context. Interestingly enough, the majority of linguistically oriented studies of media discourses including advertising (e.g., Fairclough, 1995; Fowler, 1991; Lee, 1992) apply the findings of critical linguistics to analyze their relevant data; and critical linguistics (or critical discourse analysis) is in turn based, to a great extent, on systemic-functional grammar. This implies that systemic-functional linguistics constitutes the major and the most appropriate framework within which to study advertising discourses, in particular due to its multifaceted applications in analysis of texts to discern their ideological implications. Furthermore, the framework in question may also be applied in studying the grammar of visual texts (see e.g., Eggins and Iedema, 1997; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). It is worth noting that this analytical tool is of paramount importance in the study of advertising discourse because the non-linguistic context of visual elements plays a crucial role in advertisements. Nonetheless, as was pointed out earlier, the current study does not restrict itself to a particular theoretical framework, but draws from various approaches to analyze its data.

Methods and types of advertisements

Although we are studying Persian advertising, our primary objective here is to provide a general picture of the prevailing socio-political and cultural order in Iran during the reform era (1997–2005). We are not aiming to make generalizable statements about all advertising in Iran, as a quantitative study would. Instead, we engage in textual analyses of selected texts of advertising that we consider fairly typical (i.e., prevalent, non-controversial, mundane) of the period in order to provide a general picture of advertising discourse in the post-revolutionary reform era.

The sources of texts are weekly magazines such as *Zan-e Ruz* (“Today’s Woman”), *Ittela’at Haftegi* (“Weekly Information”), and the bi-weekly magazine *Khanevadeh Sabz* (“Green Family”). However, a few examples are also taken from daily newspapers such as *Iran*, *Jam-e Jam* (“Jam’s Crystal Ball”), and *Hamshari* (“Fellow-citizen”). The data also come from hygiene, cosmetics, and clothes advertisements which are mainly found in weekly magazines. In order to make statements about the reform era we need to compare and contrast advertising discourse from this era to the preceding era of economic reconstruction (1989–1997). Moreover, we have decided to follow the advertising strategies of the same brand names in the two periods in order to create a systematic approach (i.e., to control for what might be idiosyncratic differences in communicative strategies by different companies). The three brand names are “*Saviz*,” “*Shandiz*,” and “*Golpasand*.” We have chosen brand names because they lend themselves to a contrastive analysis. In other words, this study compares and contrasts how the communicative strategies of the same company can resemble, or differ from, one another in the two different ideological environments. Thus, the advertising texts we have selected have appeared in Iran from 1992 to 2004, covering the periods of economic reconstruction and the political reform. We should recall that commercial advertisements were not permitted during the first decade of the post-revolutionary era, coinciding roughly with the post-revolution and the Iran–Iraq war periods (1979–1988).

Analysis of advertisements

The analysis of texts consists of two major parts. The first part deals with a detailed analysis of different versions of advertisements from three companies ("*Saviz*," "*Shandiz*," and "*Golpasand*"). The second part provides a general description of some characteristics of advertisements found specifically in the reform stage since there exist no counterparts for them in the economic reconstruction period.

Comparison of advertisements in the different periods

The first advertisement publicizes an eau-de-Cologne with the trade name *Saviz*. It comes from the earlier part of the economic reconstruction period. The analysis of this advertisement can be carried out in terms of its trade name, repetition, grammar, propositional content and implicature, sound symbolism, language display, and visual language.

Saviz ("of good morals or temper") is an archaic Persian word that can be interpreted metaphorically, as is the case for many trade names in other languages (Vorlat, 1985). That is, it means that "the product equals to *saviz*," and it can be spelled out in the advertising context as: "you can attain serenity by using *Saviz Eau de Cologne*."[3] The advertising text contains eleven words, of which five designate *Saviz*. Moreover, the text has six disjointed phrases as follows:

[1a] Eau de Cologne 3000
Saviz

Saviz [the emblem]
Saviz eau de Cologne

SAVIZ [in English]
Eau de Cologne [in English]

Beautiful and clean with Saviz

The repetition of the word *Saviz* in different colours, shapes, sizes, fonts, and languages in such a short text is linguistically and pragmatically significant. The implication is that all these linguistic and orthographical devices are used for the thematization of the product *Saviz*, and its projection into focal point. Apart from having the effect of image building for the product, this strategy enhances the memorability of the product name. In particular, the psychological impact of this linguistic device will be reinforced by the rhythmical pattern employed in the last phrase: *zibā ve tæmiz bā sāviz*. As the punch line of the advertisement,

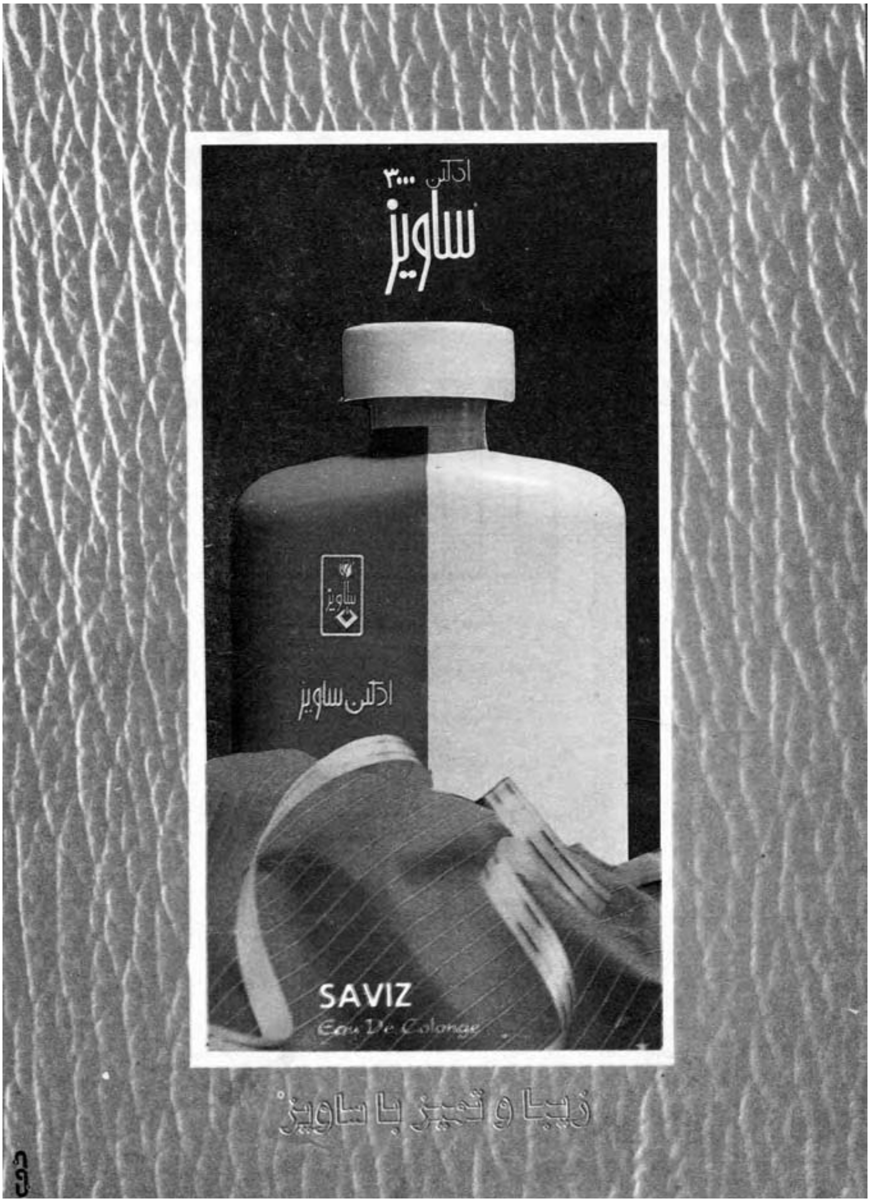

ادکلن ۳۰۰۰
ساویز
ساویز
ادکلن ساویز
SAVIZ
Eau De Colonge
زیبا و تمیز با ساویز

Figure 7.1

this phrase is very pleasing to the ear because it manipulates the harmoniously musical sounds [z], [ā, æ, i, e], [b, m, v]. Moreover, it could be a technique for sound symbolism, implying as it does the association of repetitive [z] with the Persian word *zan* ("woman"). In pre-revolutionary Iran this advertising would have been accompanied by images of young, beautiful women. However, since the depiction of women in advertising is frowned upon in post-revolutionary Iran (see Amouzaeh and Tavangar, 2004), the image of woman that is partly constructed by sound image ("*zan*") paradigmatically takes the position of an actual image of a woman.

From a grammatical perspective, we have here six disjointed noun phrases in which only the last one is a compound noun phrase requiring an explanation in terms of grammar and semantics. In a linguistic perspective, the phrase in question is a nominalized one conjoining and integrating two paratactic clauses – to use Halliday's (1994) terms. Nominalization, as some scholars have argued (e.g., Fairclough, 1982; Fowler, 1991; Halliday, 1994; Kress and Hodge, 1979), affords the participants ambiguity and is thus semantically vague. That is, it leaves it up to the reader/addressee to infer the implicature from the context of communication. It is a kind of linguistic device used mainly in press and advertising discourses to safeguard the speaker without committing her/him to an explicit statement. Technically speaking, the implicature inferred by the reader can be canceled, or even rejected, by the speaker. This is reminiscent of Geis's (1980) argument that advertising communications are mainly based on people's pragmatic implicature (practical reasoning), rather than on their logical inferences. On these grounds, the nominalized phrase *zibā ve tæmiz bā sāviz* ("beautiful and clean with Saviz") could lead to various inferences (e.g., If you want to be beautiful and clean you must use Saviz; Saviz brings you beauty and cleanness). This shows that a range of pragmatic inferences can be drawn from this grammatical construction. Another interesting point about this construction is the use of *bā* ("with"). The use of *bā* in Persian allows ambiguity in that it has multiple meanings: "with" as in a sense of instrumentation ("with" this product you would achieve desirable outcomes) and "with" as in "in the company of" (or being "with" a person). Both of these interpretations would be desirable in this context. This may explain why such a nominalized construction is common in Persian advertising discourse regardless of whether it belongs to pre- or post-revolutionary eras, or whether it is selling cosmetics or other products. Here are a few examples: (1) *ŝadi ve s̄adabi bâ mahsulât b.b.k:* "Joy and freshness with B.B.K beauty products," (2) *ŝâdâbi xânevadeh bâ kereme nivâ:* "Family bliss with Nivea cream," (3) *salâmati ve ŝâdabi bâ ŝâmpoo sehat:* "Health and bliss with Sehat shampoo," and (4) *narm o latif bâ mâ'e dastŝuyi latif* ("soft and delicate with Golrang liquid hand soap").

The use of English language in the advertisement [1a] may also be interpreted as a kind of "language display" (Eastman and Stein, 1993) or "symbolic values of foreign language" (Haarmann, 1989) in advertising. This means that the purpose of employing English is not to convey particular information to the audience. Neither is it intended for possible English audiences. Rather, the use of English in this context promotes positive images such as the international status of the product, modernity, Europeanization, and reliability, all of which are attached to the symbolic use of the English language in Persian advertising.[4]

The visual part of the advertisement is very complex. The main frame is black. The inside of the black frame is green with a wave-like projected surface. Inside the frame of the green surface we see a narrow white frame, inside which we have again a black background with a bottle of *Saviz* in it. The bottle has been painted in maroon and white. Beside the bottle we see a type of bed cover in green with yellow stripes. At the surface level, it may be said that the three colors of green, white, and "maroon" (red), the colors of the Iranian national flag, remind the reader of his/her national flag. At the latent level, the visual elements (e.g., bed cover, colors of black and green) could be interpreted as invoking intimacy. This is a plausible reading because the advertising would otherwise remain devoid of any content other than the informational elements of the advertising. One reason why the advertisers adopt such an indirect and fairly benign strategy to convey these implicit meanings is in the socio-political context of post-revolutionary Iran. We should remember that this advertisement was produced in 1994, when there were greater constraints on the creative forces in advertising than in the following years. The depiction of intimacy, romance, and related issues, elements that are integral to advertising in many other parts of the world, always runs the risk of violating Islamic percepts according to the Islamic Republic. As we know from the present and past advertising practices, depictions of intimacy and romance have always been easily achieved by using the image of young couples in many countries, including pre-revolutionary Iran. As we (Amouzadeh and Tavangar, 2004) have previously argued, the advertisers in the post-revolutionary era used pictorial metaphors to reconcile two types of conflicting ideologies: one based on advertising practices and the other inspired by "Islamic values." However, in the reform period, when a strict reading of the Islamic codes was relaxed, we began to see images of women in such contexts with more frequency. Such depiction involved displaying only her face to the exclusion of her hair (which is not permitted), or displaying her wearing the Islamic dress code. At other times, the depiction of women without the Islamic dress code was suggested through the use of girls under the age of ten, as they are exempt from such restrictions.

The comparison of the aforementioned advertisement with its other versions [1b and 1c] in the later era will reveal some interesting similarities and important differences. The repetition of a brand name and the use of two disjointed phrases as the slogan of the product to establish the same implicit implicaturs are more or less the same in all versions of the advertisements. For example, in a later version [1b] of the advertisement we have *hamiŝeh tamiz, hamiŝeh saviz* ("always clean, always Saviz"), in which the same indirect inferences may be drawn as was the case for *zibā ve tœmiz bā sāviz* ("beautiful and clean with Saviz"). Nonetheless, what is at stake here is the difference between them. At first, their emblem differences require some explanation. In the economic reconstruction period, we observe a simple vertical rectangle, with the word *Saviz* in

Persian orthography inscribed inside it. In contrast, the form of emblem has changed from a rectangle to a complex triangle in the reform period. The triangle represents two human faces in a dark color facing each other intimately, and reminds us of the image of a couple. Underneath the triangle is the name of *Saviz* in English and in red font. Under the English script we see the word *Saviz* in Persian. In contrast to the previous example, the emblem by itself establishes an implicit image of women. This reading can be reinforced by the picture of a young girl holding a tube of *Saviz* with the English sentence, "Makes life new for everyone," and the English phrase, "Moisturizing skin care cream," written on it. Despite the fact that the picture of a young girl cannot evoke romance and intimacy for obvious reasons, that image is still less implicit in suggesting femininity than a bunch of flower is, a strategy employed in the economic reconstruction era.

Another difference is the prominent use of English in the second example. Apart from integrating the English script into its emblem and making the English font larger and above the Persian script, the advertisements display a few tubes of *Saviz* products, each with a complete English text. However, the *Saviz* Company used to employ English peripherally, by using English orthography once at the end with a small and normal (not boldfaced) font.

The analysis of another advertisement adds further support to the argument that advertising companies employ a rather different communicative strategy in the reform period in contrast to the economic reconstruction period. The following advertisement (Figure 7.4) publicizes *Shandiz sunscreen cream*. Here is its Persian translation, where the phrases in brackets mean that they are in English in the original text:

[2a] Anti-sun cream
Shandiz
[Sunscreen Cream]
[UVA-UVB-IR]
According to European Standards

- To keep away the skin from harmful ultraviolet rays of the sun
Do you know that:
- the ultraviolet rays of the sun exist all days of the year and hurt your skin!

Shandiz is the name of a place with a pleasant climate in northeastern Iran, where people would like to spend their summer holidays. This name is known to have been associated with, and be reminiscent of, a romantic place. A few varieties of this advertisement may be found in Persian weekly magazines at different times. At first glance, there does not seem to be so much difference among them. On closer inspection, however, some important distinctions may be drawn from each era. This version [2a], from the economic reconstruction period, starts with the Persian noun phrase *kerem zede āftāb, **Shandiz**,*[5] followed by the English phrase ***Shandiz**, Sunscreen Cream, UVA-UVB-IR*. The other two

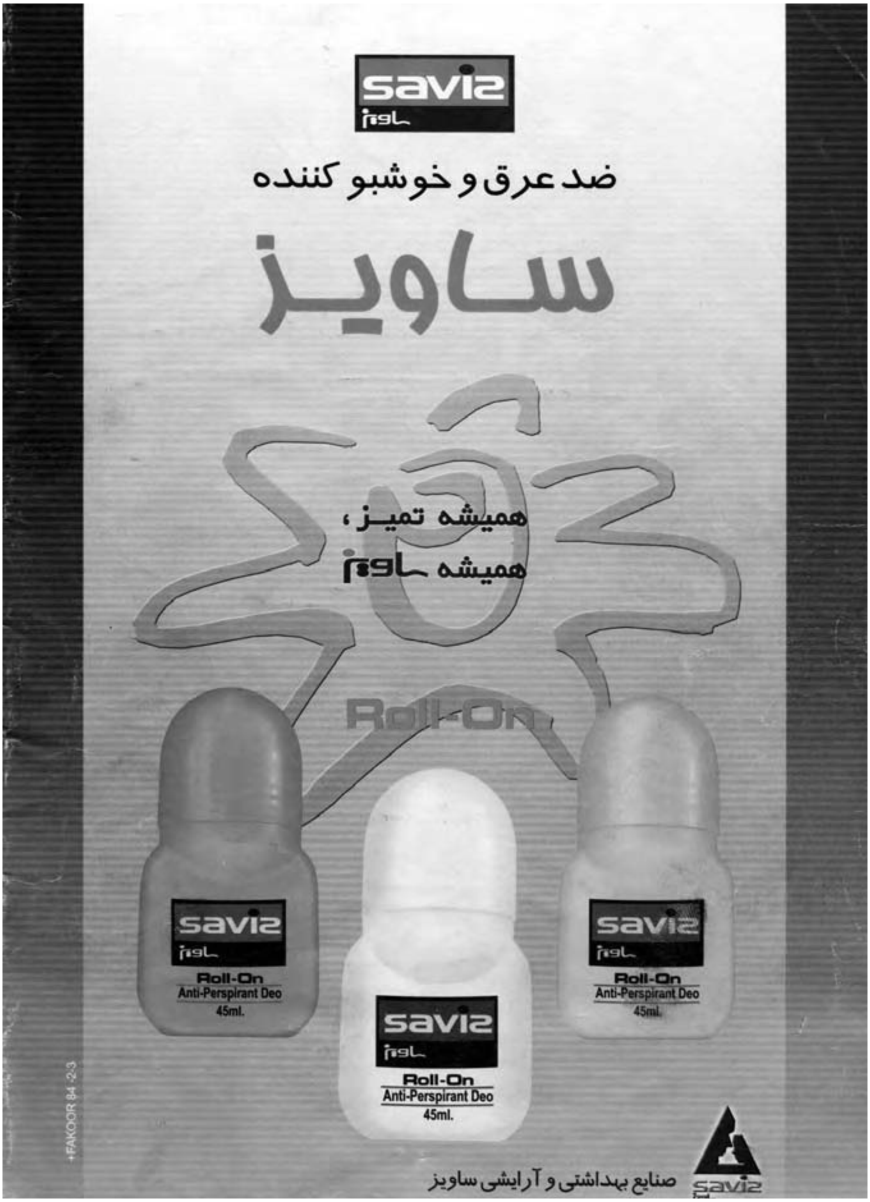

savis
ساویز
ضد عرق و خوشبو کننده
ساویز
همیشه تمیز،
همیشه ساویز
Roll-On
savis ساویز Roll-On Anti-Perspirant Deo 45ml.
savis ساویز Roll-On Anti-Perspirant Deo 45ml.
savis ساویز Roll-On Anti-Perspirant Deo 45ml.
+FAKOOR 84 -2-3
صنایع بهداشتی و آرایشی ساویز
savis

Figure 7.2

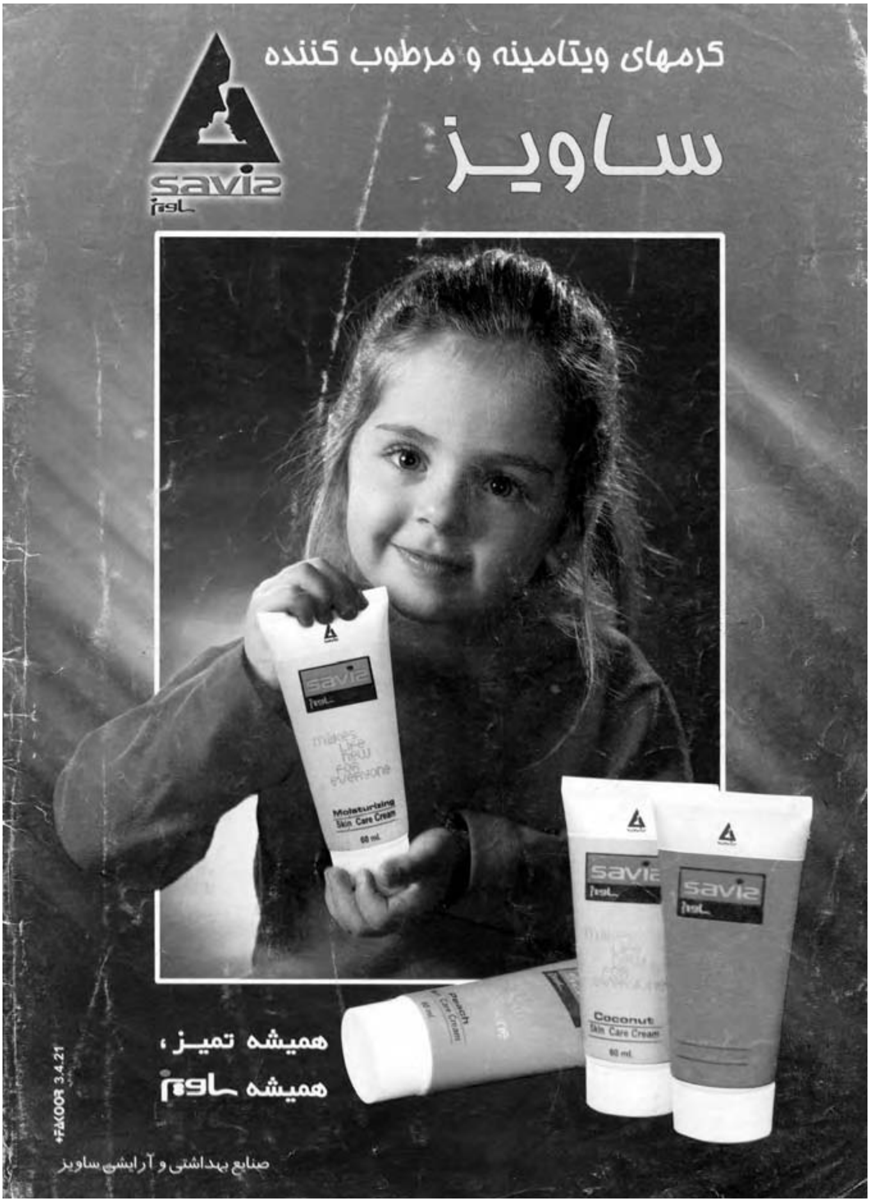
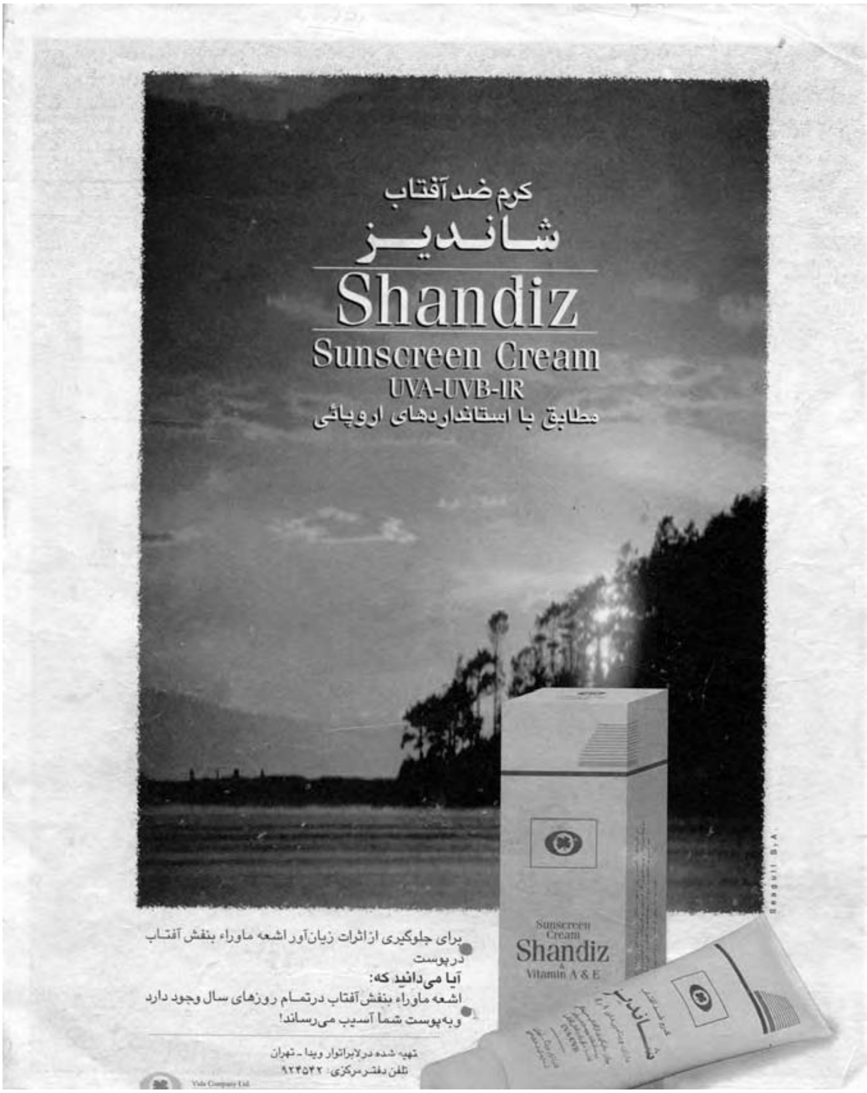

کرمهای ویتامینه و مرطوب کننده
ساویز
saviz
ساویز
Makes Life new for everyone
Moisturizing Skin Care Cream
60 ml
Peach Skin Care Cream
Coconut Skin Care Cream
همیشه تمیز، همیشه ساویز
FAKOOR 3.4.21
صنایع بهداشتی و آرایشی ساویز

Figure 7.3



کرم ضد آفتاب

شانـدیـز

Shandiz

Sunscreen Cream

UVA-UVB-IR

مطابق با استانداردهای اروپائی

Sunscreen Cream
Shandiz
Vitamin A & E

برای جلوگیری از اثرات زیان‌آور اشعه ماوراء بنفش آفتاب در پوست

آیا می‌دانید که:

اشعه ماوراء بنفش آفتاب در تمام روزهای سال وجود دارد و به‌پوست شما آسیب می‌رساند!

تهیه شده در لابراتوار ویدا ـ تهران

تلفن دفتر مرکزی: ۹۲۴۵۴۲

Vida Company Ltd.

Figure 7.4

versions [2b and 2c] of this advertisement from the reform period, however, start with English phrases (e.g., *Sunscreen Cream,* ***Shandiz*** and *Eye Contour Cream, Anti-wrinkle,* ***Shandiz***) followed by Persian words. The topicalization of brand names in the English language, rather than in Persian, implies that the use of English functions more than displaying the international status of the product. Here the competing discourses of the local brand name, on the one hand, and the topicalization in the English language, on the other, require due attention. Although the use of English in both versions highlights the international status of the product, the later version thematizes such an ideology markedly by putting the English phrase *Eye Contour Cream Anti-wrinkle Shandiz* at the top of the text. In a sense, this strategy topicalizes English and marginalizes Persian, which emphasizes the international rather than the patriotic or nationalistic view.

Another aspect of the aforementioned advertisements is that in the reform period the inclination is to suggest "Americanization" more than "Westernization." For instance, the phrase *motābeq bā estāndārdhāye oruppāye* ("according to European standards") in earlier texts from the economic reconstruction period has been replaced by phrases such as *taid ŝode dar amrika motābeq bā estāndārd FDA* ("approved in the United States according to FDA standards") in the texts from the reform era.

The comparison also shows that whereas the image of a sunflower is metaphorically evocative of the position of woman in the earlier version, in the latter version the face of a young and beautiful female accompanies the verbal text without displaying her hair. This shows that the socio-political constraints have been relaxed in the reform period and that the discourse of the advertisers reflects and contributes to this situation, where "non-Islamic" ideologies are used to persuade audiences.

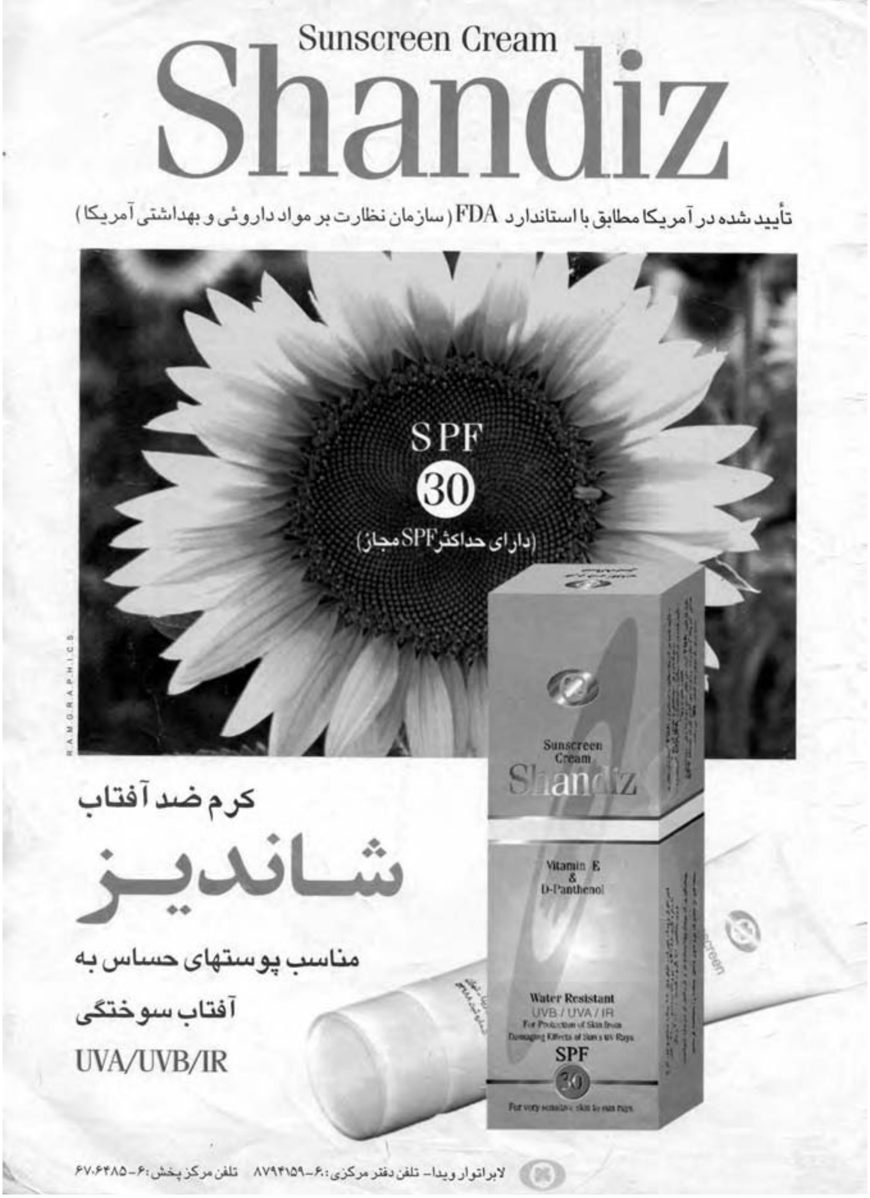
Golpasnad is the last trade name that will be discussed. It is a compound noun in which *gol* means "flower" and *pasand* means "admired." It advertises toothpaste and skin cream. The Persian translation of its version from reconstruction period is as follows:

[3a] Why foreign toothpaste?
Golpasand gel toothpaste with German Blenax formula containing Hidrotedsilka and fluoride sodium for the protection of tooth enamel, for health and for prevention of cavities.

[here you find the picture of a Golpasand toothpaste box inscribed in English together with a bunch of roses]
[here you find the picture of a tube of Golpasand toothpaste with the English script on it]

Golpasand gel toothpaste means you do not need foreign toothpaste.

Golpasand toothpaste with Fluoride gel gum fights gum disease and decay.



Sunscreen Cream

Shandiz

تأیید شده در آمریکا مطابق با استاندارد FDA (سازمان نظارت بر مواد داروئی و بهداشتی آمریکا)

SPF 30 (دارای حداکثر SPF مجاز)

کرم ضد آفتاب

شاندیز

مناسب پوستهای حساس به

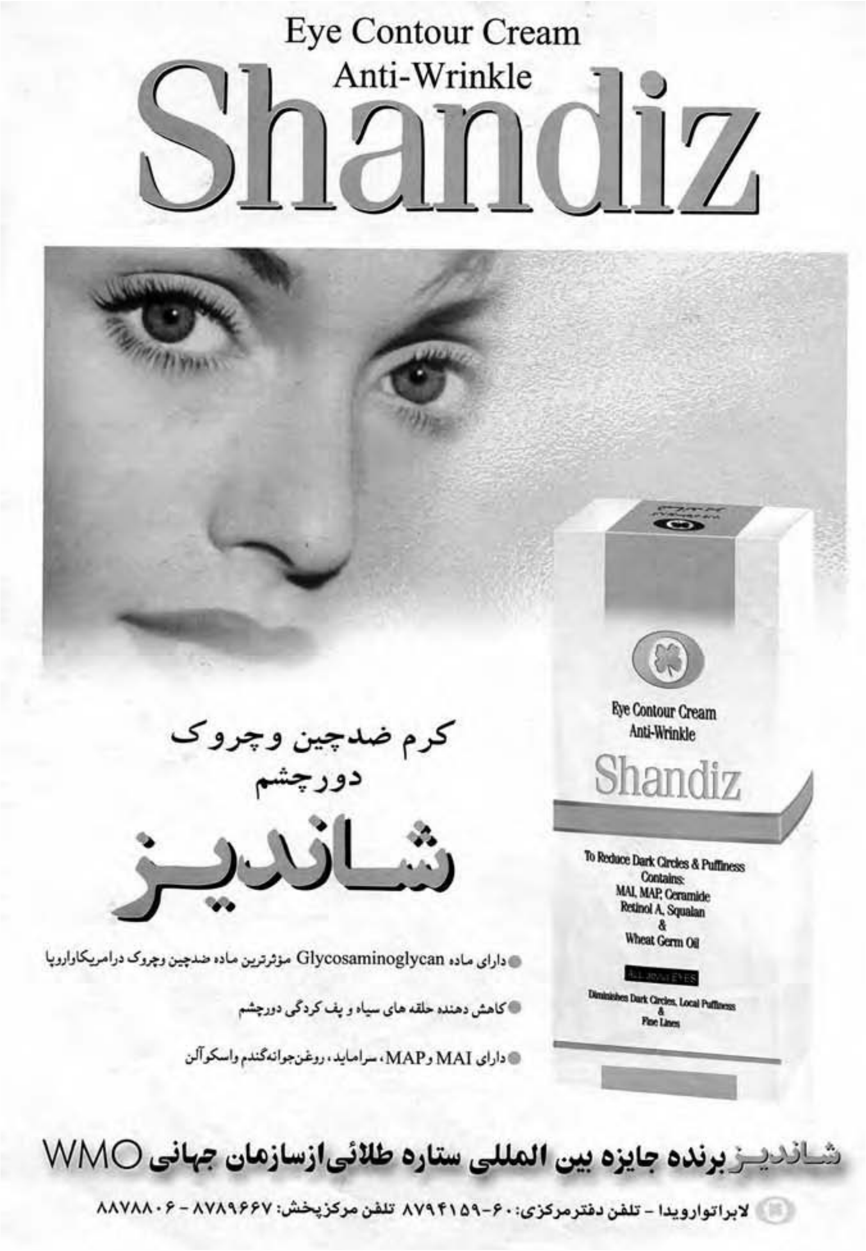
آفتاب سوختگی

UVA/UVB/IR

لابراتوار ویدا- تلفن دفتر مرکزی: ۶۰-۸۷۹۴۱۵۹ تلفن مرکز پخش: ۶-۶۷۰۶۴۸۵

Sunscreen Cream
Shandiz
Vitamin E & D-Panthenol
Water Resistant
UVB / UVA / IR
For Protection of Skin from Damaging Effects of Sun's UV Rays
SPF 30
For very sensitive skin to sun rays
R.A.M GRAPHICS

Figure 7.5



Eye Contour Cream

Anti-Wrinkle

Shandiz

کرم ضدچین وچروک

دورچشم

شانـدیـز

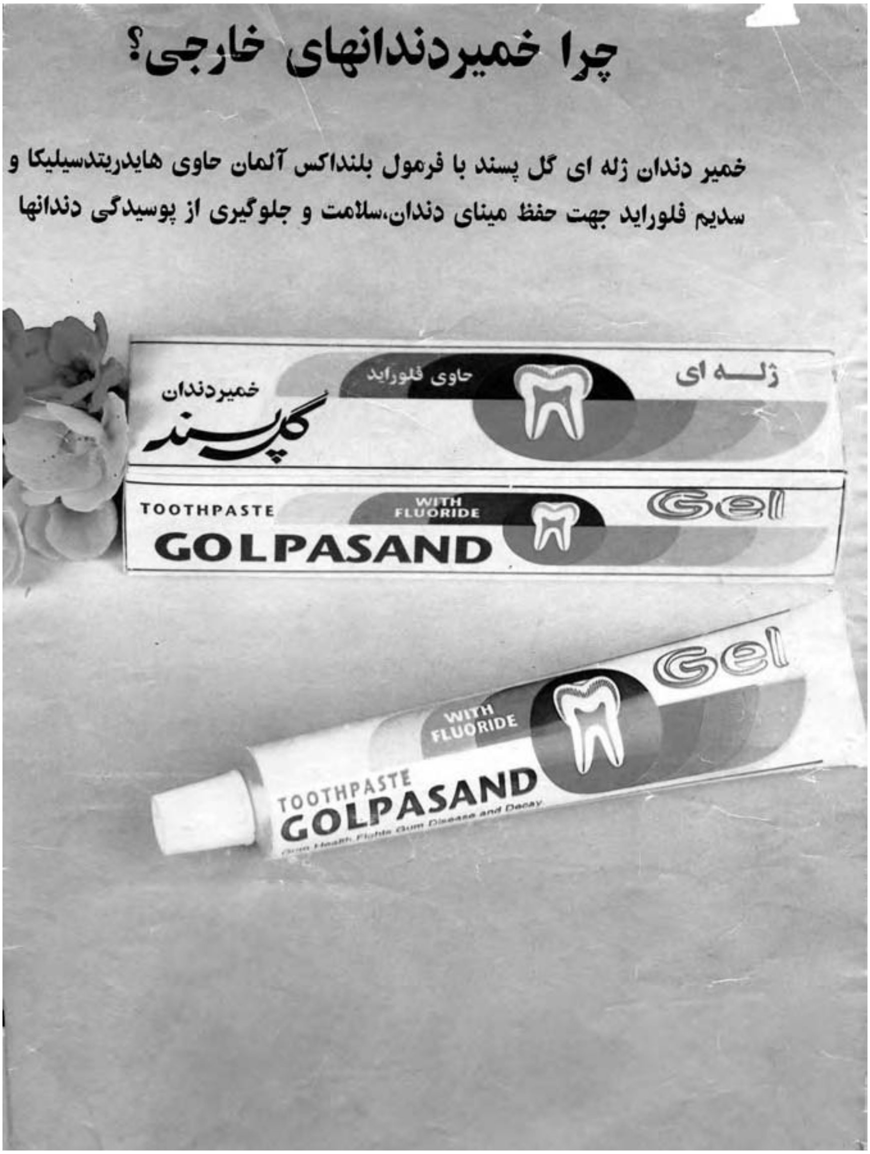
- دارای ماده Glycosaminoglycan مؤثرترین ماده ضدچین وچروک درامریکاواروپا
- کاهش دهنده حلقه های سیاه و پف کردگی دورچشم
- دارای MAI وMAP، سرامايد، روغن‌جوانه‌گندم واسکوآلن

شانـدیـز برنده جایزه بین المللی ستاره طلائی ازسازمان جهانی WMO

لابراتوارویدا - تلفن دفترمرکزی: ۶۰-۸۷۹۴۱۵۹ تلفن مرکزپخش: ۸۷۸۹۶۶۷ - ۸۸۷۸۸۰۶

Eye Contour Cream
Anti-Wrinkle
Shandiz
To Reduce Dark Circles & Puffiness
Contains:
MAI, MAP, Ceramide
Retinol A, Squalan
&
Wheat Germ Oil
Diminishes Dark Circles, Local Puffiness
&
Fine Lines

Figure 7.6



چرا خمیردندانهای خارجی؟

خمیر دندان ژله ای گل پسند با فرمول بلنداکس آلمان حاوی هایدریتدسیلیکا و سدیم فلوراید جهت حفظ مینای دندان، سلامت و جلوگیری از پوسیدگی دندانها

ژلـه ای
حاوی فلوراید
خمیردندان
گل‌پسند
TOOTHPASTE
WITH FLUORIDE
GOLPASAND
Gel
WITH FLUORIDE
Gel
TOOTHPASTE
GOLPASAND
Gum Health, Fights Gum Disease and Decay.

Figure 7.7

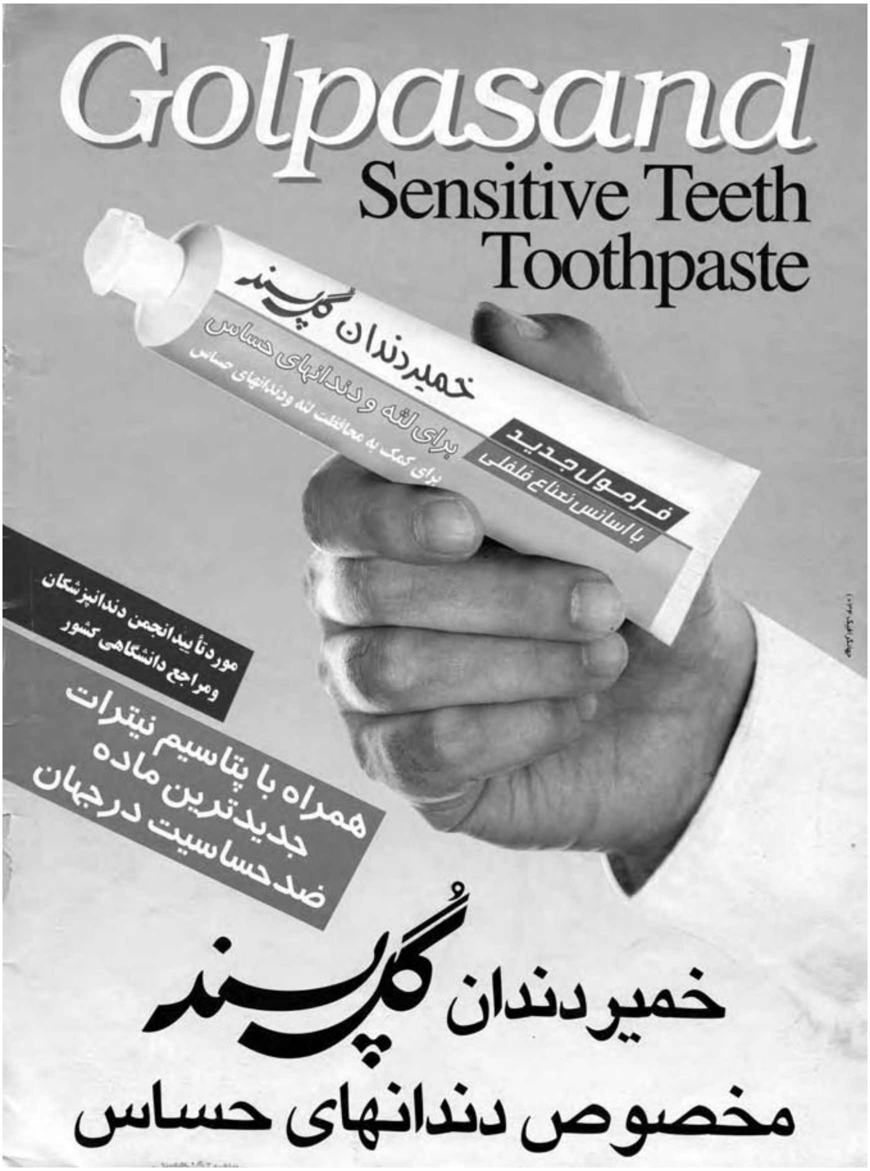
The text begins with a rhetorical question: “Why foreign toothpaste?” This question is ambiguous in that it seems to address two questions: “Why do we need to consume foreign toothpaste?” and “Why don’t we need to consume foreign toothpaste?” It is the context, and in particular the sentence “Golpasand gel toothpaste means you do not need foreign toothpaste,” which eliminates the first reading, and endorses the second one. Despite the fact that the advertisement emphasizes the reliability of the local product, its recourse to some foreign aspects merits serious attention. What is at stake here is the competing discourses of national versus foreign products, in particular the general assumption in Iran that foreign products are more durable and reliable than Iranian goods, and that foreign products normally mean European goods. Interestingly, the advertisement has to associate its product with some foreign characteristics in order to convince the expected reader that the product is as reliable as foreign goods. This argument is supported by the use of phrases such as “with German Blenax formula” and “containing Hidrotedsilka and fluoride sodium” in the text. The former phrase refers explicitly to Germany, whose products enjoy high prestige and reliability in Iran, and the latter phrase resorts to technical chemical terms, which are also implicitly associated with the scientific discourse and with the West, which is considered to be the source of science and technology. The use of English on the tube and on the box of the product also reinforces such a reading since all foreign goods with an international status employ English for their packages.

Another version [3b] of this trade name from the reform period stands in sharp contrast with the preceding advertisement. At the top of the text we have the following phrase in English which attracts the attention of the reader:

> [Golpasand]
> [Sensitive Teeth]
> [Toothpaste]

This text stands in sharp contrast to the previous one in the way it thematizes English and de-emphasizes the local aspects of the product. In a sense, this text stresses merely the international status of the product without addressing the local or the national as a way to please local audiences (as was the case in the previous advertisement). It is not clear why the company has stopped campaigning against foreignness by equating its national product with foreign ones. The first reason could be that local products in the economic reconstruction period failed to gain the reliability and high prestige that foreign goods enjoy. The second reason may be that the need for nationalist ideology, which used to be predominant in the economic reconstruction era, is not as strong to the extent that an appeal to a foreignness of a product is more acceptable in this era.

The third version [3c] of *Golpasand* provides further support for the earlier argument that advertising companies employ more explicit strategies to incorporate images of women and femininity in the reform period. Here the whole background of the page is covered by the face of a young lady surrounded by a few



Golpasand

Sensitive Teeth
Toothpaste

خمیردندان گُلپسند
برای لثه و دندانهای حساس
برای کمک به محافظت لثه ودندانهای حساس

فرمول جدید
با اسانس نعناع فلفلی

مورد تأیید انجمن دندانپزشکان
ومراجع دانشگاهی کشور

همراه با پتاسیم نیترات
جدیدترین ماده
ضدحساسیت درجهان

خمیردندان گُلپسند
مخصوص دندانهای حساس

Figure 7.8

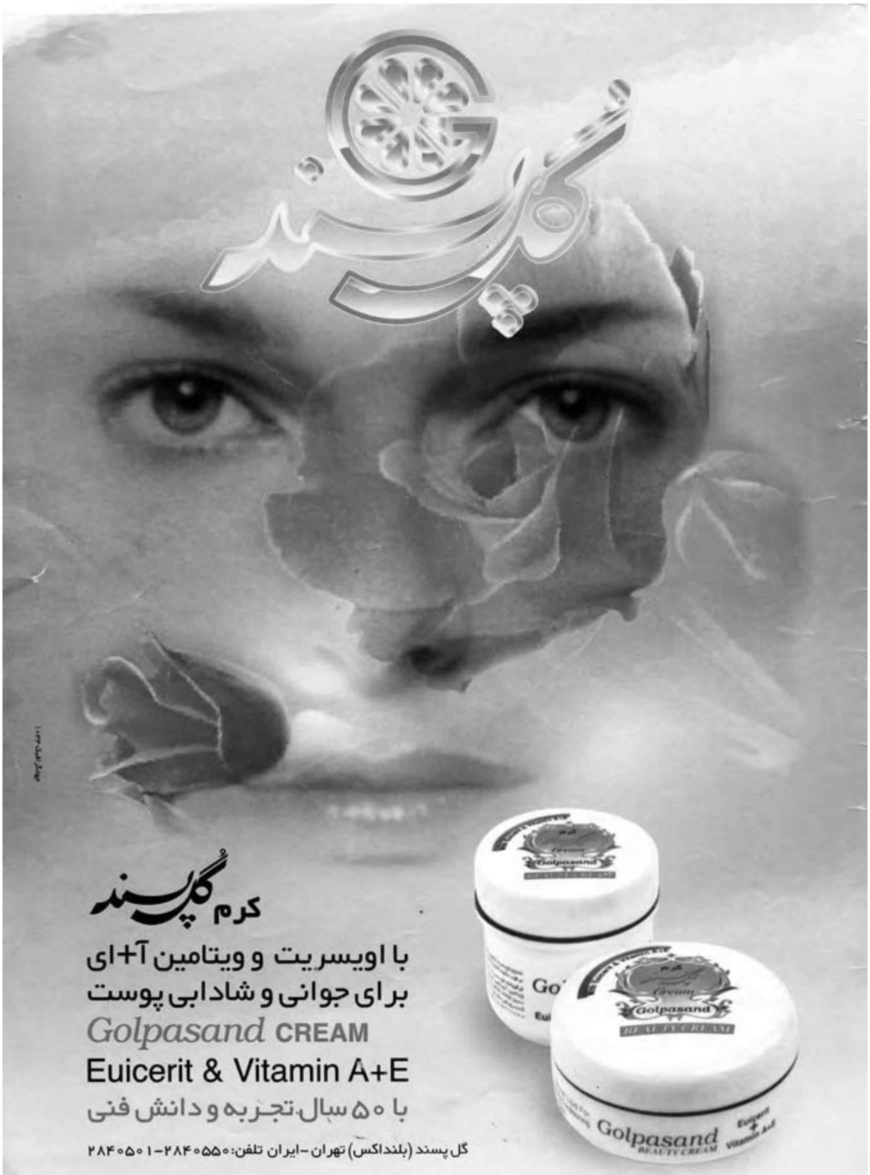
twigs of roses, and looking at the containers of the product. The display of such an explicit image of women could not be found in the advertising discourse of the economic reconstruction era. This means that the pictorial metonymy, in which part of a woman's face stands for her image as a whole, is more explicit than a pictorial metaphor where a bunch of flowers stands for an image of a woman (see Amouzadeh and Tavangar, 2004).

The general argument here is that the comparison of the different advertisements of the three trade names in the two periods of post-revolutionary Iran reveals the fact that they reflect, and in turn contribute to, their relevant socio-cultural circumstances. In other words, the socio-cultural conditions in the reform period do not prevent companies from using an explicit reference to images of women and expressing a preference for Western/global symbolic values over local ones, as was the case in the economic reconstruction era.

Other features of Persian advertisements

There are other communicative differences between the two sets of advertisements in the two periods, and some new characteristics and modes of communication are attached only to the advertising discourse of the reform period, each of which can form a separate topic on its own for a scholarly investigation. However, this section confines itself to providing a general account of such features in order to delineate further directions in the advertising discourse of Persian.

One of the differences between the advertisements from the economic reconstruction era and those from the reform period has to do with trade name. As discussed by Amouzadeh (in press), almost all products in the area of cosmetics and hygiene bear a Persian name in post-revolutionary Iran. However, the investigation of the advertisements of the later stage reveals the fact that foreign names like *Day*, *Fair and Lady*, *Beauty Club*, *Nouvella*, *Camay*, *Orbit*, *Betis*, and *Pati* are found in the reform period. However, not all of them are imported by Iran, and indeed most are manufactured locally, or have a license from foreign countries to be manufactured in Iran. Regarding the first one, the homophone of the English word *Day* can be, of course, a Persian word (دي) too, referring to the first month of winter in Iran. In this context *Day* can be considered as a pun. It is worth mentioning here that the employment of the literary device of pun in its various forms is another characteristic of the post-revolutionary advertising discourse requiring serious investigation. For example, one of the typical puns that the majority of Iranians know by heart is *hame rāzi az ĉasbe rāzi* ("all are pleased with Razi glue"). The word *rāzi* appears twice in this sentence. Whereas the first one means "pleased" or "satisfied," the second one is the brand name [راضي means "pleased" or "satisfied," and رازي is the brand name]. Although both are pronounced in exactly the same way, the orthographical characteristics are different. The important point is that this difference is overridden when they are phonologically represented. There are also some local trade names that are direct translations from English. A well-known



گل پسند
Golpasand
BEAUTY CREAM

کرم گل پسند

با اویسریت و ویتامین آ+ای
برای جوانی و شادابی پوست

Golpasand CREAM

Euicerit & Vitamin A+E

با ۵۰ سال تجربه و دانش فنی

گل پسند (بلنداکس) تهران - ایران تلفن: ۲۸۴۰۵۵۰-۲۸۴۰۵۰۱

Figure 7.9

example is *sose hezār jazire*. The word-by-word translation is "one thousand island sauce," which is a local version of thousand island salad dressing.

Other characteristics of Persian advertisements in the reform era are the use of brand names from non-standard Persian dialects and languages such as *talâvang* ("rooster's song," *junikâ* ("young bull"), and *kijā* ("girl"). All these names have been taken from the Mazandarani dialect. Interestingly, none of these has a single equivalent in standard Persian. Even the Persian word *doxtar* ("daughter") is not an exact synonym of *kijā* ("girl"). In other words, we have only one word in Persian referring to both "'daughter" and "girl." However, in Mazandarni dialect we have both *kijā* ("girl") and *detar* ("daughter"). Apart from their semantic differences, the last two words do not imply the same expressive and emotive meanings. Moreover, the term *talâvang* in Mazandarani may be used metaphorically to refer to the early morning before sunrise or before dawn. It seems that many non-Mazandarnis do not know the meanings of such trade names. Yet the symbolic values of such trade names convey a certain degree of authenticity and naturalness. We can also observe Azari (a variety of Turkish) words for some brand names such as *orumādā* ("water island"), and *san ič* ("you drink"). It should be noted that such a non-standard variety may also involve attempts by advertisers to appeal to ethnic groups to influence their consumption habits.

Environmental ethics is another issue manipulated by some companies in the reform period to promote their products. Ironically, this strategy is employed by automobile companies whose products inevitably contribute to air pollution. A slogan such as *pežo perŝiyā duste tabiyat* ("Peugeot Persia, a friend of nature") is a good example of that. Anther example, *Periad dogane suz, dustār manābe melli* ("hybrid fuel Pride, friendly to national resources"), frames the national energy issue as an environmental cause. In another example, *āsamān pāk, suxte pāk* ("clean sky, clean fuel") may be found in car advertising. Not surprisingly, such slogans are usually written in green fonts. Environmental consciousness, which has been on the rise in Iran just as it has been in other parts of the world in this age of globalization, poses challenges to advertisers and consumers. As Mühlhäusler (2003) has argued, addressing environments in advertising often faces the challenge of reconciling conflict between the interest of manufacturers and the health interests of the public, and the conflict between the economic discourse and the ethical discourse of the environmentalists. In this regard, Iran is no exception.

The use of film actors as celebrities is another feature of commercial advertising in the reform era. Using images of Jamshid Meshaykhi for general air-conditioner advertising, Mohammad Reza Golzar for advertising a men's clothing brand, and recently the image of the actress Hedyeh Tehrani for eau-de-Cologne are examples of advertising practices in the reform era and its legacy. This promotional strategy in advertising discourse indicates that in the cultural domains some restrictions were relaxed in the reform period.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has provided a qualitative analysis of Persian advertising discourse in post-revolutionary Iran. By adopting a contrastive approach, it has investigated issues such as brand names, language display, visual language, and literary devices used in both economic reconstruction and reform periods with a view to understanding the broader contexts that influence those communicative strategies. We have argued that although there are some similarities in both eras, the reform period shows the use of a wider range of linguistic and non-linguistic devices than those used in the economic period. Two particular aspects of such differences have been particularly important. First, depiction and the imagery of women and femininity have been less implicit in the reform period than in the previous era. Second, the symbolic use of English to denote the international status of the product has gained prominence in the second period, whereas nationalist ideology and local values have been more forceful in the reconstruction era than in the later period. Explanations for these differences have addressed different developments. In the economic reconstruction period, Iran suffered from severe economical setbacks following the war with Iraq. Before Iran could fully recover, the advertising industry could not flourish in such an inactive economic environment. In improving its relations with the outside world, Iran improved her relations with the rest of the world in the reform period, in the context of a higher level of economic, commercial, and cultural exchange with the outside world. In the reform era, advertising proliferated as the country experienced a period of relaxed socio-political constraints. In this period, advertising discourse, along with other cultural forms and processes, reflected and contributed to this socio-political context.

Notes

1 *Editor's note:* I have edited this chapter for style and language. While I have retranslated a few words to clarify the presentation, I have tried to preserve the authors' voice.

2 The post-revolutionary era in Iran may be divided into three different periods of *islamgarayi* ("Islamization," 1980–1988), *sazandagi* ("economic reconstruction," 1989–1997), and *eslahat* ("political reform," 1997–2005). This division is largely accepted by experts (see, e.g., Bashiriyah, 2001).

3 Amouzadeh's study (in press) of the metaphorical status of trade names in pre- and post-revolutionary advertisements in Iran shows that there exists a tendency in the post-revolutionary era to adopt brand names with metaphorical appeal, in contrast to the pre-revolutionary period, in which such a tendency is less common.

4 See Amouzadeh (2003) for an extensive discussion of the symbolic use of English in Persian advertising.

5 Here the comma stands for the place of a word in a different line in the original text and the bold font stands for a larger font and a different color.

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8 Trends in contemporary Persian poetry[1]

Alireza Anushiravani and Kavoos Hassanli

Introduction

In this chapter, we provide an overview of the broader trends and transformations in contemporary Persian poetry for a wider readership. We demonstrate that these trends entail both continuity and change in Persian poetry. The scope of our presentation covers both pre- and post-Islamic Revolution poetry. Our primary objective is to outline major trends in contemporary Persian poetry. We also aim to highlight how those trends engage and reflect the major societal concerns and preoccupations.

In order to place post-revolutionary Persian poetry and its transformations in its historical context, we discuss Persian poetry in the post-revolutionary period as well as the decades that led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The towering figure in modern Persian poetry is Nima Yushij (1897–1959). Being quite familiar with the tenor of his times, and having a good understanding of the truth of literature and a clear vision of his vocation as a poet, Nima started an extensive effort to bring Persian poetry into line with world literature. Instead of the conventions of classical Persian poetry, he sought new ways of expression. These new ways included the language, imagery, and form of poetry. Nima's efforts were meant to change the outlook of modern Persian poets and to prevent them from mere imitation of past literary experiences. Nima distanced himself from the past mentality, and engaged in the realities of his surroundings. This helped him discover new poetical horizons. He invited other poets to join him in expressing their inner and intimate feelings and gave them a taste of artistic revelation. We start our discussion of Persian poetry with the poetry that was created in the shadow of Nima's figure.

Persian poetry before the Islamic Revolution

Whoever heard the message of Nima was deeply impressed by him. Some poets were inclined toward the socio-political themes. These poets included Ahmad Shamlu, Akhavan Salis, and Siavoosh Kasraei. Others poets such as Hooshang Irani, Ahmad Reza Ahmadi, and Yadullah Royaei were mostly interested in language and literary techniques and concentrated on artistic innovations. Others started to compose radical socialist and revolutionary poems. Their poems were closer to political manifestos rather than artistic expressions. Among these were Khosrow Golsorkhi and Sa'id Sultanpour. Others like Nader Naderpour, Feridoun Moshiri, and Feridoun Tavalloli were mostly romantic and sensational poets and dealt with romantic ideas in their poetry. Others like Sohrab Sepehri with their contemplative nature moved toward a new kind of mysticism to convey their ideas.

Mohammad Ali Sepanloo (2001) has identified four major directions in modern Persian poetry. First is the "moderate group."[2] This type of poetry is a combination of an evolution in Iraqi's style and the heritage of lyrical language, the work of young Nima and the commitment to Nima's recommendations in breaking meter,[3] and rhyme's position and inspiration through the translation of Western romantic poetry. The second is the "fundamentalist group." This kind of poetry is a combination of the following elements and tendencies. Modern innovations against traditions, the combination of spoken and literary languages, disrupting the habitual manners, Nima's work in the second half of his life, efforts in combining meters, and inspiration through the translation of Western symbolic poetry all contributed to this poetry. The third kind of poetry is called "blank verse." The evolution of poetical prose, the inspiration of classical Persian prose, and the inspiration through translation of Western poetry especially concerning form, rhythm, and music in poetry (disregarding Prosodic or Nimaic meter) all contributed to this type of poetry. The fourth is the "new wave." This type of poetry is a combination of the following characteristics and tendencies. Living behind blank verse, using everyday spoken language, journalistic prose, and neglecting the structure of translated modern poetry have all contributed to this type of poetry (Sepanloo, 2001, p. 50).

Nima opened up new horizons for Iranian poets to experience life based on their own individual talents and potential and to find their own ways. Today those who respect Nima's innovations but restrict the necessity of the changes only to ones proposed by him are not so different from the traditionalists of Nima's own time. The social conditions of each era demand an art and literature of its own. Our time is different from Nima's and demands a different kind of art and literature.

The most prominent followers of Nima are those who did not ignore the pains and sufferings of their society while keeping the artistic and literary values in mind. Poets like Shamlu, Akhavan, Farrokhzad, Kasraei, Shafiei Kadkani, and Atashi offered a new social poetry which was more fluent and polished than the language of their master. This branch of today's Iranian poetry has tried to function as a truthful means to express people's ideas in an artistic framework. In this kind of poetry social thoughts have replaced individual emotions and deal mainly with themes such as man's freedom, justice, the struggle against dictatorship and poverty, supporting liberation movements, martyrdom, and urban issues.

The new socialist poets are mostly concerned with content. Following Nima's social vision, they commit themselves to talk about the suffering and pain of their people, and this leads them to neglect the aesthetic aspects of many of their poems. As Forough Farrokhzad says,

> I am more concerned with the content.... Some poems are like this, I mean they are beautiful, they caress your soul. However, some poems are "poetical." Of course, these are poems, but poetry is not limited only to this.... Delicacy and beauty are only parts of a poem.

Farrokhzad adds,

> Composing this kind of poetry is mostly a question of construction rather than creativity. I believe what has deteriorated our poetry is this extreme concern with delicacy and beauty. Our life is different. It is tough and untamed. These moods must enter our poetry. Our poetry needs violence and non-poetic words in order to start a new life.
>
> (Quoted in Shamisa, 1995, p. 226)

Another characteristic of modern Persian poetry especially during the 1950s and 1960s is the encounter of the native culture with the technical achievements of Western literature. In other words, when these writers and poets faced the intellectual and cultural imports of Western literature, they chose to go back to their own native roots. However, they often cleverly adopted the new techniques of the West. Many poems by figures such as Shamlu, Forough, Sepehri, along with the stories by writers such as Sadiq Chubak, Jalal Ale-Ahmad, Simin Daneshvar, Golamhossein Sa'edi, Hooshang Golshiri, Bahram Sadeqi, and Ibrahim Golistan during the 1960s are good examples of the combination of style and structure. This cultural amalgamation eventually helped to promote the form and content of modern Persian literature (Ruzbeh, 2002, pp. 407–408).

According to Langaroudi (1999), the dominant poetry of the first half of the 1950s (after the *coup d'état*) was rebellious, passionate, romantic, and mostly pessimistic. The poetry of this period voices the nation's resentment and instigates a sense of revenge against self, society, life, government, and politics. Moreover, coexisting with this poetry, there is a minor socio-political and emotional poetry that resists the major trend of the poetry of that time. Among these poets, for whom poetry was a weapon for class struggle, were Sirous Kasraei, Hooshang Ebtehaj, and Mohammad Kalantari (Langaroudi, 1999, pp. 20–23).

The romantic poems of poets like Tavalloli, Naderpour, and Moshiri were very influential in a certain period of modern Persian poetry. This moderate and emotional poetry functioned as a bridge to introduce readers to new poetry. However, the influence of this kind of poetry on the evolution of contemporary poetry did not go further than this. Moreover, some of its main branches prompted certain contemporary poetry critics to criticize these poets for their corruption, and to consider the 1950s as the age of the decline of Persian poetry.

Of course, not all the poetry of the 1950s and 1960s is similar in nature; some poems are simple, lyrical, and imagistic, and some are pessimistic, nihilistic, and dark, while others are concerned with social problems. Although the names of some contemporary poets might not be considered among the prominent forerunners of contemporary poetry, they played an important role in expanding its reception in a certain period. Nader Naderpour's poetry familiarized a large number of readers with new poetry in the 1950s.

In the mainstream of contemporary poetry, some movements or so-called literary "waves" came into existence. Among them one can list "poetry of volume," "new waves," and "genuine waves." There is no doubt that the modernist movements after Nima had their roots in social conditions and were also influenced by Western literary movements. Some of these poets did not compose their poems according to the literary taste and sensibility of Iranian society. This may explain why their works did not receive a wider reception.

Tondar Kia in the 1940s and Hooshang Irani in the 1950s are among those who neither comprehended Nima's aesthetic principles, nor had a good understanding of the nuances and decorum of classical Persian poetry. They suggested crude and immature ideas to modern Persian poetry. Tondar Kia reduced poetry to a game of words. His concept of innovation lacked any creativity and poetic imagination. Hooshang Irani was a painter-poet and a translator who was a recluse and was more mature poetically than Tondar Kia. However, the publication of his *Banafsheh bar Khakestari* [Purple upon gray] in 1951 exposed the bitter objections of the traditionalists.

Ahmad Reza Ahmadi, using the New Wave poetry in the 1960s, and Yadullah Royaei, using Volume poetry in the 1970s, started to break the old traditions. Their movement was more moderate and poetic than Tondar Kia's and Irani's. However, in comparison with their contemporaries like Shamlu, Akhavan, Farrokhzad, and Sepehri, they were left in the margins and did not find a large audience. The first batch of New Wave poets like Ahmad Reza Ahmadi and Yadullah Royaei were either influenced by the surrealistic poems of Hooshang Irani or were the imitators of Saint Joan Press, Paul Elvar, Louis Aragon, Ezra Pound, and others. These New Wave poets ignored social issues and content in its traditional sense and started to search for "the genuine substance of poetry." They revealed the hidden linguistic layers and ideas of poetry. They put aside the principles such as rhyme and musicality of poetry even in its Nimaic sense, and emphasized some new geometrical proportions of words in a prose-like and ambiguous poetry. Among them are Ahmad Reza Ahmadi, Yadullah Royaei, Parviz Eslampour, Bijan Elahi, Bahram Ardabili, Azim Khalili, Hooshang Chalangi, Shahram Shahrokhtash, and Mohammad Reza Aslani (Ruzbeh, 2002, p. 91).

In his writings during the 1960s, Yadullah Royaei emphasized the form and language of poetry more than did his predecessors and contemporaries. He believed that the role of the nature and music of words is more important than their meanings. His article, entitled "The language of poetry," is considered to be the first formalistic view in Iranian criticism (Langaroodi, 1991, pp. 627–628).[4] As we approach the close of the 1960s, political and revolutionary poetry begins to flourish. In the 1960s and 1970s guerrilla poetry, especially the poetry of Sa'id Soltanpour, Ali Mirfetrous, and Khosrow Golsorkhi, becomes more popular. In the early 1970s, when the Siahkal uprising[5] reached its climax, it drove the New Wave poetry into the sidelines. Khosrow Golsorkhi's[6] social criticisms of modern poetry contributed considerably to the flourishing of this kind of poetry. With the publication of *Seday-e Mira* [Mortal voice] (1968), Sa'id Soltanpour could be considered to be the representative of guerrilla poetry in the 1960s. The guerrilla poetry was raw, revolutionary, rough, propagandist, and stormy. It addressed the resistance and revolutionary groups, and terms such as cruelty, prison, swords, weapon, machine-gun, and blood appeared frequently in this kind of poetry.

Poetry after the Islamic Revolution

The opposition of different political groups against the Shah finally brought down the Pahlavi dynasty culminating in the victory of Islamic Revolution in 1979. In the following year, Iraq's aggression against Iran led to a war that lasted from 1980 to 1988. These two historical events deeply influenced all aspects of social, cultural, artistic, and political life in Iran. Undoubtedly, Persian poetry could not remain indifferent to these events. The Iranian nation as a whole fought bravely against the aggressive enemy and sacrificed their lives and wealth to defend their country. How could the true artists of the society remain indifferent to the sufferings and sacrifices of the nation? The particular social conditions brought into existence a new kind of poetry; this poetry, not unlike the constitutional poetry, was full of passionate emotions and excitements. The poetry of this period, especially at the beginning of the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the early years of war, was propagandist, revolutionary, and emotional which aimed to convey the excited voices of the people. However, as time passed the social excitements cooled down and poetry also calmed down and took on an artistic form.

The events of the revolution and the war provided new themes and images for poetry. For example, when the poet wants to report the night bombardment of the enemy, he compares the wall to an "upright grave" which is a waiting night, the wall that might fall on him at any moment and bury him as in a grave. "Here/the wall/is no shelter/it's another grave standing/awaiting night/ (Aminpour, 1985, p. 11). It is worth mentioning that not all the poems of the Islamic Revolution are similar. If we carefully consider the poetry of the post-revolutionary period, especially during the 1980s, we notice several trends. First, there are traditional poets who begin using the Classical language and forms to talk about religious and political concepts. Among these poets are Hamid Sabzevari, Moshfiq Kashani, and Mehrdad Avesta. Second, there are semi-traditional poets who compose their poems using traditional forms, but use new imagery and linguistic innovations. Among these poets were Ahmad Azizi, Ali Mo'alem, and Nasrollah Mardani. Third, modernist poets use both traditional and new forms and are mostly inclined to innovations in all areas including language, imagery, structure, and content. Some of them are among the prominent figures of the 1980s such as Qaisar Aminpour, Hassan Hosseini, and Salman Herati. Poets like Tahereh Saffarzadeh and Ali Musavi Garmaroudi, who started their poetic career a long time ago, are also among the poets of the 1980s.[7]

Thematically the poetry of the Islamic Revolution was different from the romantic poetry before the Revolution. The main themes of the post-Islamic Revolution poetry may be summarized as follows: the expression of issues related to the Islamic Revolution, highlighting the concept of liberation and emancipation, mass mobilization, defending world liberation movements, eulogy of religious and poetical figures of the revolution, disseminating the culture of martyrdom, enhancing religious values especially the culture of Ashura, fighting against corruption, materialism, idleness, Westernization, aristocracy, and vanity, criticizing city life and its mechanical manifestations, and admiring the simplicity and sincerity of country life and family relations. In this trend content replaced form, and the spirit of hope and liveliness with an epic tone became prevalent during the early post-revolutionary years. This trend of contemporary Persian poetry was named "Islamic Revolution poetry" and was supported by the government and mass media.

Parallel to this, there was another trend of poetry after the Islamic Revolution. During this period prominent poets such as Shamlu, Akhavan, Moshiri, Naderpour, Royaei, Atashi, Sha'fiei Kadkani, Sepanloo, and Barahani continued their creative careers. Some of these poets, however, had already reached the end of their poetic life and did not produce any masterpieces, and were, in fact, retired as poets. Poets like Shamlu, Moshiri, Mosaddiq, Akhavan, Naderpour, Azad, and Shafiei Kadkani, though still attracting lots of readers, did not show any fundamental literary evolution. But their contemporaries preferred not to remain within the framework of their past creativity and, being influenced by the new trends of poetry and the changes in society, changed their poetical direction as well. Among these are Manouchehr Atashi, Mohmmad Hoghoghi, Mohammad Ali Sepanloo, and Reza Barahani. Barahani's poetry has been subject to drastic changes. Being influenced by Western post-modernist poetry, Barahani not only leaves his own past poetry behind, but leads a new avant-garde poetry in Iran. In his new poetry Barahani is mainly concerned with techniques and defamiliarization, though he is criticized by his contemporary poets and critics for excessive attention to technique. If poets like Feridoun Moshiri and Hamid Mosaddiq were mainly thinking of public reception, the poetry of Barahani was extremely unfamiliar to his audience.

Some critics, however, are not happy with the poetry of the 1980s. Sarkoohi (1990) believes that in the recent decade (1980s) the most prominent figures of the 1960s and the 1970s did nothing – except a few good works – beyond repeating the same old ideas and thoughts with the same language and structure. Our other poets are not aware of the fact that the language of our great poets is no longer a suitable means of expression and are merely copying them. Our poetry cannot respond adequately to the changes of the collective psyche of the nation, and the urgent need to express our current emotions. It is not equipped with the language and structure to face contemporary history and is withdrawing fast from any creativity and innovation.[8] During the 1980s other poets entered the scene and reached their poetic climax. These poets, who were still young at the time of the Revolution, became very influential and active in the 1980s. Among them are Ali Baba Chahi, Shams Langaroudi, Fereshteh Sari, Seyyed Ali Salehi, and Harmoz Alipour.

The poetic language of poets like Royaei and Ahmadi influenced the poetry of the 1980s and 1990s. They refrained from using metaphors, usual rhetorical figures, and prosodic meters, and showed great interest in objectivity. Shams Langaroudi, Fereshteh Sari, and Seyyed Ali Salehi are the intermediate poets of the 1980s who bridge the poetry of past decades to the poetry of the 1990s. However, we should keep it in mind that they are individual poets and have their own characteristics.

During the 1960s and 1970s poets mainly dealt with content and people were more interested in socio-political poetry. Therefore, people's demand for this kind of poetry was satisfied by poets whose main artistic creativity resided in the socio-political life of society. But the poetry of the 1980s gradually moved toward another direction to convey its message through form rather than content. The most important transformation of Persian poetry which started about the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s had major features including poetical innovation, decanonization of the content, attention to the literariness of poetry, negation of intellectualization, freedom in poetical language, using the spoken language, and finally diversity of setting and voices in poetry.

The outstanding poems before the Revolution were general and the poet assumed a prophet-like mission for himself to guide others. But the poet of the 1980s and the 1990s no longer sees himself as a prophet. He has come down to earth to experience for himself directly. In the poetry of the 1980s and the 1990s the poet does not consider himself the chosen man and has no interest in the lofty language of the past, and this is why he gets rid of the familiar old forms and chooses new ones. The poetry of the past decades was mostly interested in "what to say" and the poetry of the 1990s in "how to say it." Thus, the poetry of the 1990s did not mean to convey ideas, but to play with the poetical language; therefore, it became extremely difficult to translate.

Modern Persian poetry gradually stepped aside from dogmatism and became more reader-centered. During the decades before the Revolution, the poet was the central figure and the reader was supposed to discover the poet's intention. In other words, the poem was meant to convey the poet's intentional message to the reader. However, in recent years the role of the reader as one of the three principles (poet, poem, and reader) became more prominent. The reader started to re-create the poem while reading it, and their understanding of the poem replaced the poet's intention. The reader was no longer passive but had a creative role finding new meanings in a poem. The poets of the 1980s and the 1990s were courageous enough to precede the aesthetic system of their predecessors.

The works of critics of artists such as Enayat Sami'ei, Kazem Karimian, Hooshang Golshiri, Reza Barahani, Manouchehr Atashi, Ali Baba Chahi, and

Behzad Khajat were influential in encouraging other poets to change the direction of their poetry. What brought about fundamental changes in the poetry of the 1990s was twofold. On the one side we had the new world order, the collapse of the communist regime of the U.S.S.R., the Islamic Revolution, the war between Iran and Iraq, the incredible expansion of information technology, the disappearance of geographical boundaries, and globalization. On the other side we had the translation of new Western literary theories and their influence on Iranian poets, and theories such as modernism, post-modernism, structuralism, post-structuralism, formalism, feminism, and hermeneutics.

Although one of the features of modern Persian poetry is the emphasis on integrated and cohesive structure, it has been lost in today's poetry. As Aqa Askari and Langaroodi (2003) argue, "Some of the poems of our contemporaries are just a pile of fragmented pictures of a movie, separate and unrelated pictures which do not lead the reader to any beginning or end. Sometimes, it seems that these pictures have been cut from different movies and then pasted together. One title, or meter or tone cannot bring these pictures into unity" (p. 207). The poetry of the 1990s appeared in different forms and shapes. Starting with the traditional poetry, and continuing with Nimaic and blank verse, it took different names on its way forward. Some of these names used to describe the poetry of the 1990s were speech poetry, post-Nimaic poetry, post-modernist poetry, avant-garde poetry, poetry in another situation, and a different poetry. What follows is an explanation of three major trends.

Speech poetry

Speech poetry chooses everyday spoken language rather the lofty language of classical literature. It avoids generalization and tries to be objective and experimental, and deals with the problems of today's ordinary people. In getting poetry closer to prose, Nima says, "For several years since my youth, I have done my best to get poetry closer to prose as if trying to find my way by touching the ground in a dark night" (Nima, 1989, p. 63). Seyyed Ali Salehi (2003) who has insisted on this kind of prose-like poetry says, "Poetry, a magical dialogue, which enjoys a vocal and much fluent source especially in Persian language, must be released from the land exile of the island of educated and authoritative words, and get itself closer to the shore of musicality beyond any dictatorship (p. 9). Moreover, speech poetry aims to expand perfection, freedom, and to go beyond meaning to produce new voices and create the dynamic spirit of language as a living phenomenon (p. 10). Speech poetry does not intend to inherit the thematic characteristic of its predecessors. Communicating the intelligence of words and the rhythmic dance of voices, manifesting themselves in the multiplicity of meanings, are the characteristics of speech poetry which emancipates us from the dictatorship of businesslike words with limited meanings. Speech poetry avoids generalization; it is humanitarian, and co-exists with its addressee. It is neither authoritative, nor monologic. It is the actualization of Nima's desire to bring poetry closer to natural language and the pure nature of language (p. 39). Speech poetry is about simplicity. Speech poetry has its roots in the "language of poetry" and is a new event in the evolution of modern Persian poetry. It is a revolutionary step toward the liberation of poetry and paves the way to pass through the crisis of new poetry, especially blank verse (p. 130).

Language-oriented poetry of the 1990s

Part of today's poetry, which is mostly known as "the poetry of the 1990s" even today, is a different poetry that relies more on the functions of language. Some contemporary critics have traced the roots of avant-garde poetry to the 1960s and believe that Bijan Jalali is its founder.

The post-modernist Persian poetry starts with Bijan Jalali in the 1960s. In this poetry, the borderline between prose and poetry becomes less transparent, and the collapse of form reaches its climax. Jalali rejects the prosodic rules of the new poetry and helps to bring down the dominance of form. The passive reader becomes active and the authority of the poet is challenged. In fact, in his hands poetry, which used to be a unified authoritarian unit, changes into a diversified text. He demolishes the distance between poetry and prose, and makes it possible for every Persian speaker to enter the realm of poetry.[9] Ali Baba Chahi (2003), who is among today's poets and literary theorists, does not agree with this idea and believes that Forough Farrokhzad's poem entitled "Let's Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season" is the beginning of post-modern poetry in Iran. He believes that "this poem is not monologic. It has many centers though one cannot pinpoint those centers. Moreover, this poem evades centralization and moves towards decentralization and multiplicity" (p. 8).

The poetry of the 1990s has the following features and characteristics.

- Rejection of romantic, epic, and mystical language and expressions – the three major movements of traditional poetry – and dealing with its relative individual language to express all corners of daily life.
- Avoiding the general concepts in philosophical and political structures, observing the interrelatedness of world events and the multi-dimensionality of all facts and truths.
- Dialogism and diversity in poetry, hence the freedom of the reader's response.
- Collapse of the role of imagination in its classical definition, i.e., the use of rhetorical figures such as metaphors, simile, and so on. Therefore, the emphasis is on the wholeness of the poem rather that its parts, and it is very probable to read a poem which looks more like prose with little use of rhetorical figures.
- A conscious effort to evade lofty language and search for a language which is surprisingly close to spoken language.
- Simultaneity of poetic creation.
- Lack of decorative language in form and content.

- Looking for new horizons and subjects which have been neglected in the past.
- Amazing simplicity of poetic form.
- Offering new and diverse structures, hence no specific explicit stylistic framework can be discerned in this period.
- Use of bitter and harsh satire.[10]

Too much emphasis on theories and techniques deprived part of pioneer modern Persian poetry of poetical sense. If in the past Persian poetry was fettered by strict rules of rhyme and prosody, part of modern Persian poetry, like traditional poetry, was deeply entangled in techniques and encaged within its own walls. Excessive attention to language emptied modern Persian poetry of poetic elements. The concept-oriented poetry focused on the premeditated message, which led poetry to non-artistic report writing. The language-oriented poetry, which focused on techniques and structures, deprived modern Persian poetry of its poetical and artistic spirit. The insistence of those who were enchanted by language-oriented poetry caused bitter misunderstanding for today's novices. They came to believe that poetry is more a question of technical matter which can be learned rather then an artistic creation. Undoubtedly, theories of post-modern Western poetry have a direct influence on modern Persian poetry.

The search of modern Persian poets for new forms of expression gave birth to such forms as poet-new poetry, post-ghazal, poetry of the moment, short poems and some others that had only a transitory lifespan.

Contemporary poetry movement in traditional forms (Ghazal)

When Nima proposed a new scheme for Persian poetry, many traditional Iranian poets and critics became angry and bitterly tried to quiet down his voice. However, since Nima was right, his voice found its audience gradually and his comments were accepted. Nima's voice was so strong that it shook the dogmatism of the traditionalists. Although poets like Vahid Dastgerdi, Habib Yagmaei, Ra'di Azarakhshi, Latf'ali Soratgar, Jalal al-Din Homaei did not agree with any changes in the literary traditions, other poets like Parviz Natel Khanlari, Mohammad Hossein Shahriyar, Mehrdad Avesta, Moshfiq Kashani, Hossein Monzavi, and Simin Behbahani were influenced by this movement and a new poetic atmosphere was created. This zest for innovation continues up to the present day, and new ways have been experienced by modern poets.

Among the traditional forms, ghazal has received a good reception among modern poets as a means to express their social and revolutionary ideas. In Simin Behbahani's ghazals, today's life with all its features can be observed. Talking about contemporary life in the form of ghazal started during the Qajar era. However, one notices that the diction of the constitutional poetry is so non-artistic and immature that the poetry is reduced to popular comedy or humor – though in the poetry of poets like Simin Behbahani the diction is very solid and consistent with the other elements of the poem, and is often bitter and satirical.

Khanlari, Tavalloli, Ebtehaj, Moshfiq Kashani and others joined the new poetry in the form of traditional Persian poetry. Their ghazals were similar in form and content to traditional poetry and their main themes dealt with the romantic lamentations and pains of the lover. Classical diction was commonly used in their poems. Their difference with traditional poetry was in their simple style, the use of spoken language, and new imageries. Poets like Mehdi Hamidi, Mo'eini Kermanshahi and Shahriyar composed individualistic poems with great attention to particularities, which were the very characteristic of Nimaic poetry.

Mohammad Hossein Shahriyar, a great contemporary poet, though he liked Nima's poetry, did not succeed in the circle of new poetry. Shahriyar's mentality remained traditional and his innovations were mostly restricted to the use of ordinary words and expressions. As far as consistency and fluency were concerned, he could not even compete with poets like Rahi Mo'yyeri.

The Islamic Revolution in 1979 helped the restoration of traditional poetic forms. One of the fundamental principles of the Islamic Revolution was to restore the traditional religious values and norms. This restoration included literary traditions as well. The content-oriented Islamic Revolution poets, influenced by the post-Revolution and post-war social conditions, addressed an audience who expected rhythmic, simple, and easy-to-understand poetry. As a result traditional poetic forms began to flourish.

The epic-like language of today's ghazal and its social references made it different from the old mentality of lyrical poetry. These poems deal with the Islamic Revolution and the Iran–Iraq war. They explore themes such as martyrdom, martyrs, jihad, patriotism, eulogy of holy Imams, the uprising of Ashura, liberation movements, the sacrifices of Muslim nations such as Palestine, Afghanistan, and Bosnia for freedom, praising the courage and bravery of revolutionary men, and rejection of materialism and urbanism. The Revolution and the war as social contexts introduced new words and expressions into poetic language. Words such as fire, blood, and martyrdom were commonly used in the poetry of the Islamic Revolution. Qaisar Aminpour (1984) reports that in Nassrollah Mardani's book entitled *Khoon Namay-e Khak* (The Blood Letter of Soil) the word "blood" has been repeated 201 times, while the word "night" has been used 79 times (p. 88). The works of poets like Simin Behbahani did not remain unaffected. In her collection *Khatti ze Sor'at va az Atash* (A Line of Speed and from Fire), the word "blood" has been used 32 times, and the word "fire" 24 times. In another collection *Dasht-e Arjan* (The Arjan Plain), the word "blood" has been repeated 33 times and "fire" 20 times (Haydari, 2004).

The most prominent features of post-revolution poetry, especially during the past two decades, include the following elements: dominance of propagandist, narrative, and report-like poetic style; lack of poetic depth; the spirit of hope, epic, and spirituality; abundance of national mythological, religious, and mystical words and expressions; newly moderate structure; avoidance of lofty and courtly language; inclination toward spoken language; and the spirit of disillusioned opposition, especially in post-war poetry (See Ruzbeh, 2002, p. 309).

In the post-war era, Persian ghazal moved in two directions. First, utopian poetry tried to combine form and content. Second, dystopian poetry concentrated mostly on structure and form. The utopian poetry included the poets of the Islamic Revolution who had now confronted new challenges: society's inclination toward modernism and consumption, the gradual disappearance of past genuine Islamic values, social and economic corruptions such as bribery, barratry, immorality, and vanity, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and political antagonisms. These poets reacted differently to these challenges. Some continued to defend past norms. Others, while having a bitter social outlook, tended toward humanitarian and semi-philosophical tendencies. Still others who were disillusioned wrote love poetry. Some individuals became indifferent and left the scene.

During the 1990s the younger poets started to compose ghazal under the influence of new movements, which mostly focused on form and structure. If we want to describe the innovations of contemporary Persian poetry within traditional forms, we can highlight the following features, tendencies, and contributions of that poetry:

- Putting aside the customary traditional norms such as rhetorical figures
- Getting rid of the old recurrent and predictable images of the past (e.g., eyes, eyebrows, cheeks, lips)
- Abandoning the closed circle of the traditional vision of the world and attaining freedom of thought
- Highlighting the role of the reader in reading and understanding poetry
- Use of new regional, spoken, idiomatic expressions
- Use of new structures
- Dealing with everyday and world events
- Keeping away from old mentalities and getting closer to contemporary life
- Use of new rhymes
- Use of new images and symbols
- New uses of Persian language capacities
- Breaking the old rules of script writing and mixing old and new forms
- Use of stream of consciousness in literary production
- Defamiliarization, and deconstruction of old styles
- Use of other alternative artistic expressions such as film and theatre.

These characteristics and features define today's Persian poetry. It is clear that today's poets are making their own contributions even as they write in the shadow of the achievements of a glorious Persian poetry from an earlier era.

Conclusion

During the past decades, different forms of poetry have emerged in Iran. The 1980s and 1990s saw the following notable poetry. The poetry of prominent poets of the previous decades such as Shamlu, Akhavan, Moshiri, and Naderpour continued without significant changes in their poetry. We also had the poetry of the prominent poets of the previous decades that was influenced by the social and historical conditions and which found a new direction. Among them poets such as Atashi, Brahani, Sepanloo, and Hoghoghi are noteworthy. The poetry of poets such as Shams Langaroudi, Seyyed Ali Salehi, Fereshteh Sari, and Ali Baba Chahi, who reached the climax of their poetic careers in the 1980s and 1990s, made them the prominent voice of past decades. Poets such as Mohammad Hossein Shahriyar, Hamid Sabzevari, Moshfiq Kashani, and Mehrdad Avesta continued to write in recent decades using the traditional language and imagery. There was also poetry of the neo-traditional poets who used the past forms but were influenced by current movements. Among these, Simin Behbahani, Hossein Monzavi, and Mohammad Ali Bahmani are notable. The modern Islamic Revolution poets such as Qaisar Aminpour, Hassan Hosseini, and Salman Herati emphasized the content and used both old and new forms, but tried to avoid the past traditional poetry. Speech poetry of poets such as Seyyed Ali Salehi, which rejected the lofty literary language of the past, tried to approach the everyday spoken language. The language-oriented poetry of the 1990s, being influenced by Western post-modern theories, concentrated on language and technique. This poetry was penned by figures such Ali Baba Chahi, Behzad Khajat, Hooshyar Ansari-far, Aza Jamali, Mehrdad Fallah, and Ali Abdul-Rezaei.

Post-Islamic Revolution Iranian poets are neither well known in Iran nor outside Iran. This low profile in world literature is perhaps a reflection of the difficulties these poets have experienced in defining and finding their audiences. Other artists have faced the same dilemma in other art forms. Readers still think of modern classical poets like Nima, Shamlu, Akhavan, Farrokhzad, and Sepehri when they read modern Persian poetry. These poets had set a framework for poetry within which they could communicate with their readers within a defined horizon of expectations. However, the 1990s have seen the emergence of new ideas and techniques in Persian poetry. Post-modernism, globalization, and diversity in both narrative techniques and structures on the one hand, and regional and global events on the other hand, have thrown both the poets and their readers into unchartered territories. Every new group or movement is leading in a different direction looking for its appropriate audience. A certain degree of uncertainty that characterizes this context is perhaps a reflection of the times in which these groups and movements coexist. The 1990s is probably a unique period in which all trends of Persian poetry in a wide range of spectrum from traditional classical to post-modernist poetry are actively engaged in literary production. This can be an opportunity or a challenge for the reader who is not yet familiar with these new and often contradictory trends in contemporary poetry.

Notes

1 *Editor's note:* I have edited this chapter for style, organization and language while trying to preserve the authors' voice.
2 All translations are by the first author unless indicated otherwise.
3 What Sepanloo has in mind here is to shorten or to lengthen the hemispheres, not to break the poetic meters.
4 This article was published in *Ketab-e Hafteh* [Weekly Book], no. 11, 1961.
5 Siahkal is a suburb of Lahijan in northern Iran. In February 1349/1970 a group of anti-loyalist guerrillas attack Siahkal. Though many of them are killed by Shah's secret police, the news spreads all over the country. New guerrilla resistance groups come into existence and guerrilla poetry starts to flourish.
6 Khosrow Golsorkhi was a poet and a revolutionary journalist in the 1940s. In March 1352/1973, he was arrested and accused of attempting to kill the Shah. He was condemned to death and was executed in the same year at the age of 30. After his execution, the so-called "Office of Writing" which was in charge of press censorship in Iran banned terms such as "Gol-e Sorkh" (the red rose), "Shaqaiq" (tulip), fence, and any other terms which had any connotation of resistance whatsoever (quoted in Langaroudi, 1999, p. 376).
7 For further information see Kamyar Abedi, *Dar Jostojoy-e She'r* (On Searching for Poetry), Tehran, 1381/2002.
8 What Sarkoohi says can be applied to the first half of the 1980s. In the second half we witness new changes in Persian poetry. However, the fact cannot be denied that in the past 30 years some other branches of art such as cinema and short story writing have preceded poetry.
9 See Bazargani and Zibaie's comments in Baba Chahi (2003) on post-modern poetry in Iran.
10 See Khajat (2002, pp. 112–113) on this point.

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9 Iranian émigré cinema as a component of Iranian national cinema

Hamid Naficy

In April 1989, the Los Angeles International Film Festival canceled at the last minute the première of *Veiled Threat* (1989), directed by Iranian-American filmmaker Cyrus Nowrasteh, because of a bomb threat – a controversial action that highlighted the festival's dual responsibility for public safety and for First Amendment rights protection. The controversy continued for several days, but it was difficult to sort out definitively the real reasons behind either the bomb threat or the cancelation of the screening. The festival director claimed that the producers brought the threat on themselves as a publicity stunt by publicly linking their film and its anti-Islamist content to the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's *fatwa* against the author of *The Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie. The producers responded that the threat was real enough for the Federal Bureau of Investigation to have taken it seriously. This low-budget, low-velocity, lowbrow thriller finally opened in Los Angeles theaters to dismal reviews and attendance. Trying to recoup their losses by downplaying its Islamic connotations, the producers dropped the "veil" from the title. Apparently, neither the initial attempt to associate the film with political Islam as a threat nor the subsequent attempt at dissociating it from political Islam helped the film's box office.

Straddling more than one society, émigré filmmakers are sometimes in a position to play off the funding agencies and public tastes of different countries against each other to increase their financial backing and revenues. Sometimes, they attempt to cash in on the newsworthiness and popular stereotypes of their country of origin. Such efforts pay off more when newsworthiness is based on positive attributes, but they can backfire badly, as in the case of *Veiled Threat*, if negative connotations are involved, as was the case with Iran and Iranians because of the 1979 anti-Shah and anti-imperialist Revolution and the 1979 to 1980 disastrous hostage-taking episode in which 52 Americans were held illegally captive in the American Embassy in Tehran for 444 days.

Defining key terms

This chapter examines the politics and aesthetics of the films made by Iranian filmmakers living in exile and diaspora in Europe and North America. These films are part of an emerging global cinema of displacement – what I have called "accented cinema" – created by differently situated filmmakers from varied origins who live in diverse host countries (Naficy, 2001a). However, this is by no means an established or cohesive cinema, for it has been in a state of preformation and emergence since the 1960s in disparate and dispersed pockets across the globe. It is, nevertheless, an increasingly significant cinematic formation in terms of its output, which reaches into the thousands, its variety of forms and diversity of cultures, which are staggering, and its social impact, which extends far beyond the émigré communities to include the general public as well. If the dominant cinema is considered universal and without accent, the films that exilic and diasporic subjects make are accented. However, this accent emanates not so much from the accented speech of the diegetic characters as from the displacement of the filmmakers, their artisanal production mode, and their aesthetics, politics, and demography.

These exile-made films are also part of what might be called the Iranian "national cinema," for in our current age of globalization and dispersion national cinemas can no longer be limited to only the films made within the bounded geographic borders of nation-states. Since not only movies travel across borders, as they have from the start of the industry, but also moviemakers and movie audiences, the static and bounded concepts of national cinema, or nation-state, need elasticity of their own.

In this study, the term "exile" refers principally to external exiles: Iranians who have voluntarily or involuntarily left their country of origin, and who maintain an ambivalent but highly cathected relationship with their previous and current places and cultures. Although they do not return to Iran, they maintain an intense desire to do so – a desire that is projected in potent return narratives that form a veritable genre of "return" films. As exiles their relationship is with their country and cultures of origin, and the sight, sounds, taste, and feel of an originary experience, of an elsewhere at other times. Those filmmakers who have been forcibly driven away tend to want to define, at least during the liminal period of displacement, all things in their lives not only in relationship to the homeland but also in strictly political terms.

"Diaspora," like exile, often begins with trauma, rupture, and coercion, and it involves the scattering of populations to places outside their homeland. Sometimes, however, the scattering is caused by a desire for increased trade, work, and financial, artistic, professional, and other opportunities. Like the Iranians in exile, those in diaspora have an identity in Iran *before* their departure, and their diasporic identity is constructed in resonance with this prior identity. However, unlike exile, which may be individualistic or collective, diaspora is necessarily collective, both in its origination and destination. As a result, the nurturing of a collective memory, often of an idealized homeland, is constitutive of the diasporic identity. While the exiles' identity involves a near exclusive relationship with homeland, diasporic consciousness is multi-sited, involving both their homeland Iran and their compatriot communities elsewhere, in Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. As a result, plurality, multiplicity, and hybridity are structured in dominance among the diasporans, while among the political exiles, binarism and duality rule.

These differences tend to accent exilic and diaspora films differently. Diaspora filmmakers tend to be centered less than the exiled filmmakers on a cathected relationship with a single homeland and on a claim that they represent it and its people. As a result, their works are expressed less in the narratives of retrospection, loss, and absence or in strictly partisanal political terms. Their films are accented more fully than those of the exiles by the plurality and performativity of identity.

To better appreciate the totality of the Iranians' cinematic output, their accented films are situated within a regional context.

Middle Eastern and North-African émigré filmmakers

Middle Eastern and North-African émigré filmmakers are a prime example of the new postcolonial, Third World, and non-Western populations in the West whose works form the accented cinema. Although their exodus to these regions is not new, there has been a massive surge in their emigration since the 1960s. Accurate figures for their various population types (refugees, émigrés, exiles) are difficult to obtain and they vary based on the definition of each type and the data sources that are consulted. In the United States, the 1990 Census Bureau data showed the total number of those who trace their ancestry to the Middle East as nearly two million (exact figure: 1,731,000) out of a total U.S. population of approximately 250 million. Among them, there were 921,000 Arabs, 308,000 Armenians, 260,000 Iranians, and 117,000 Israelis. The largest concentration of Middle Easterners in the U.S. and in the Western world, some 300,000 people, lived in Los Angeles (Bozorgmehr *et al.*, 1996).

I conducted two research projects about the displaced Middle Eastern filmmakers.[1] The first, conducted in the late 1990s, showed that the Middle Eastern and North African filmmakers form a surprisingly large and diverse group, numbering 321 filmmakers from 16 sending countries who made at least 920 films in 27 receiving countries, mostly in Europe and North America.[2] In terms of output, Iranian filmmakers topped the list (with 307 films), followed by Armenians (235), Algerians (107), Lebanese (46), Palestinians (35), Turks (25), Moroccans (25), Tunisians (23), and Israeli/Jewish filmmakers (24). The majority of the filmmakers were men, reflecting the dominance of patriarchy within the sending nations and the general pattern of migrations worldwide, which have favored the emigration of men ahead of their families to establish a beachhead for chain migration. This gender imbalance also reflects the belief, common to many Middle Eastern and North African societies, that cinema is not a socially acceptable, religiously sanctioned, and economically feasible enterprise for women. The patriarchal ideologies of the receiving countries, too, contribute to women's underrepresentation.

The historical factors causing the migration and the density, variety, and cultural and economic capital of the displaced populations in the receiving countries are factors that favored accented filmmaking. Algerian filmmakers, for example, made their films almost exclusively in France (collectively called *beur* cinema), the country that until 1961 colonized Algeria and to which Algerians emigrated in massive numbers following independence (Naficy, 2001a, pp. 95–100). Likewise, the majority of Turkish filmmakers worked in Germany, where historical and political relationships favored Turkish guest workers (Naficy, 2001a, pp. 191–199). On the other hand, Armenians made films in a number of European and North American countries, commensurate with their worldwide diaspora (see Naficy, 2001a). Likewise, a social revolution in 1979 dispersed many affluent Iranians to North America and Europe, where they made most of their films.

The accented filmmakers' films, too, form a highly diverse corpus, as many of them are transnationally funded and are multinational, multilingual, and intercultural, partly accounting for their accent. They range widely in types, from amateur films to feature fiction films, from animated shorts to documentary films, and from experimental films and videos to television series and shows.

The magnitude, diversity, and geographical spread of the Middle Eastern and North African immigration gives an idea of the larger scattering of the peoples across the globe and of the movement of cultural and intellectual capital, from the Third World to the First World. Clearly, we are facing a mammoth, emergent, transnational film movement and film style. However, unlike most film movements and styles of the past, the global accented cinema is not monolithic, cohesive, centralized, or hierarchaized. Rather, in line with our postcolonial and postmodern age, it is simultaneously global and local, and it exists in chaotic semi-autonomous pockets in symbiosis with the dominant and other alternative cinemas.

Iranian émigré filmmakers – a demographic profile

I conducted a second, more recent, extensive study of only the Iranian filmmakers working in exile and Diaspora, which not only revised considerably upward their total output in the previous study but also provided a fascinating sociocultural and cinematic profile of that output. As Table 9.1 demonstrates, since the late 1950s, at least 211 filmmakers have directed 538 films outside Iran. The real figures for both accented filmmakers and films are certainly higher than these, as they are constantly rising and there is no clearing house or research institute that regularly collects data on them. Nevertheless, these statistics, collected from myriad filmographies, festival catalogs, distributors' catalogs, and personal contact with filmmakers over many years, are the first and the most exhaustive to date.[3] The United States is the location where Iranian exiles made most of their films; that is, 87 of the 211 filmmakers worked in the United States, making 213 of a total of 538 films (see Table 9.1). This is not surprising, since the United States is the country that houses both the largest population of Iranians outside Iran and the largest film industry in the world. Contrary to the inflated anecdotal and popular press reports (both Iranian exile and American), which put the number of Iranians in the United States at one to two million, the 1990 U.S. census showed a total of 285,000 Iranians in the United States – both foreign-born and native-born, of whom 100,000 (35 percent) lived in the Los Angeles metropolitan area (Bozorgmehr, 1997, p. 445). This U.S. census figure almost certainly represents an undercount: as a preliminary analysis of the 2000 census figures offers a substantially higher number of approximately 350,000 persons of Iranian ancestry in the United States.[4] The largest influx of Iranians into the U.S. occurred in two broad phases: between 1950 and 1977, and between 1979 and 1986. These two waves, one motivated by a rapid, top-down Westernization spearheaded by the Shah, and the other by a bottom-up popular social revolution, eventually led by Ayatollah Khomeini, produced two different types of populations. While the first wave comprised chiefly permanent economic immigrants or temporary immigrants such as a large number of students, much of the second wave – forming a majority – was made up of political refugees and exiles (Bozorgmehr, 1997, pp. 443–444). A similar pattern appears to be true for Iranian immigration in Europe and elsewhere. As a small sojourner population, the first immigrant and student wave did not produce many films, since as Table 9.2 shows, only 22 films were made in North America and Europe between 1958 and 1977. However, the second, much larger wave of exiles were highly productive, as they made 95 films between 1977 and 1986. In the ensuing years, between 1987 and 2002, as exile evolved for many into diaspora, ethnicity, and permanent immigration their output grew steadily, reaching an all-time high of 421 films.

Because Iranian exiles were on average older than immigrants, had less education, were forced to accept jobs that were lower than what they had in Iran, and they had a lower mastery of the host country's language and culture, transplantation meant a drastic downward shift in their status (Bozorgmehr and Sabagh, 1991, pp. 126–131). This partially explains the propensity toward dystopia and dysphoria, particularly among public intellectuals, including filmmakers, who in their homeland had benefited from a higher stature as thinkers and dissidents, but who in exile suffered from lack of access to their natural sources of nourishment and status: Persian language, media, and audiences. Significantly, however, the exile, immigrant, diaspora, and ethnic categories are not fixed since the changed circumstances often transform one into another. This evolution is reflected not only in the contents and forms of the exile-produced televisual culture in the United States, which I have discussed extensively elsewhere (Naficy, 1993a), but also in the thematic trajectory of their films in Europe and North America (see below).

The geographic locations in which the films were made give a good idea of the dispersion of the Iranian diaspora communities worldwide and the number of films made give an indication of the relative size and cultural capital of the Iranian population in each location. As Table 9.1 shows, Iranians made films in 16 countries, with the United States ranking first (with 213 films), followed, among others, by France (69), Sweden (59), Germany (54), Canada (45), the Netherlands (29), Austria (27), and Great Britain (13). In each of these countries (with the exception of Austria), there is a sizable Iranian community that produces not only films but also, in varying degrees, other cultural products such as

Table 9.1 Iranian accented filmmakers' profile (1958–2001)*

Country	*Films*	*Filmmakers*	*Women*	*Experimental*	*Feature*	*Documentary*	*Short*	*Educational*	*TV show*	*Animation*	*Types unknown*
U.S.A.	213	87	17	42	53	47	54	5	9	8 (web) 5	4
France	69	21	7	25	10	23	10			1	
Sweden	59	25	3	0	5	14	39			1	
Germany	54	24	3	3	15	13	21				1
Canada	45	21	4	8	3	1	28			1	4
Netherlands	29	9	3	1	3	12	13				
Austria	27	5			6	6	5			1	9
UK	13	7	5	2		2	8				1
Denmark	9	2			1		6				2
Norway	7	3	2		1	3	1			2	
New Zealand	6	1		5			1				
Belgium	3	1								3	
Russia	1	1					1				
Australia	1	1				1					
India	1	1					1				
Switzerland	1	1					1				
Total	538	211	44	86	97	122	3	5	9	17	21

Note

* Only Iranians who directed films and videos outside Iran are listed. These include those working for commercial and professional film industries and those working in artisanal, interstitial, alternative, and amateur environments. A few TV directors who have made television films for mainstream networks are also listed, but this list is not exhaustive and their output is not counted in the total number of films. Those who worked in cinema as producers, writers, cinematographers, editors, or cast members are also not listed. Many Iranians produced and directed ethnic TV shows; these are not listed here; for an extensive treatment of them, see Naficy (1993a). Those who directed only music videos are also not listed. The number of films is high in some countries, sometimes due to the presence of a single prolific filmmaker there, such as Ghazel in France, Sohrab Shahid Saless in Germany, and Houchang Allahyari in Austria. As a result, high figures do not necessarily mean a large and active Iranian film culture in those countries. Blank spaces denote either lack of information or lack of films in that year.

Table 9.2 Chronology of accented films in Europe and North America (1958–2001)*

Year	*North America*	*Europe*	*Other*	*Total*
1958		1		1
1959				
1960	1			1
1961				
1962		1		1
1963				
1964	1			1
1965				
1966				
1967				
1968				
1969	3			3
1970	1	1		2
1971	2	1		3
1972	1			1
1973	1	1		2
1974	2	2		4
1975		1		1
1976	1	1		2
1977	6			6
1978	5			5
1979	4	4		8
1980	9	5		14
1981	5	10		15
1982	4	4		8
1983	6	7		13
1984	4	7	India 1	12
1985	8	6		14
1986	6	3		9
1987	8	1		9
1988	9	11		20
1989	11	11		22
1990	8	15		23
1991	6	18		24
1992	13	24		37
1993	12	16	Russia 1	29
1994	10	19		29
1995	13	15		28
1996	12	8	Australia 1	21
1997	8	15	New Zealand 1	24
1998	12	12	New Zealand 1	25
1999	10	21	New Zealand 1	33
2000	11	19	New Zealand 1	31
2001	16	2	New Zealand 1	19
Dates unknown	29	9		38
Total	258	271	9	538

Note

* "Year" is the year in which the films were either produced or released. "North America" includes Canada and the United States (no films were made in Mexico). "Europe" includes all countries on the Continent plus Great Britain. There were 38 films whose production or release dates were not known. Blank spaces denote either lack of information or lack of films in that year.

music, music videos, periodicals, and radio and television programs. It is this dispersion of populations and products across multiple nations that is creating an Iranian diasporic consciousness. Compared with native-born Americans or other high-achieving immigrants, Iranian immigrants in the U.S. have an unusually high level of income, education, self-employment, and professional skills – all of which are necessary for creating the viable ethnic economy that supports such a dynamic advertising-driven popular culture and their emerging political influence, in the United States, among the Iranian diaspora, and inside Iran.

Another demographic factor contributing to the politics of accented cinema is the surprising heterogeneity of the displaced Iranian populations in terms of religion, ethnicity, and politics – a heterogeneity that is not readily apparent to outsiders. In the United States, for example, Shi'i Muslims form the largest group followed by Armenians, Jews, and Bahais. Interestingly, however, when taken together, Iranian minorities outnumber the Muslims who formed 98 percent of the population in the originating country. Thus, for the first time, the Muslim majority is a minority in exile, perhaps partly accounting for its exilic ambivalence and anxiety. Significantly, Iranian exiles are highly secular, particularly among the Muslims. A mere 2 percent in Bozorgmehr *et al.*'s study said they observe religious practice, apparently reflecting their secular background before exile and their current opposition to the Islamic government (1991, p. 14). This means that despite the prevalent sociological view, at least in the case of Iranian immigrants, religion has not necessarily reinforced ethnicity. Their overwhelming secularism and opposition to the Islamic government accounts for the near complete absence of religious topics in the first decade of Iranian television.[5] However, Iranian accented cinema, particularly its two early genres of "cinema of denial" and "cinema of panic and pursuit" (see below), did tackle the issue of politicized Islam early on, but only to condemn it as terroristic. Beyond those kinds of political and instrumentalist uses of Islam, neither Islam nor any other religion became a dominant theme of accented films.

Although, in my study, I did not attempt to ascertain the religious, ethnic, racial, and sociocultural affiliations of the directors, these factors have a determining impact on exilic television, music videos, and accented films. For example, self-employment is very high among Iranians in the United States (six times that of native-born Americans). However, Iranian Jews had an incredibly high 82 percent self-employment rate in the early 1990s, the highest among any new immigrant groups in all of the United States (Bozorgmehr *et al.*, 1991, p. 12). Heavy self-employment allowed Iranians to create a series of inter-ethnic or sub-ethnic economies, which supported their popular culture in exile and diaspora, consisting of television, radio, newspapers, music, and films – all driven by advertising. The high proportion of inter-ethnic populations and the high percentage of self-employment among Jews and Armenians meant that they had a disproportionate impact on the political economy of exilic television and music videos (Naficy, 1998).

Ethnicity is also an important factor, which is intertwined with language and nationality. Although the Iranian population is ethnically and linguistically diverse, Persian language (Farsi) is considered to be the lingua franca for all sub-ethnic groups that form the Iranian national identity both within and outside the Iranian nation-state. These are highly complex issues requiring additional discussion. Unlike the North African, South Asian, East Asian, and Caribbean countries whose displaced populations formed the category "postcolonial" and created the *beur* cinema in France, Asian Pacific film and video collectives in the United States (Naficy, 2001a, pp. 63–70), and black and Asian film and video collectives in Britain (Naficy, 2001a, pp. 87–94), respectively, Iran was not colonized by the West and Iranian émigrés cannot accurately be called postcolonial. Although colonialism was brutal and unjust for the colonized subjects, the shared experience of colonialism and the imposed colonial language ironically produced certain positive side effects for the postcolonial subjects who emigrated to Western metropolitan centers. The most important of these is, in Gayatri Spivak's words, "access to the culture of imperialism," which allowed the postcolonials to "critique, yet inhabit intimately" that culture (1993, p. 60). This access created the necessary distance that positioned them to also critique their own native cultures. At the same time, shared history encouraged consolidation of identity among the disparate, formerly colonized populations now in diaspora, while linguistic commonality facilitated communication among them, and between them and the colonizing host societies. The formerly imposed colonial language, therefore, became an unexpected asset for the postcolonial subjects in diaspora, particularly for the intellectuals. As such, they are more prone to invest in the constitution of a new society here and now than in a nostalgic reconstitution of an imaginary homeland elsewhere. The considerable impact of postcolonial critical thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, C.L.R. James, Edward Said, Salman Rushdie, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, among others, on theorizing the postcolonial and postmodern conditions would have been at best modest were it not for their mastery of the colonizers' languages, cultures, and philosophical traditions. With some exceptions, most of the creative postcolonial literatures in Britain and most of the North African *beur* literatures in France are also written in the colonizers' languages, and are often bestsellers. As a result, their output has come to form not only the postcolonial and *beur* literatures but also the national literatures of the former colonizing countries – much like the way in which accented films are contributing to the flourishing of the national cinemas of the host countries.

Iranians, who had not experienced direct Western colonialism and its imposed language and culture at home, could not benefit in exile from the collective identity of colonizers' language and the intimate access and cultural mastery that this vestige of colonialism offered. This does not mean that they were not exposed to or lured by the West, or subjected to the West's colonizing projects. From the nineteenth century onward, Iran was an arena for intense machinations, first between the Great Powers (imperialist England and Czarist Russia), and later between the Superpowers (U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.). Foreign and Iranian leaders and the elite manipulated these rivalries to benefit themselves and to Westernize Iran. Many intellectuals, businessmen, and even

Muslim clerics favored modernization along Western lines, while traditionalists opposed it. Cinema, which came to Iran relatively early in 1900, was part of this cultural struggle over Westernization (Naficy, 2000b). These and other conflicts since the 1950s, culminating in the 1979 Revolution which drove into exile a great many Iranians, produced among them a sense of deep paranoia, conspiracy thinking, and ambivalence that compounded the general mistrust that comes with political exile. What exacerbated both governmental relations and people-to-people relations were the government-sanctioned hostage-taking in Tehran in 1980; charges that the Iranian government was involved in terrorism at home and abroad, in nuclear and chemical arms buildup, and in opposing the Israeli–Palestinian peace process; and the continually tightening economic boycott of Iran by the West, particularly by the United States. All this led to a complexly negative representation of Iran and of the United States in the respective national media and pop cultures (Naficy, 1984, 1995), and to an ambivalent structure of feelings among the exiles about their home and host governments and about their own national and individual identities. Such ambivalence and anxiety are deeply inscribed in the accented films, partially producing their accent.

What provided certainty and stability amidst this culture of ambivalence and anxiety was the Persian language, which is often credited with having preserved the integrity of Iranian culture and society in the face of foreign invasions, among them the Arab and Muslim invasion in the seventh century, which in many countries obliterated their native languages, but not in Iran (Meskub, 1992). Because of this unifying and nationalistic historical role, it is no wonder that the overwhelming majority of all exile television programs, music videos, and early films were in Persian, regardless of the politics and ethno-religious affiliations of their diverse makers. Gradually, however, English, Penglish (a hybrid of Persian and English), and other host country languages have become accepted, as filmmakers and audiences have evolved and set down roots abroad. In addition, younger filmmakers, less invested in exilic ideological politics and more interested in ethnic identity politics, such as Marjan Safinia and Parisa Taghizadeh in their humorous *But You Speak Such Good English!* (1999) have dared to make fun of, and subvert, the politics of linguistic nationalism.

As expected, deterritorialization and immigration destabilized the traditional Iranian patriarchy, bringing prominence to women's social and political status and to questioning of gender relations, a prominence that was inscribed in accented films of all categories in the form of strong women protagonists who subverted authoritarian relations. Another reason for the strong screen representation of women may be found in their relatively strong and rising presence behind the cameras. As Table 9.1 demonstrates, 21 percent were women directors (44 out of 211 directors), with the largest percentage (40 per cent) working in the United States (17 women), which contains the largest Iranian population in diaspora. While this female–male director ratio appears to be small, it is perhaps much higher than it was in Iran when the 1979 Revolution drove many into exile. Since the Revolution, the number of women feature directors inside Iran has also increased exponentially, from one to over a dozen (Naficy, 2001b). However, even though they are outside the reach of Islamic Iran, the iconography and power relations of the veil continued to capture the imagination of women filmmakers outside Iran (particularly in the video installations of Neshat and Ghazel). Among the most accomplished, innovative, or prolific women filmmakers who worked outside Iran are Shirin Bazleh (U.S.A.), Shirin Etessam (U.S.A.), Farideh Fardjam (the Netherlands), Ghazel (France/Iran), Marva Nabili (U.S.A.), Shirin Neshat (U.S.A.), Soudabeh Oskoui-Babcock (U.S.A.), Mitra Tabrizian (U.K.), Persheng Sadeqh Vaziri (U.S.A./Iran), and Mehrnaz Saeed Vafa (U.S.A.). Significantly, a great majority of them work in the short and non-theatrical film forms, which are generally more receptive to women, minoritarian, and alternative artists.

Politically, royalists, who wish to restore some form of constitutional monarchy in Iran, early on outnumbered the other factions in the arts and popular culture. This was particularly true in Los Angeles, the capital of Iranian diasporic pop culture. However, there were also significant numbers of independent leftists and secular filmmakers, who opposed the Islamic Republic openly and directly in their films. The films of "cinema of denial," "cinema of panic and pursuit," and "cinema of transition" generally represent these sorts of politics. There were also those, much smaller in number, who in the throes of revolutionary upheaval supported the government in Iran with their documentaries. Supporters of the Mojahedin-e Khalq guerrilla organization, which has been working to topple the Islamic government by force from Iraq, on the other hand, concentrated on producing television programs such as *Sima-ye Azadi* (Face of Freedom), with their own ideological and iconographic politics (Naficy, 1993a, pp. 73–77).

Some of these political and ideological attitudes softened and evolved over the years as the older exiles changed and as a new generation came of age. Thus, exilic evolution is both generational and geographical. The exilism of Iranians in the Untied States, for example, toned down over the years to the point of assuming for many an émigré, ethnic, diasporic, or hyphenated character, while the exilism of those in Europe – particularly of the political exiles – seems to have remained more or less intact, or even hardened. This is evident in the far less political contexts in which Iranian films are screened and received in the United States than in Europe. For example, there are no regularly scheduled political festivals of Iranian "exile films" in the United States, while two have surfaced in Europe: in Göteborg, Sweden, and Saarbrücken, Germany (see below).

Interstitial mode of film production

Many accented filmmakers operate individually and in the interstices of social formations, culture industries, and cinematic practices, forming what I have called an interstitial mode of production (Naficy, 2001a, pp. 40–62; see also Naficy, 1999b). Yet, in their production and/or exhibition practices some of them demonstrate a strong affinity for some type of collective Iranian identity.

The culture of ambivalence and anxiety, referred to earlier, is heavily implicated here as well. Unlike many émigré groups, Iranians did not early on create any formal collective organization for producing and distributing their films, videos, and television programs – even though they were the most active among the Middle Eastern and North African filmmakers in the West. Instead, because of historical experiences, orientational framework of mistrust, particularly among the older generation, and their phobic and conflicted exile politics, they generally preferred individual and artisanal filmmaking to collective effort. Their generally high class-capital and aspiration helped them leapfrog the traditional low-paying émigré jobs and ethnic employment and residency, which have tended to favor place-bound ethnic identity. These very factors favored the creation of a dynamic, Persian language, advertising-driven pop culture, which consolidated a symbolic and discursive Iranian collective identity.[6] Iranians in the United States are thus among the first new ethnic groups for whom the physical ethnic enclave (ghetto) is supplemented and supplanted by a media-saturated discursive ethnic enclave. Ironically, these factors, along with the host society's discrimination and prejudice, particularly against the Muslims, prevented them from fully participating in the social and political life of the host countries, slowing down their assimilation. Therefore, many Iranians, including filmmakers, remained in an agonistic exilic mode of cultural otherness and psychic split for over two decades. This tendency was fed by the relative recency of their emigration, which meant that they occupied the liminal spaces of exile and diaspora more than the settled niche of ethnicity. On the other hand, their wide dispersion to over a dozen countries gradually tempered the binarist attachment to the homeland, encouraging lateral diasporist affiliations. The Islamist regime's gradual move toward increasing openness and reforms, particularly after the election to presidency of Mohammad Khatami in 1997, and the prospect of a future *rapprochement* between Iran and the United States, made possible the idea of return, reconciliation, and reinvestment. Indeed, many Iranians, including filmmakers, did travel to Iran for the first time, where they made films, forming a "return" film genre.[7] It is in the light of these evolving historical, psychological, and social forces and factors that Iranian exile and diaspora filmmakers generally preferred an interstitial production mode to a collective one.

Characteristics of interstitial films

Interstitial filmmaking involves working independently; not within the studio system, but in the interstices of cultural formations and cinematic practices and benefiting from, exploiting, and poaching the mainstream society's existing institutions. Films made in this mode share several characteristics that constitute their accent, the most salient of which are briefly noted here.[8] The first has to do with low budget and diverse funding sources. Accented filmmakers operate with a meager budget, which is obtained by means of self-financing, ethnic and exilic financing, and reliance on funding from television stations and national, state, local, and private arts agencies.

To keep the cost down, filmmakers usually take up multiple functions in their films, forming the second characteristic. They not only direct the films but also often produce them, write their screenplays, edit them, and even act in them. By performing multiple functions, they also consolidate their control and authorship of their films. Their self-inscription is often autobiographical.

A third characteristic is the bilingualism, even multilingualism, of the films. After an initial period of monolingual filmmaking, driven by linguistic nationalism, most displaced artists become at least bilingual, a change that is driven by the cosmopolitanism of the filmmakers and their primary audience as well as by their gradual assimilation. This necessitates the use of subtitles, dubbing, and sometimes voice-overs – strategies that give the films calligraphic and acoustic accents that highlight the translational processes of intercultural existence and art.

Other characteristics are the accented filmmakers' generally very low output, caused by the difficulties and the length of time that it takes them to produce, exhibit, and distribute their films. Most of them must be involved in distributing their own films to ethnic audiences, or they must be satisfied with either a limited general release of their films or with their specialized distribution by small, boutique houses. The ratio of 3.9 directed on average by each Iranian émigré film (211 filmmakers directed 538 films) demonstrates this low output, even among a generally well-off and media-savvy population such as Iranians. A few filmmakers have been very prolific, such as Sohrab Shahid Saless who directed 13 feature-length fiction films and documentaries for cinema and television in Germany, or Ghazel who made over 25 short films in France and Iran for video installations. If the output of such prolific directors is subtracted from the total, the ratio of films to filmmakers will diminish even more substantially.

Limited or contested representation in film festivals is another characteristic. Exilic filmmakers have a hard time entering their films in top-tier international film festivals and they encounter difficulties in representing in these festivals the nation they have left behind or have been driven from. Several reasons stand out, among them: exilic films are not generally backed by Hollywood majors or by their independent offspring, with sufficient clout to force their way into festivals; they are highly partisan politically, causing festival organizers, who depend on good relations with foreign governments, to shy away from them; and they have a split or dual national identity, causing them to fall between cracks. Lack of collective representation forms a final characteristic of the accented films. As noted earlier, unlike the ethnic groups that make films collectively, Iranian filmmakers were slow to form credible media associations to represent their professional and ethnic interests. They also failed early on to form watchdog organizations to actively monitor and counteract the media representations of their compatriots.

Despite this interstitial tendency, Iranian accented filmmakers' shared experience of otherness, ambivalence, and anxiety and the common themes of homesickness, fear, and panic in their films, their Persian language dialogue, and the collective manner of their exhibition have served to construct an Iranian collective consciousness.

Thematic evolution

Like exile itself, the Iranian accented cinema is not static. It has evolved in tandem with the status of the filmmakers and their primary audience. This evolution is charted in six thematic categories, which are not entirely distinct, as some of the films partake of the politics and stylistics of more than one category. It is for clarity that films are predominantly assigned to only one category.

In its first thematic category, Iranian exile cinema was a *cinema of denial*; physically located in exile, it was mentally situated at home and it largely disavowed the fact of exile. For example, although the story of Parviz Sayyad's *The Mission* (*Mamuriat*, 1983) occurs in the United States, involving an Islamic Republic terrorist on a mission to assassinate an ex-security agent of the Shah's era (played by Sayyad), it emphasizes the politics of the homeland. Likewise, Cyrus Nowrasterh's *Veiled Threat* concentrates on the problems an Iranian exile faces when he attempts to track down the Islamic government's agent who had tried to assassinate his family. In Arby Ovanessian's *How My Mother's Embroidered Apron Unfolds in My Life* (*Le tablier brodé de ma mère s'étale dans ma vie*, 1983–1985), the director's ethno-religious homeland, Armenia, is explicitly encoded, but not his birth homeland, Iran, nor his country of residence, France. Exilic denial is not accidental. It is motivated by both the desire to disavow the ruptures of exile and the wish that it will be short-lived, culminating in a glorious return.

In the second category, *cinema of panic and pursuit*, there was a sense both of spatial claustrophobia in the films' mise-en-scène and shot composition, and of temporal claustrophobia and panic among diegetic characters whose actions were driven by chase, stalking, assassination, and terrorism. Sayyad's *The Mission* and Hassan Ildari's *Face of the Enemy* (1989) provide examples. These films circulated and consolidated the widely accepted notions in the West that the Islamic government was a terrorist government and that Iranians were all victimized by it. As such, they played into the binary politics of exile.

In the third category, *cinema of transition*, the films focused on Iranians who were in transit in third spaces or third countries, where they attempted to obtain passports, visas, and plane tickets. Sayyad's *Checkpoint* (*Sarhad*, 1987), for example, charts the heated political debate among a group of Iranian and American students who are caught in a geographic and legal limbo at a Canadian–American border checkpoint because of the cancellation of their visas due to hostage-taking in Tehran. Reza Allamehzadeh's *The Guests of Hotel Astoria* (*Mehmanan-e Hotel-e Astoria*, 1989) is about a group of Iranian refugees in a hotel in Istanbul, Turkey, and the tragic efforts of a young couple to gain entry to the U.S. and of an older couple to return to Iran.

The diegesis of the fourth category, *liminal cinema*, was both physically and mentally located in the host country, and its narrative was centered on the life and clash of cultures in exile. Jalal Fatemi's experimental feature video *The Nuclear Baby* (*Nowzad-e Atomi*, 1989) evokes a nightmarish post-nuclear war vision in which past, present, and future as well as Iranian and American landscapes and icons are critically juxtaposed. Erica Jordan and Shirin Etessam's

Walls of Sand (1996) charts the deepening relationship of an Iranian illegal immigrant (played by Etessam) who, to obtain a residency permit green card, becomes an au pair for a young Anglo mother who suffers from agoraphobia. The mere exposure to Shirin Neshat's two-screen video installations *Turbulent* (*Biqarar*, 1998), *Soliloquy* (*Zemzemeh*, 1999), and *Rapture* (*Owj*, 1999) – one representing women, one men; one representing East and Islam, the other representing West and secularism; one representing here and home, the other representing there and exile – reproduces the duality, fragmentation, and simultaneity of deterritorialized existence (Naficy, 2000a). The triptych video installations of Ghazel, known as *Me* films, in which the artist, fully wrapped in a black chador, appears in hundreds of small humorous vignettes, filmed in France, Iran, and the United States, both criticize and certify the oppression of women in Iran by autocratic state and by patriarchal tradition. At the same time, the *Me* films document the liminal life and times of a cosmopolitan woman artist.

A fifth category, *transnational cinema*, made either by hyphenated Iranians or by Iranians who transcended national belonging, did not necessarily deal with Iranian but with universal issues of love, alienation, and displacement. In his nearly two dozen years of exile in Germany, Sohrab Shahid Saless made over a dozen lengthy and difficult films about the pathology and psychology of all sorts of social displacements, including exilic deterritorialization. His *Far From Home* (*In der Fremde*/*Dar Ghorbat*, 1975) centers on the dreary and claustrophobic life of Turkish guest workers in Germany. His uncompromising *Utopia* (1982) deals with the painful lives of a group of prostitutes in a Hamburg brothel, while his *Roses for Africa* (*Rosen für Afrika*, 1991) focuses on the dystopic and fruitless efforts of an unemployed German to reach his continent of dreams, Africa. Mitra Tabrizian's *Journey of No Return* (1993) is a dystopic film of exilic displacement and of a father–daughter angst-ridden relationship. Caveh Zahedi's "experimental documentaries," on the other hand, point out the absurdity of love and displacement with a light touch. His comedy *A Little Stiff* (co-directed with Greg Watkins, 1991) is about the unceasing efforts of a young man (played by Zahedi) to win his girlfriend's attention, while his *I Don't Hate Las Vegas Anymore* (1994) documents a contentious family trip with his own real-life brother and father to Las Vegas. These films are both clever documentaries and ruminations on the documentary form. Amir Naderi's visually stunning fiction films, *Manhattan by Numbers* (1993) and *Avenue A.B.C… Manhattan* (1997), also chart various dystopic states of displacement and disconnection in New York City. Houshang Allahyari's *Fear of Heights* (*Hohenangst*, 1994) deals with alienation and fears of various kinds in Austria. Shot in Cantonese, Marva Nabili's *Nightsongs* (1984) turns to the struggle of a Chinese immigrant family from the perspective of a female Chinese-Vietnamese relative, who is staying with them in New York City's Chinatown.

A sixth category, *cinema of return*, emerged early, led by documentarists who returned to chronicle the 1979 revolution and its aftermath. Among these are two films by Rafigh Pooya. *Bloody Friday* (with Marcia Goodman, 1979) is about political repression during the Shah's reign, including the massacre of civilians in Tehran's Jaleh Square on "bloody Friday" (October 8, 1978), which fanned revolutionary fervor. In *In Defense of People* (*Dar Defa' az Mardom*, 1981) Pooya uses the footage of the television trial of leftist intellectuals Khosrow Golsorkhi and Keramat Daneshian and filmmaker Reza Allamehzadeh, among others, to critique the Shah's regime.[9] Bigan Saliani's *Iran: Inside the Islamic Republic* (1980) offers a polished history of recent Iranian history from the 1950s to the initial post-revolution times. Mohammad Tehrani's *Till Revolution* (*Ta Enqelab*, 1980) also offers a visual account of Iranian political aspirations in the second half of the twentieth century. These films provided powerful historical documents and slice-of-life chronicles of recent Iranian events, leading to the revolution of 1979 and its immediate aftermath. In the process, they rewrote Iranian national history from a position of exile.

Persheng Sadegh Vaziri's *Journal From Iran* (1986) and *A Place Called Home* (1988) are return films of a different kind that rewrite a different history – the filmmaker's own personal history. They document her return visits to Iran in search of a home – visits that paved the way for her to stay home to make films. Vaziri's return is emblematic of the developing exchange relations between the Iranian cinemas in exile and at home. With the passage of time and political change, the antagonistic stances of Iranians on both sides of the exilic divide underwent a gradual, but definite, shift. This involved the return of several generations of filmmakers trained abroad to make films at home.

The first generation was the Pahlavi-era new-wave filmmakers, who had left the Islamic Republic to work abroad, such as Bahman Farmanara, who distributed films in Canada and the United States, and Parviz Kimiavi, who made films for television films in France. Upon their return to Iran in the 1990s, they encountered difficulties and it took them several years to make their first post-return films. Kimiavi's *Iran is My Home* (*Iran Sara-ye Man Ast*, 1998) and Farmanara's *Smell of Camphor, Fragrance of Jasmine* (*Bu-ye Kafur, Atr-e Yas*, 1999) are Art Cinema films that proved to be powerful and controversial (the first has yet to be released in Iran and the second won the top directing award at the 2000 Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran). A second generation of younger filmmakers, such as Masud Jafari Jozani (trained in the U.S.A.), Shahram Assadi (Sweden), and Faryal Behzad (U.S.A.), returned to Iran early in the post-revolutionary era to make films, which also generally fall within the art cinema category. Now, a third generation of Iranians born or raised in Europe and the U.S.A. is returning to make avant-garde, documentary, and feature films at home, such as Rafi Pitz (trained in France), Babak Payami (Canada), Ramin Bahrami (U.S.A.), Perzheng Vaziri (U.S.A.), and Ghazel (France). The impact of these filmmakers is growing, as indicated by the 2000 Fajr festival roster which for the first time included films from three such returnees.[10] Some critics cynically ascribed the return of these filmmakers to economic reasons (it is cheaper to make films in Iran) or to political expediency (international film festivals are looking to films from Iran for their programming, and making films in Iran, now that its cinema has currency, is the best way to get into these festivals).[11] These factors may be at work, but the impact of the reform movement in

Iran and the possible *rapprochement* between Iran and Western powers, particularly with the United States, are also important factors, as are the deeply personal reasons that must have motivated each filmmaker.

Not surprisingly, many of the returnees' films involve stories of return – return home, return to the past, or return to childhood. It is as though the present is not sufficient unto itself, as though to see Iran, it is necessary to view it retrospectively and nostalgically. Such a conceptualization of home is driven partly by the distance – real and metaphorical – from which these filmmakers view Iran. It is also motivated in part by their hybridized personal and national identities and by their liminal position within Iranian society and culture industry, both of which at times encourage firmer attachment to roots, to atavistic times, and to authenticating experiences. It may also be driven by this new generation's indirect and imaginative contact with home, which is mediated by family memories, displacement, and the manner in which the post-revolutionary art cinema films – so successful in foreign film festivals – have imagined and represented Iran to outsiders (some of this generation's filmmakers' first experience of Iran is through these films). The various distances and slippages between self and other and between home and elsewhere that the returnees experience make for contradictory texts that are critical not only of the dominant zeitgeist in the Islamic Republic (and in the West) but also of the dominant forms of filmmaking. For example, Ghazel's more than 25 short *Me* films (1997–2001) critique the Islamic veiling practice by their autobiographical and self-inscriptional ironic skits at the same time that they participate in that practice. Her films also critique the dominant cinema's narrative mode and polished style by their brief lengths, their low-tech quality (filmed with a home video camera), their seemingly amateurish aesthetics, and their repetitive structure.

These six evolving thematic categories were products of the specific Iranian history, politics, and culture and of the Iranian exiles' ethno-religious affiliations and gender relations. Despite this evolutionary trajectory, some things remained generally unchanged. For example, inter-ethnicity and religiosity were suppressed in the interest of promoting nationalistic politics. Consequently, although ethno-religious minorities (such as Jews, Armenians, Bahais, Kurds, and Turks) are involved in cinema, few films foregrounded inter-ethnic issues or singled out religious minorities as protagonists.

It must be emphasized that such an evolutionary thematic taxonomy is not uniquely Iranian. A similar schema may be charted for the accented filmmakers of other nations and regions, given their specific circumstances. Indeed, evolution is constitutive of the accented cinema, for neither is the accented style stabilized by the apparatus of cinematic genres and production practices, nor are its displaced audiences fully normalized by their legal status.

Stylistic features

The best of the accented films, particularly the liminal, transnational, and return category films, turned the liabilities and limitations of interstitiality and interstitial production mode into points of strength, or "style." This accented style is informed by Third Cinema aesthetics, including: by smallness; by low-tech, imperfect, sometimes amateurish, quality; by varied length; by an experimental narrative that blurs the fictional and non-fictional boundaries and crosses traditional conventions of genres, and by alternative exhibition modes such as video installations and performances in museum and gallery settings. Table 9.3 provides some data to back up these claims of innovative and alternative style. It shows that there is a great diversity of film types. Of a total of 538 films, 86 are experimental in style, 97 are feature-length fiction films, 122 are documentaries (including short and feature length), 190 are short subject films, five are educational films, 17 are animated films, and 21 are films of unknown types. They also vary tremendously in terms of their length, from Ghazel's 30-second film scenes that form her 12-minute *Me* film series to Shahid Saless's three-hour feature films (such as *Utopia* and *Roses for Africa*). This means that such films are structurally unexhibitable in conventional venues, such as commercial theaters and broadcast television, because they do not fit the standard time-slots of these venues. Many are also made for alternative exhibition spaces, such as museums and galleries, involving some sort of installation or performance, such as the powerful dual-screen installations of Shirin Neshat.

The films of the first three thematic categories – cinema of denial, cinema of panic and pursuit, and cinema of transition – are not generally innovative in terms of their style insofar as they remain embedded in realism and in classical narrative forms. Their accent comes not so much from their alternative visual style than from the prevalence of the following features: the accented speech or the Persian language dialogue of their diegetic characters; themes of displacement, journey, search, politics of blame, family unity, history, and obsession with the homeland; structures of feeling and narratives of panic and phobia as well as of memory and nostalgia that are inscribed in closed and open chronotopes. However, the films of the next three categories – liminal cinema, transnational cinema, and return cinema – are much more innovative and experimental, since they break with the tyranny of realist cinema by introducing self-reflexivity, autobiography, self-inscription, and allegorization of the filmmakers' interstitial social positions and psychic positioning. They also contain fragmented and non-linear narratives and they engage in critical juxtapositions of film styles that critique the very styles that are juxtaposed. For example, by the manner in which Zahedi mixes the documentary and fictional renditions of the world in his *Little Stiffs* and *I Don't Hate Las Vegas Anymore*, he questions the naturalness of those renditions.

The interstitial filmmakers' dilemma is to determine whom they speak for, whom they address, and to whom they must turn for financing and distribution of their films – the answer to all of which impacts upon the films' style. The film categories of denial, panic, and transition addressed only Iranian audiences, in Persian, which required that their cast and stories be strictly Iranian, thus limiting their distribution to only the exile outlets (bookstores, grocery stores, and music stores). Indeed, most of the 538 films made abroad are not available even in those outlets, making access to them extremely difficult and sporadic – a situation that may improve as cybercasting of films becomes more widespread.[12] However, the liminal, transnational, and return film categories moved away from such narrow conceptions to become truly accented in style. They dealt with both Iranian and non-Iranian subjects, involve bilingual worlds and speech, and were experimental and authorial in style. They also addressed cross-over non-ethnic audiences, and several of them were critically acclaimed and commercially distributed.[13] As such, these films are part of both the accented worldwide cinema and of the national cinemas of the countries in which the filmmakers reside as well as of borderless Iranian accented cinema. Such moves inevitably entailed a mental relocation, from "there" to "here," even to "nowhere," which in turn necessitated a toning down of the films' political rhetoric, even a depoliticization of sorts, and an integration of the particular (Iranian) with the general (universal).

Audience reception

As expected, the filmmakers' politics of location and the films' narrative relocations alienated the compatriot audience – a characteristic response to accented films in general – since in the process they signified upon both the homeland's culture and the exiles' lifestyle. A case in point is Ghasem Ebrahimian's *The Suitors* (*Khastegaran*, 1989), discussed below. Such reactions demonstrate that because of their textual politics and exhibition practices, accented films, collectively made or not, are often received collectively. Textually, Iranian feature films' overwhelming concern with national politics and exilic politics as well as their Persian-language dialogue encouraged ethnic consolidation. Certain exhibition practices also favored high ethnic attendance. Mainstream video stores did not distribute exiled-made films, forcing Iranians to go to theaters. Most of the films, however, were on the screen for only a short time, from one to several nights and in only one theater. Each screening in a repertory theater, rented commercial theater, or university cinema was heavily promoted in the Iranian media and was attended often by families, increasing ethnic affiliation and collective celebration.

Filmed in Persian, *The Suitors* shows a group of Islamist expatriates in New York City slaughtering a sheep in the bathtub of their apartment in a traditional ritual that celebrates the arrival of guests, in this case a married couple from Iran. The blood from the slaughter seeps into the apartment below, causing a neighbor who is watching a Christian TV show to call in the SWAT team, which attacks the premises on the assumption that there are terrorists inside. In the confusion, the newly arrived husband is killed. The rest of the film is the story of Maryam, his young, attractive, veiled wife, attempting to rid herself of her veil and of her various persistent suitors – all of whom were close friends of her dead husband and were involved in the sheep slaughter.

The film caused strong and divergent reactions. It was critically well received by mainline American and European presses, was selected for the Directors'

Table 9.3 Accented film types (1958–2001)*

Year	*Experimental*	*Feature*	*Documentary*	*Short*	*Educational*	*Animation*	*Types unknown*
1958			1				
1959							
1960		1					
1961							
1962			1				
1963							
1964		1					
1965							
1966							
1967							
1968							
1969	2		1				
1970	1					1	
1971	1	1				1	
1972				1			
1973				1		1	
1974		2		2			
1975		1					
1976		1	1				
1977			4	1		1	
1978		1	1	3			
1979	1	2	5				
1980	1	3	5	4			1
1981	2	1	7	2	1		2
1982	1	2	1	1	2		1
1983		6	6	1			
1984	1	4	3	1	1	1	1
1985		8	5		1		
1986	4	1	3	1			

1987	3	3		3			
1988	4	4	6	5		1	
1989	1	4	6	9		1	1
1990	3	2	5	13			
1991	3	3	6	10		2	
1992	1	8	8	17		1	2
1993	2	2	10	14			1
1994		4	5	18			2
1995	1	1	3	22			1
1996		4	5	9		1	2
1997	8	3	2	9			2
1998	3	4	6	11			1
1999	16	5	1	11			
2000	12	7	5	7			
2001	7	1	4	2		5	
Dates unknown	8	7	6	12		1	4
Total	86	97	122	190	5	17	21

Note

* “Experimental” includes experimental, avant-garde, and alternative forms of storytelling and exhibition (such as video installations). “Feature” means feature-length fictional films. “Documentary” includes feature-length non-fiction as well as short documentaries. “Short” generally means short fiction films. “Animation” includes cell animation, computer animation, and web animations. TV shows and music videos, both highly prolific genres, are not listed here. Empty spaces denote either lack of information or lack of films in that year.

Fortnight at the 1988 Cannes International Film Festival, and was released commercially on a limited basis in several U.S. cities. The exile media, on the other hand, reacted defensively overall and many of them condemned the film. Acculturated Iranians regarded it – despite its narrative flaws, uneven pacing, and some crude characterization – as a feminist corrective to the dominant view of Iranian women as backward and dependent victims. The film's feminism and critical edge, which was clearly pointed at the men and at patriarchy, were partially responsible for the negative reaction of the exile media, which was heavily male-dominated.

Specifically, what seemed to have offended most of the critics were the "savage" scenes of the sheep's slaughter in a bathtub, the callous pursuit of Maryam by the suitors, and her cold-blooded murder of one of them. The critics appeared to have understood that in portraying the traditional Muslim-Iranian customs of slaughtering animals and seeking a spouse, Ebrahimian was signifying upon those customs and in the process criticizing them. Maryam's murder of her persistent suitor was also condemned for portraying Iranian women as uncharacteristically ruthless and violent.[14] These readings, which contradicted the director's purpose of depicting Iranians as "humans," not "terrorists" (Dowlatabadi, 1989, p. 31), showed that the exiles felt betrayed by a director who exposed and signified upon aspects of the native culture from an insider perspective but for the benefit of outsider audiences. That traditional customs of courting and ritual slaughtering of animals were interpreted so negatively by some had a lot to do with the exilic context of the film's reception by secular, non-Muslim, and anti-government Iranians who were driven into exile by a religiously and politically intolerant theocracy. When indigenous practices are viewed outside their naturalized contexts, they become defamiliarized and may be devalued, particularly if viewers are defensive about those practices. However, if they are not defensive, then defamiliarization may produce the promised critical awareness and pedagogic effect that Bertold Brecht had theorized.

The controversy surrounding this film showed the accented films' extraordinary burden of representation. Thus, to the accented filmmakers' dilemmas, the following two must be added: how to balance ethnic and national loyalty with personal and artistic integrity and how to reconcile universality with specificity. Each director must determine what constitutes the universal or the specific. The localist universalism that is intended here is obtainable only through specificity, which can be had if instead of focusing on the homeland alone and on copying cinematic formulas, accented filmmakers turn, like Romany filmmaker Tony Gatlif, Argentinean director Fernando Solanas, Iranian filmmaker Sohrab Shahid Saless, and Mauritanian director Med Hondo, to their indigenous "local cultures" or to their own individual experiences in exile to create a third space of alterity, creativity, and insight.[15]

Collective exhibition and exile festivals

Accented cinema's collective mode involves not only the collective production or reception, already discussed, but also the collective distribution and exhibition of the films. The collective exhibition is highly complicated, particularly in the case of festivals that screen homeland's films in exile or those that exhibit both the homeland's films and the exile-made films. The animus and anxiety that film festivals provoke are not only due to the antagonistic politics, cinemas, filmmakers, and audiences, which are brought together across the exilic divide, but are also due to the cultural translations and mistranslations that occur on these occasions.

In the 1990s, festivals of films made in Iran prospered outside the country, and Iranian films and directors were celebrated widely the world over.[16] While most Iranians abroad also celebrated these films and attended them in increasing numbers, among some politically exiled filmmakers and entertainers, this success brought on both controversy and attempts to boycott the festivals (Naficy, 2001a, pp. 83–87). Despite these negative reactions, overall these film festivals, and the commercial exhibition of the homeland's films in theaters which ensued, had a positive and collectivizing impact on Iranians abroad. This was because with these films they reconnected intimately to their estranged homeland and with their success abroad they felt a sense of national pride – a pride that countered the barbaric and backward impressions of Iran as a nation, which the American mainstream media and the Iranian exile media and films had both circulated.

At the same time, a competing exhibition venue for exile-made films emerged, particularly in Europe, with collectivizing consequences. In 1993, the first major festival of Iranian films in exile was organized in Göteborg, Sweden, by dissident filmmaker Hossein Mahini and others. It contained 64 films made by Iranian filmmakers in the United States and in seven European countries. The second festival, held in 1995, featured 58 exile films, 44 of which were made by Iranians, and the rest by other exiled filmmakers.[17] With the second festival, the geographical distribution of Iranian participants increased to 12 countries, mapping out both the global dispersion and concentration of the Iranian diaspora communities. In so doing, since 1995 the Göteborg festival has added a diasporic dimension to the Iranian filmic identity, which had been limited to either a national or an exilic identity. Although the festival organizers are still heartily invested in the binarist discourses of exile, by their inclusion of Iranian films made in diverse countries, they are unwittingly and unwillingly creating a third space of diaspora in which Iranian filmmakers may finally find a collective voice. Despite their wish, this voice is less likely to be a harmonious and united anti-Islamic Republic voice, driven by exilic duality, than a contentious and polysemic one that is motivated by diasporic multiplicity. In such diasporic third spaces, Iranians can create vertical, horizontal, and transverse group affiliations across nation-states, social formations, and cinematic practices. To do that, they will have to suppress insider group differences in order to move out of cellularity into coalitional agency and into what Neil Larsen (1991) calls a "postnational" border subjectivity (p. xviii). Such diasporic rhizomacity, coalitional agency, and postnational subjectivity is emerging in the liminal, transnational, and return film categories and in the annual Iranian Diaspora Film Festival, begun in 2000, which showcases works made outside Iran in several Canadian cities (www.diasporafilmfest.org).

Notes

1 I thank my research assistant Nahal Naficy who assisted me in putting together the database of Iranian accented films and filmmakers and the resultant tables. I also thank all the filmmakers, too many to name here, who shared their filmography and films with me. This is revised version of my article "Making films with an accent: Iranian émigré cinema," *Framework*, 43, 2 (fall) 2002, pp. 15–41.

2 These statistics should be understood in the following context. Many Middle Eastern filmmakers moved through several countries and across a number of identities. Some claimed multiple identities – both simultaneous and sequential – while others denied any form of particularistic identity. Some never returned home, while others periodically visit their homelands where they made films. Some moved among too many worlds, often leaving behind inadequately documented histories. A few deliberately obfuscated their history in order to conceal their tracks. Such fluidity and camouflaging, characteristic of exilic positionality, makes it difficult to pin down with certainty some filmmakers' country of origin or residence, let alone their other markers of identity (such as their ethnic, religious, and political affiliations). These statistics are also a function of the filmographies consulted and cannot therefore be considered definitive. They only suggest the dimension of the Middle East and North Africa diaspora cinemas. For sources on Middle Eastern and North African filmmakers in diaspora and exile, see Naficy, 2001a, p. 295n.7.

3 Among these research tools are various issues of *The World Is My Home*, a catalog of the Exile Film Festival, held in Göthenburg, Sweden, from 1993 to 2001; various issues of *Cinem-ye Azad* magazine published in Saarbrücken, Germany, in the 1990s; various film festival and film distributor catalogs; my own books (Naficy, 1993a, 2001a); and filmmakers' filmography, résumés, and films.

4 From an e-mail to me, from Mehdi Bozorgmehr, dated January 9, 2002.

5 Television programs with significant religious content only began in 1992: *Mozhdeh* (Glad Tidings) was an Assembly of God Christian program and *Aftab* (Sunshine) was a pro-Islamic Republic show (Naficy, 1993a).

6 On Iranian popular culture see Naficy, 1993a, 1993b.

7 However, an all-encompassing backlash against the reformists emerged, particularly among the judiciary and security branches of the government, resulting in the banning of some 50 reformist periodicals and the jailing of many editors. These and other repressive measures have caused a brain drain in recent years.

8 These are explained fully with examples in Naficy (2001a and 1999b).

9 Pooya's subsequent feature fiction thriller *Broken Bridges* (1996), shot in the United States, Russia, and Azerbaijan, is also driven by a return narrative that examines Azeri nationalism. This film resonates autobiographically, as Pooya is of Azeri background.

10 These were Farmanara's *Smell of Camphor, Fragrance of Jasmine*, Ramin Bahrami's *Strangers* (1999), and Babak Payami's *One More Day* (1999). Fajr International Film Festival is the foremost annual Iranian film festival that takes place in Tehran on the anniversary of the 1979 Revolution in early February.

11 "Nasl-e Avval, Nasl-e Chaharom … Iran Bara-ye Hameh-ye Iranian," *Mahnameh-ye Sinemai-ye Film* 250 (Farvardin 1379/March 2000), p. 49.

12 Jordan and Etessam's film *Walls of Sand* was the first film to be cybercast in its entirety by The Synch in 1998 (Naficy, 2001a, p. 208). Likewise, Hassan Nadji's film *Outsider* (1999) was cybercast by Ifilm.Com in 2001. In a new development, some filmmakers have begun to make films strictly for the Internet, such as Jayron Zolfaghari, who has made several short animated films for cybercast. These include the following, all made in 2001: *Requiem for a Dream*, *Balance*, *Romance*, *Fishing Game*, and *Fish Alphabet Game*.

13 For example, the feature films of Shahid Saless, Naderi, and Zahedi and Neshat's video installations.

14 One reviewer called *The Suitors* "anti-Iranian" and a "calamity," since its representation of Iranian exiles as "cruel, stupid, and pitiable" fit the pattern of colonialist conquest, which is based on negative portrayals of natives that justify intervention in their affairs and on their behalf (Pousti, 1988, n.p.). Another reviewer criticized it for "self-humiliation" aimed to appease the Americans (Shafa, 1989, p. 86). In a letter published in an exile newspaper in London, a reader claimed that the film reinforced the negative image that the Islamic Republic's politics had created of Iranians as "barbarian," "uneducated," and "uncivilized savages." Dramatizing his disappointment with the film, the reader stated that he went to see the film full of enthusiasm but returned to his car with "stooped shoulders and hesitant steps" (*Kayhan*, July 12, 1989, p. 9).

15 Achieving universal truths by way of cultural specificity is a route taken not only by important Third World filmmakers in exile, but also by eminent First World directors from Europe who made films outside their own countries, particularly in the United States.

16 For detailed analyses of the Iranian post-revolution cinema, see Naficy (1992, 1999a), and Issa and Whitaker (1999).

17 There have been other venues for showcasing Iranian exile films. In the U.S. throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, I organized the screening of exile-made films at UCLA and at Rice University, often with the filmmakers in attendance. Since 1995, Cinema-ye Azad organization, spearheaded by Basir Nasibi, has put on exile film festivals in Saarbrücken and other German cities. In 1995, Kamshad Kooshan put together the first U.S.-based International Tournée of Iranian Short Films in Diaspora, which traveled to museum and university cinemas. The First Vancouver Iranian Film and Video Festival was held in fall 2000 in Vancouver, Canada.

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10 Iranian cinema and the critique of absolutism

Zohreh T. Sullivan

> The problem I have with the films of my [first and second period] is that they are one-sided, absolutist.... In the third period ... everyone is simultaneously good and bad, everyone is gray. This is the most important change in this period ... in these films ... there is no center of truth.... It's in the fourth period that the light begins to enter.... I'm looking at two general questions. One is the multiplicity of perspectives and the other is human sorrow.
>
> (Mohsen Makhmalbaf[1])

> I want to create the type of cinema that shows by not showing. This is very different from most movies nowadays, which are not literally pornographic but are in essence pornographic, because they show so much that they take away a possibility of imagining things for ourselves.
>
> (Abbas Kiarostami[2])

Mohsen Makhmalbaf's recognition of the gradual evolution of his early absolutist claims to his later celebration of multiplicity is a key to understanding the vitality and epistemological complexity of contemporary Iranian cinema. The recent films of Abbas Kiarostami, Dariush Mehrjui, Bahman Farmanara, Bahram Beizai, Tahmineh Milani, Rakhsan Bani Etemad, and Jafar Panahi, among others, reconceptualize cinema as a new site of contestation between meanings and truths, and between power and knowledge. Kiarostami increasingly refuses the omniscient power of the director as a gesture toward resisting the authority of authorship.[3] Dariush Mehrjui upsets the order of patriarchal certainties in *Hamoun* where the absurd scholar-philosopher-husband writing a treatise on love and faith cannot understand his wife or why she wants a divorce. Tahmineh Milani's *The Hidden-Half* punctures the traditional expectations and knowledge that a husband has of a wife, and by extension, the post-revolutionary nation of its past history. Rakhshan Bani Etemad's *May Lady* questions discrepancies between versions of "the ideal mother" in life and art. And Makhmalbaf's *A Moment of Innocence* screens his own life to question the pastness of his past and that of the nation. Even as Makhmalbaf insists on the need to rethink our relation to the past and to each other, modern cinema in Iran is rethinking the relation between image and social reality, between knowledge, representation, and reality, between reality as something known and something unknown. In its resistance to realistic representation, in its dialectical reading of the relation between cinematic art and reality, it *transforms* its audience's relation to reality, and therefore compels an alternative way of seeing and thinking – and that's where its revolutionary potential lies. Like Adorno, Benjamin, and others in the Frankfurt School, the Iranian art filmmakers I most appreciate are those who know and work from and illuminate the human condition of alienation, failure, and loss. The Frankfurt School, recognizing the problematic structures of feeling and knowing inscribed in language, thought of the visual as a possible liberation from what Fredric Jameson (1975) aptly called "the prison-house of language." So do our filmmakers in their current state of censorship and emergency.

Cultural critics have long recognized that the new avant-garde in art film has, for at least a decade, found its center in Tehran, Iran. Philip French's (2000) comment, for instance, is echoed by many others: "The San Andreas fault may run through Hollywood, but the cutting edge of cinema is currently to be found in Iran, whence it sends ripples round the world." In a recent essay in the *Guardian*, Tariq Ali (2005) draws attention to the hidden styles of resistance to state power in Iranian cinema:

> It is clerical Iran that has produced the most vibrant and remarkable cinema of today. Not since the French New Wave have auteurs from a single country dominated the art-cinema market. Compelled by circumstances (like their Communist bloc counterparts of the 1960s) to rely on symbolism and allegory, Iran's film-makers have produced a varied range of high-quality cinema. One reason for this is the rich intellectual tradition in the country that transcended the kitsch world of the Shah as well as bearded Puritanism.[4]

And yet, because Iranian art films irritate many who still hunger for cinematic clarity, revelation, and action, the problems of viewers are worth noting as symptomatic. Roger Ebert has expressed impatience with the slowness of action in Kiarostami. And in the *New York Times*, Elaine Sciolino (2001), for instance, has called Iran's cinema "the most creative expression of the country's imagination … one of the most vibrant and prolific cinemas in the world." "A cultural and political battlefield." "Yet," she adds, "the films are not fully representative of life in Iran."[5] Other critics are torn between, on the one hand, wanting cinema to be fully representative, like Italian neo-realism, to show "the real" (Dabashi, 2001, pp. 252–253), and, on the other, knowing that much in modern cinema doesn't reflect anything recognizably "real" at all. Perhaps we can see in this new Iranian art cinema a post-mimetic modernity that works against popular desire for transparency and linearity in art and history. This too is an extension of a long tradition of alternative ways of seeing in a culture whose intellectuals have reacted against Western models of historical narrative and particularly Europe and America's "positional superiority" in representing Iran and the rest of the world. A range of writers such as Ahmad Kasravi, Ali Shariati, and Jalal al-Ahmad have resisted positions complicit with Western master-narratives and critiqued what Edward Said would later call "Orientalism." Like Said, these earlier Iranian writers insisted on the need to rethink the problem of cultural representation, impressing on Iranians the need to expose the nets cast on knowledge, art, and culture by colonial powers.

As Jalal Al-Ahmad (1982) put it in his famous critique of Pahlavi Iran's mimicry of Western styles, "I speak of being afflicted with 'westisis' the way I would speak of being afflicted with cholera" (p. 3). But Al-Ahmad and others were not about to toss out the baby with the bathwater and persisted in alterative reading of both history and modernity. Progress, science, freedom, education, and justice (hallmarks of modernity) were reread as always already a part of Islam – but practiced and represented differently. Therefore, they were compelled into articulating an alternative modernity, one shaped and fueled by revolutionary ways of seeing that, they believed, were more ethically responsible to the culture. Rather than posit an oppositional binary between the physical and non-physical or the literal and metaphoric, the recent films of Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf show the dialectical relation between the physical and metaphysical, past and present, and (what Kiarostami calls) presence and absence. As works of cultural resistance, they function, in part, to negate the narrative styles, the system, and the state out of which they emerge. The characters in post-revolutionary Iranian films are not heroic. They are often failures in private and in public life. They not only carry, but contaminate others with the scars, habits, and madness of the past, of the Iraq–Iran war, and of the continuing social problems of patriarchy. The wounds of the battlefields are sometimes literal (Makhmalbaf's *The Marriage of the Blessed*). Sometimes they are metaphoric, as in Kiarostami's *Homework*, where the children, wounded by home, family, and society, will grow up to become the men who have no work or place in their society (Sabzian in *Close-Up*),[6] or who beat their wives in Farmanara's *Smell of Camphor, Scent of Jasmine*, or the hopeless suicide in Kiarostami's *A Taste of Cherry*. If the present moment in each film is pregnant with the problems of its past, so is the figure on screen pregnant with those who are off-screen, only heard, and not there.

The films of Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf and their critical reception outside Iran offer a fertile field to explore the issues raised by a national cinema that has been praised for its achievements and yet held to be inadequately "representative" of the context from which it emerges.

In my brief reflections on Iranian cinema in the context of modern Iranian culture I want to ground what I have to say in the concrete by raising some points of debate with symptomatic criticism of Kiarostami's *The Wind will Carry Us* as a way of illustrating the work of Iranian cinema as modernist (or postmodern) art; and to add some observations on *Close-Up* and on Makhmalbaf's *A Moment of Innocence* (a.k.a. *Bread and Flowers*). I want to reflect on the relation between cinema/art and those other terms – modern/ist and Iranian culture. Finally, I want to say something about the cultural and political work Iranian cinema performs.

Readings of *The Wind will Carry Us* may be seen as symptomatic of how we expect art to reflect culture. Among the many myths that energized the Revolution was that when the old (Pahlavi) empire died a new Islamic nation would be born, and that the blessings of modernity were already endemic to progressive Islam. The myth that the film disrupts is the myth of Iran's social, cultural, and religious cohesion, the myth that Iran is a culturally homogenous nation whose history has evolved seamlessly through 2,500 years, and that its unity as a nation is based on lived, shared experience.

When film critics accuse Kiarostami of being "ignorant of the moral paralysis of ethnographic anthropology," and of "mutating his creative ego into the collective psyche of what he thinks is his nation but is not" (Dabashi, 2001, p. 252), such criticism leads me to ask questions about ethnography, the nation, and the state of cultural criticism. What is a nation? If it is (in Benedict Anderson's catchy phrase) an "imagined community," a fiction we all agree to support and sustain, a group sharing a common identity, isn't the film a deliberate counter to that assumption? There is no shared identity among these Iranians in *The Wind will Carry Us.* And, by extension, isn't the narrative also a model of resistance to ethnographic anthropology that aims to master and know its subjects? The film is about a man called "Agha Mohandes," Mr. Engineer, who comes to a Kurdish village with a group of men on an ethnographic mission. His assignment is to chronicle the rituals of bodily scarring following the death of an old woman in the village of Siah Dareh. He fails on every level: with his friends – a young boy, a ditch digger who is putting down the groundwork for telephone lines, a milkmaid, Zainab, to whom the engineer recites the poetry of Forough Farokhzad, and with others. The film ends with the engineer's failure and the recovery of a bone – a ruin of the past – that he tosses into a river.

My thesis here is that this is, like so many other Iranian films, an intensely political allegory, a film whose form and content record failure – that doesn't offer a satisfactory conclusion to any relationship – technological, physical, or metaphysical. What it refuses to offer is a humanistic solution, or comforting coherent national identity, or the promise of technological modernity. But critics who long for a "national cinema" worry about that. The problem with the concept of "national identity" and its endemic homogeneity is its denial and erasure of difference – of class, gender, region, and ethnicity. So my response to such critiques of *The Wind will Carry Us* is to suggest that Kiarostami is so critically aware of the perils of nativism, of naïve ways of "seeing," and of staged authenticity, that he resists at every turn the authoritarian presumptions of realism (direct access to reality and truth) in both style and reference.

We need also to remember that Iranian art – miniatures, poetry, carpets – have traditionally been non-referential and abstract. Could we not therefore look at such films as critiques of naïve cinematic representation as reflection of reality, of naïve humanism that presumes transparent knowledge, and as a critique of what al-Ahmad called "*westoxification*"? Isn't this about a cell phone-addicted modern Tehrooni as enemy-intruder in a Kurdistan village whose ethnographic object won't die just to please him, a village that has plenty of communication, thank you, and doesn't need telephone lines laid down? But those telephone lines are a metonymy (of instrumental rationality perhaps), an allegory for what a nation thinks it needs in order to become an imagined community, to connect its nerve ends with others. In place of telephone lines, the protagonist finds in the final scene a bone. It is a moment that signifies loss and disenchantment – or what Makhmalbaf would call "human sorrow." It may also be useful to read such a film as an ironic version of Walter Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*, an allegorical tragedy that is not religious, but rather secular and historical, grounded in a historical period when the forces of modernity and progress aim to liberate those perceived as backward, uncivilized, or "primitive." This film records moments of failure in such an agenda.

If new nations rely on myths of collectivity and origin, what *The Wind* provides is a counter-myth and an alternative: the Kurdish village and its rituals provide what the Tehrooni imagines will be the background pageantry and ritual that the ethnographer comes to uncover/discover. If he had succeeded in completing his mission and connecting with his roots, we might have a film that would resolve all problems and conflicts and leave its viewers content. Our Tehrooni could have married the milkmaid, continued to recite poetry in and out of the cow barn, and settled down into marital bliss. But Kiarostami won't do that. Folk consciousness, which finds a nice romantic origin for fantasies of culture and nation is, quite simply, not there and cannot be found by the high-tech man with the cell phone that won't operate in the village. He is a sympathetic but failed communicator, who nonetheless learns from his experience in the village, so that his social and cultural consciousness expands to the point that he refuses to make the film he has come out to make.

There is a necessary rupture between ethnographer and subject, between cinematographer and audience: we can call it (with T.S. Eliot) a "dissociation of sensibility." Everything is disrupted and dysfunctional in the world represented by Kiarostami: the phone conversations, the relationship with the boy, with the lovely girl, and with Forough. He refuses nostalgia – even nostalgia about that subject so dear to the Iranian heart – poetry. This moment too reminds me of the long tradition of self-critique in Iranian culture, of Ahmad Kasravi, the anti-clerical intellectual assassinated in 1946 by the Fadayaan-Islam. Kasravi, a linguist, historian, and social reformer, sought ways to confront Iran's social problems and systems of authority. Among his many monographs was *Hasan is Burning his Book of Hafez*, in which he satirized the Iranian love for Persian poetry as cultural obstacle to thought and progress (Sullivan, 2001, p. 75). This film, in the tradition of Kasravi's critiques, documents, among other failures, the failures of poetry as solution, and the failure of one man's search for authenticity through the camera as connection to an imagined Iran.

In his more reflexive earlier film, *Close-Up* (1990), Kiarostami subverts even the myth of certainty associated with cinema. Refusing every kind of absolute assurance, this film exposes the instability of self-invention. Based on a true story of a man (Hossein Sabzian) who impersonated the director Mohsen Makhmalbaf, the film moves from the moments that preceded Sabzian's arrest to the actual trial, to re-creations of his deceptive friendship with the Ahankhah family, to Kiarostami's interview with Sabzian, to a finale in which the director arranges a meeting between the real and the false Makhmalbaf. Kiarostami explains his affection for this film ("the only film I really like among my films") because it:

> was like a form of therapy.... I realized I was so much like Sabzian and the Ahankhah brothers at the same time. I also cheat and get cheated; I also need respect. This identification I sensed with Sabzian was something I thought I alone felt due to the fact that we shared the same social background.[7]

But he adds that even when the film is shown in festivals overseas, people approach him with questions that show how much they care about Sabzian outside the film. That productive link between art and life is what interests Kiarostami.

We are cunningly invited to see this as a documentary in which the actors play their real roles. Some do. But it is a trick documentary about the fine line between truth and fiction, between the self and its other in which we first believe the angle provided by watching a scene from the outside – until we ask how it is that we suddenly see the cameraman in the corner of a room. The film becomes an invitation to make the kinds of schizoid identification that the protagonist has made in his life. By showing how cinema invites you to think one way – that something is faulty with the sound system – and then deflating that perception, cinema shows that the illusion of intimacy here is the height of contrivance. We are compelled again to rethink intimacy, realism, contrivance, reality, and art. A sort of domino-effect is created by the instability of identities because Kiarostami's desire to undercut those myths of stability and monolithic creations are finally turned on the art of cinema itself. So cinema makes itself a partner in myth-making and myth-breaking. After the false Makhmalbaf is jailed, he is released at the end to the real Makhmalbaf who takes him to the family he has duped. The lovely part of the ending is that the rogue and society both go through a climactic marriage of reconciliation. The rogue Sabzian *does* become the star of a film and he *does* what he has promised: he brings the family into roles as supporting cast members.

My larger point here is that the puncturing of the myth of coherent identity is analogous to the myth of cinema and by extension to the myth of the nation. However, puncturing a myth does not deflate it. The myth of cinema is borne out even as the artifice of cinema is simultaneously exposed. The reconciliation at the end is the film's moment of maximum exposure as it embraces cinema itself as guilty partner in the invitation to conflate the real and the artificial. At the moment when Sabzian is stripped of his act, so does the camera and the film acknowledge its con game. And the family's vanity is stoked because they *are* precisely where they once wished to be – in the film.

This art is distinctly modernist. When Hamid Dabashi (2001) asked Beizai about his cultural concerns, Beizai gave him a rather sharp thesis on his understanding of Iranian art as an art of concealment – hiding, concealing, protecting: “Iranian art is far more concerned with covering and concealing things than revealing them” (p. 88). This, of course, is the strategy of modern art, what James Joyce (1992) would call the “silence, exile, and cunning” necessary “to forge out of the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race” (p. 276).

It is also a strategy that is suitable to what Makhmalbaf refers to as “the schizophrenia of Iranians [that] lies in being one thing in public and another in private” (Dabashi, 2001, p. 210). That split can be productive for the artist who works as a cultural force challenging from within the nets cast by the state. When Hamid Dabashi asked Makhmalbaf to comment on the worst cultural traits of Iranian society (p. 202), he began with pretense, hypocrisy, and sexism, but concluded by saying:

> Iran’s greatest problem is our belief in absolute truths. Everyone believes himself to be absolutely correct. That’s why democracy has failed in Iran. Democracy, before being a political issue, is a cultural issue.… We have no tradition of public discourse. Instead we have the mullah’s pulpit from which a monologue is issued.… Now it doesn’t make any difference whether the pulpit is occupied by Shamlu, or Jalal Al-e Ahmad.… These would be one-way conversations.
>
> (p. 205)

In moving from childhood to adulthood, Makhmalbaf says he moved from religion to politics, but finally to art which allows him to teach “thinking, thinking for oneself” (p. 210): “I make films in order to save myself. With films I can create a representation of myself that I can then examine, and say ‘Where have I come to now?’ I can see where I have problems, what things I wish to change. I make mirrors, then, to see myself” (p. 211). He illustrates this point later with a fable that “truth is a mirror that shattered as it fell from the hand of God. Everyone picked up a piece of it, and each decided that the truth was what he saw reflected in his fragment rather than realizing that truth had become fragmented among them all” (p. 212).

The film that best illustrates his self-reflexive reconsideration of his youthful past is *Bread and Flowers* (a.k.a. *A Moment of Innocence)*, released in l995. The film opens with a knock at a door. The autobiographical context is that of the 17-year-old Makhmalbaf who, as part of a guerrilla movement against the Shah, was assigned to stab a policeman. He recalls the tragic-comic moment in this interview:

> The policeman pulled his gun on me, so I began stabbing him, four times, with my knife. As I twisted the knife he cried out, and his cries still remain in my ears.… As I stabbed him, he pulled the trigger and shot me in the

> side. I was wearing some old army pants that were too big for me. I had tied them around my waist with an elastic band … When he shot, the band broke, and my pants fell to my feet.
>
> (Dabashi, 2001, p. 170)

Makhmalbaf was arrested and imprisoned for four years until he was released by the Islamic Revolution. The film records the director's attempts to revisit, reconsider, and re-create that moment of violence between himself and Tayebi, the policeman. When, twenty years after the attack, Tayebi comes knocking at his door to ask for a part in his films, Makhmalbaf decides to make a film about the attack. The policeman will now be assistant director and both must choose younger actors to play their parts. The problem, however, is that the younger actors resist the parts into which they have been cast: "I don't want to stab anyone," the boy cries when the tyrannical director Makhmalbaf orders him to "Stab!" Stuart Klawans's review in *The Nation* (November 29, 1999) called this film

> one of the key artworks of our time. Half documentary and half conjuring trick, *A Moment of Innocence* transforms a past act of political violence into a present-day vision of generosity, in which gifts are offered, veils are removed and jaws drop all around. This is as much magic as any film can work.

He ends his rave review with the following instruction:

> Write to me at once if you see another film with so urgent and complete an image of people's hurts, fears, needs, dreams at the end of our bloody century. Don't even write. Come straight to my door and knock.[8]

How is this art modernist? In the words of Makhmalbaf (in my epigraph): "there is no center of truth." Art and truth are negotiated, communal, ongoing processes. I can summarize my points about its modernism as follows. First, Iranian cinema resists that mass appeal we saw, not only in the era of Nazism and more recent regimes, but in Hollywood today. In that resistance, it reminds me of the Frankfurt School critique against mass culture's power to evoke conformity, to manipulate the audience with false promises of gratification that would lead them toward blind faith in past, present, and future. Second, it resists appeal to traditional pieties (like prayer, nation, and poetry). Third, it is fragmentary and resists resolution, therefore provoking thought. Fourth, it prefers non-communication and image to instant gratification and metaphor. Fifth, it prefers boredom to false experience (the length of such luminous recent films as Babak Payami's *Secret Ballot*). Sixth, it prefers allegory and images of broken history to the soothing totality of the symbol and of history as completed whole.

All this is modernist in the sense of compelling the audience to see, to look, and to experience *differently*, to escape the nets that entrap ways of seeing within certain forms of dominant ideological discourse. This is the mission of artists and thinkers that include James Joyce, Bertolt Brecht, Satyajit Ray, and the major contemporary Iranian film directors we know – the mission to raise the consciousness of the audience while offering a complex politically interpreted narrative of contemporary life that only suggests through association and indirection.

Finally, what cultural work do such films accomplish? A new beginning or nation involves the need to recover a set of cultural origins – Ali Shariati returned us to Fatima and to the Quran as he saw it. The new generation is looking to recover an alternative set of origins. Where and what are they? Some may indeed wish to return us to Qom or Mashhad, but not in the films we have seen abroad.

What and where is the location of culture? Perhaps in a landscape caught between one dead (cell phone) and the other unable to be born, a film whose incompletion we can read as "failure" or as necessary – as a representation of an incomplete social and historical project. Or in the kinds of instability represented in *Close-Up*, where the desire to undercut myths of stability is turned on the art of cinema, where the myth of a nation is analogous to the myth of cinema and the myth of the individual, where cinema makes itself a partner in myth-making and myth-breaking. However, this is not satisfying Hollywood-style "realism."

I remind us again of Adorno who has said that in modernity under conditions of catastrophe art has nothing to do with mapping social life. The reflection of "reality" Adorno would say is not art. There is something that cannot be grasped with your camera – that is what most of Kiarostami's and Makhmalbaf's recent films are all about. Perhaps that is why the glimpses of urban and rural life available through their cameras, or through their swiftly moving cars (Kiarostami's *A Taste of Cherry* and *Ten)*, are unsatisfying to viewers who want a fuller, more comprehensive take on reality.

These films represent rather what Raymond Williams calls "*a structure of feeling*," a national consciousness at this particular time. Against the effort to forge monolithic moralities and censorial evaluations, all these films may be seen as subversive and liberating. Why? Because their values embrace playfulness, subversion, deflation, evasion, expansiveness, inclusiveness, an embrace of process, and above all, of humility. What does this say about the cultural work done by such films?

At the end of that great multiple con-game in *Close-Up*, both Makhmalbaf and Sabzian bring flowers to their victims. These are examples of how myth-making and myth-breaking attempts can simultaneously reduce *and* expansively reconcile. The final image is one that embraces both folly and generosity. In his interview with Jamsheed Akrami, the director says that *Close-Up* is about "a state of collective depression after a big revolution" in which neither Sabzian nor the Ahanshah family find what they are looking for, that both come together through loss. The point I am making about the relation of Iranian art films to contemporary culture is its acknowledgement that we are all playing parts and playing in a con-game. So let us do it well and kindly. We could do worse than to remind ourselves of Woody Allen's moment of profundity in *Annie Hall* where he announces to his therapist that his brother thinks he's a chicken, but adds, "We need the eggs." So before we start condemning each other's efforts at fiction or filmmaking or nation-making, let us say that we are all in this together. We are a nation and a society in the process of integrating unsuccessful myths. By turning the exposé on cinema, our filmmakers have pre-empted the accusation of self-righteousness. We too are guilty. We need the eggs. If the nation is projection, so are we, and so is cinema. Let's not call the whole thing off.

If we question unitary and unified narratives of the nation, shouldn't we also counter unified narratives of modernity? In fact, isn't modernity characterized by uncertainty, doubt, and new modes of representation? Aren't we seeing something we learned through the Frankfurt School, through Benjamin's art of mechanical reproduction? Art, said Adorno, is fractured and non-communicative, non-representational. It has a social function, not because it reflects society, but because it stands in opposition to society. Art, he said, criticizes society simply by *being there;* it functions as a negative to the chains and nets with which society entraps the individual. It is an art appropriate to this historical moment – a potentially revolutionary art because it is an art of fragmentation (not consummation, not evolution, not completion, not unity); it is an art of the contradictory, multi-angled and multiple; it is an art of ambiguity – you aren't sure what exactly Makhmalbaf or Kiarostami is proclaiming. It is irreverent: an art that breaks the link between art/beauty/religion; it involves the loss of aura, and suggests a new democratization. Modern Iranian art cinema, like Benjamin's "mechanical reproduction," is an art that is disruptive and upsetting to the senses – that would prefer, of course, to be soothed. The old art, Benjamin (1977) said, calmed, soothed, and engaged him. But the art that mourns, the allegorical, is not comforting: "allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (pp. 177–178). It is to that uncomfortable world of ruins, of disruption, of that image of the wannabe-ethnographer whose only prize is a bone – the bone of an unknown Iranian – it is to that moment of healing and redemptive failure that the filmmaker takes us. Makhmalbaf's words in the epigraph should remind us of Brecht on the estrangement effect – which depends on seeing the familiar in the alien. In that gesture of relocating the strange and irresolvable, in recognizing all that resists the monolithic, we find the potential for a different sense of self-acceptance.

If my reading of Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf in the context of modern Iranian culture has any validity, I would ask if this is a valid generalization of most Iranian art films. I think it is. Am I suggesting that Iranian critics or audiences agree with this esthetic? I don't know. I am saying that at this time in that place Iranian filmmakers are not out to simply reflect and reinforce the collective ethos. Rather they are out to question, to interrogate, and to doubt. And the better the filmmaker, the more this structure of feeling affects their approach.

In the deflating mechanics of these films, what is being pointed out is the failure of the system of absolutism, any absolute, and in that failure lies the triumph of its cultural work.

Notes

1 Makhmalbaf makes these comments in an interview with Hamid Dabashi, which appears in Dabashi (2001, pp. 156–212).

2 See Kiarostami's interview with David Sterritt posted on the following website, which is a longer version of an interview published in *Film Comment*, 36, 4, July–August 2004: www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/9/kiarostami.html.

3 Kiarostami filmed *Ten* himself without a screenplay or cameraman, with two fixed digital video cameras in a car. He states, "I am refusing the role of the director as a god reigning over his handiwork. The god has to be brought down to earth, to be a technician god and not a creator god, to see the project as work pure and simple" (in interview with Didier Peron, *Liberation*, Paris, September 20, 2002).

4 This essay is available online at www.countercurrents.org/arts-ali230405.htm.

5 Sciolino's article is available at http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?sec=health&res=9C03E0DA113BF932A25750C0A9679C8B63.

6 In his video interview with Akrami (see below) included on the DVD of *Close-Up*, Kiarostami says, "Although *Close-Up* seems to have nothing to do with children's issues, I remind you of what the actor Hossein Sabzian says in the film. He says, "I am the child from the film *Traveler* who's left behind." And I would say the child from *Traveler* is somewhat like the kids from *Homework.* Those kids are all like the kids from *Where is the Friend's Home*? I think these kids are somewhat alike, and they just grow up. The 30-something Hossein Sabzian is one of the Homework kids who has grown up and is a product of the same type of education and society."

7 See Kiarostami's interview with Jamsheed Akrami, available at www.facets.org/asticat?function=web&catname=facets&web=features&path=/directors/kiarostamiabbas/interviewwithkiarostami.

8 This review is available at the following url: www.thenation.com/doc/19991129/klawans.

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Part II

Religion, state, and culture

11 Fundamentalism, gender, and the discourses of veiling (*Hijab*) in contemporary Iran[1]

Fatemeh Sadeghi

One of the defining characteristics of Iranian society in the twentieth century is the tension between Islam and Western modernity, and between secular and religious claims of authority and governance. During the latter part of this century, a radicalization of Islam took place in the Iranian society, one that entailed far-reaching implications. The attempts to introduce social transformations and to bring about an Islamic utopia have established not only a new kind of power politics, but also different kinds of social norms, definitions, and concepts that govern gender relations and women's issues. These developments, however, have provided contradictory and uneven grounds for women's active participation in the socio-political spheres and for their self-expression.

This chapter addresses the discourses of hijab and sexuality in Iran and other changes that have taken place due to the arrival of Islamic fundamentalism. I have placed these discourses in the context of the radicalization of Islam in order to make intelligible the changes that have taken place concerning women. After a discussion of the radicalization of Islam, I have identified two distinct discourses in specific periods with perspectives that defined roles for Islam in society. I have referred to these discourses as the discourse of traditional Shi'ite Islam and the discourse of fundamentalist Shi'ite Islam. The fundamentalist discourse undergoes two distinct phases, which I call the first and the second phase of fundamentalism. In each of these discourses, sexuality and women's role in society are conceptualized differently.

Islam as a political ideology

In order to address fundamentalism in Iran, it is instructive to place its development in a larger historical context that explains its relationship to traditions in other Islamic traditions and to the figure of religious authority in Iran. Islamic fundamentalism differs from what has been called "traditional" or "cultural"[2] Islam not only in the interpretation of Islamic doctrines, but also in addressing women's issues, specially women's veiling and their public and private lives (see Nasr, 1987). The differences between Shi'ite Islamic fundamentalism and the Shi'ite traditional beliefs are greater than the differences between the traditional Shi'ite and Sunni system of thought and beliefs. One of the differences of the two systems has to do with politics. According to Twelvers Shi'ites, unqualified rulers have occupied the political sphere; these rulers are illegitimate because the political sphere is the domain of the "absent Imam" (*Imam-e zaman* or *Imam-e ghayeb*, the messiah). Throughout the nineteenth century in Iran Shi'ite jurists had remained outside of the political sphere on the grounds that it was the domain of the absent Imam. The doctrines and institutions of *Taghiah* (letting one's true beliefs be hidden) and *Intidhar* (waiting for the coming Imam in the apocalypse) are the Shi'ite beliefs that have provided the framework for such a position. Therefore, there are few political thinkers in the Twelfth Shi'ite until the nineteenth century (Kadivar, 2000). Most Shi'ite thinkers in this branch of knowledge belong to Ismaili and Zeidi schools of Shi'ite thought, but not to Twelvers Shi'ite. This does not mean, however, that Twelvers Shi'ite lacks political dimension. Rather, that utopian society cannot be brought about through human attempts. It is in fact God's blessing (*lutf*), who is the most merciful, almighty, and all-knowing.

Such a development has its origins in the nineteenth century when, on the one hand, Islamic societies were facing colonialism, Western influences, and modernity, and, on the other hand, the emergence of the institution of Ayatollah as a figure of authority in Iran. As Mohammad Tavakkoli Targhi has argued (2006), the politicization of Shi'ite clergy and their teachings in the late nineteenth century had its origins in the arrival of scientific knowledge that undermined the clergy's teachings on health, the body, sexuality, and other daily practical matters. For the clergy, articulating political discourse against the Ghajar officials and the secular intellectuals of the day was a way to regain their relevance in the wide social arena. As a result, Shi'ite clerics largely were directly involved in politics at the turn of the century by the time the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 had become a watershed in Iranian history. They were elected as parliamentary representatives and were interested in modern political governance. In the modernizing age of Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, however, most Shi'ite clerics became disengaged from politics once again. The lack of engagement was the result of the Pahlavi regime's suppression of their voices. Moreover, many clerics did not want to collaborate with the government they deemed as antithetical to their views on many issues. Many Shi'ite clerics remained apolitical because they viewed politics as a profane and secular activity in conflict with their profession and mission in life.

Shi'ite Islamic fundamentalists view politics differently. The fundamentalists believe that the profane and heavenly should be brought together because there is no room for the heavenly if the political and the profane are not addressed. Hence, although Shi'ite Islamic fundamentalism originated in the traditional Shi'ite school, it has not been politically inspired by that school. In reality, based on the argument that resistance against social and political reforms delays the emergence of the absent Imam, Shi'ite authorities before the nineteenth century avoided politics. Contrary to the Sunni school of thought, which has provided from the very beginning a base for political involvement and human agency, traditional Shi'ite authorities had little to do with politics. In this respect, Shi'ite

Islamic fundamentalism is closer to the traditional Sunni school of thought than to the traditional Shi'ite school of thought. Indeed, Sunni's pragmatism did not deny "divine right" as a basic ground for profane authority, but accepted its dependence on human agency as well.

The year 1979 is a turning point in the Shi'ite Islam as well as Iranian society. At this point the theory of political involvement is realized, and the face of the Middle East changes for the foreseeable future. The new discourse, which has relied on new interpretation of Islamic ideas, manifested itself in the idea of the Governance of Supreme Jurisprudent (*Velayat-e Faghih*), or "guardianship of jurist." Shi'ite political thought experienced a shift from political suppression to active involvement in the socio-political transformations.

To examine the development of Shi'ite fundamentalism, I will focus on the formulation of the idea of the *Velayat-e Faghih* during the 1960s and 1970s as a response to political oppression of the clerics by the second Pahlavi regime. Shi'ite authorities such as Ayatollah Khomeini and Nematollah Salehi Najafabadi gradually formulated *Velayat-e Faghih*. In the era of absent Imam (*Asre Gheibat*), which in their interpretation implies Imam's absence from the power of history-making, political leadership by the Shi'ite authority is needed. Reinterpreting the life of the third Shi'ite Imam (*Imam Hussein*), Ne'matollah Salehi Najafabadi (1969), for instance, in his *Eternal Martyr* (*Shahide Javid*) offered a new interpretation on politics. By reinterpreting Imam's rise against the Omavid dynasty in the seventh century as a political movement rather than a holy activity, Najafabadi argued that even if he failed, we should recognize that Imam Hussein's goal was to seize political power and to bring about an Islamic society.

Eternal Martyr was widely influential and embraced by young religious students of the time, who were already inspired by Ayatollah Khomeini's thinking, and were active against Muhammad Reza Shah's tyranny and his modernization project. The book divided the religious students into two groups. The major group opposed him and regarded Salehi Najafabadi's interpretation as heretical. A minor group, including Ayatollah Montazeri and Ayatollah Meshgini, supported him. According to Youssefi Eshkevari (2004), Salehi Najafabadi's interpretation and his "politicization of Shi'ite Imam's sacred movement" outraged students with the traditional view to the point that his life was threatened (p. 25). The book addressed, according to Yussefi Eshkevari (2004), the challenge of fighting against the Pahlavi regime and the creation of an Islamic government, which had recently been theorized by Ayatollah Khomeini.

Militant groups such as *Fadaiyan-e Islam* violently put into practice the theoretical views on the relationship between religion and the political. These groups believed in radicalization of Islam and tried to formulate a comprehensive political program (including revision of views on gender relations) in order to save the corrupted society of Muslims. Unlike *Fadaiyan-e Islam*, who were politically oppressed by the regime, the theorization of Shi'ite political radicalism, later known as "fundamentalism," could not be politically oppressed. Such a shift may be considered as a move from cultural Islam toward a political Islam (e.g., Gole, 1996), or from Islamization toward a revolutionizing model (e.g., Gilles Kepel cited in Gole, 1996). Cultural Islam "seeks to protect Islam from the loss of its sacredness through profanation and from poverty through increasing politicization" (p. 109). In their confrontation with Western modernization and imperialism, Shi'ite Islamic fundamentalists transformed an apolitical religious doctrine to a political ideology. This development has had far-reaching consequences.

Women and gender in the discourse of Shi'ite fundamentalism

Contemporary religious and cultural practices cannot be explained without an examination of the transformations of the Iranian society and the intellectual, religious, and political frameworks that produced those transformations. These same frameworks explain contemporary views and practices with respect to gender discourse and women's issues. In this section, I address the fundamentalist discourse in Iran regarding gender and women's issues.

The shift from cultural Islam based on the bottom-to-top model to political Islam based on the top-to-bottom model needed a new interpretation that would be more appropriate to the political and social order of the day. This new interpretation gradually appeared as a rival not only to traditional and cultural Islam but also to Western modernization perspectives. The new interpretation was a response to modernization and the changing social dynamics in Iran during the 1940s and 1950s, especially in the realm of gender relations. In other words, the shift in Shi'ite theoretical outlook was based on the need to address new experiences and new forms of social relations, which in turn required formulating a new approach to socio-political developments. From this perspective, Islamic fundamentalists, including *Fadaiyan-e Islam* and those with more theoretical tendencies who appeared in their wake, proposed new discourses of political involvement and gender relations. Regarding gender relations, for example, a completely new perspective was developed that sustains contemporary views on veiling. Therefore, unlike traditional Islamic gender discourse based on "seclusion" (*Pard-e neshini*), Islamic fundamentalism proposed a new kind of discourse, which may be called the discourse of "segregation" (men and women occupying separate social spheres). Such a shift, however, did not take place because Shi'ite outlook could accommodate social transformations. Rather, it happened because the traditional doctrine could not produce a new interpretation to account for social transformations.

As a result, fundamentalists presented a kind of relatively modernized Islam in which the question of women has been discussed in two phases. First, it was as a part of the whole belief system. Second, it was a constitutive core of fundamentalist identity, especially after the Revolution. The question of gender has become a major component of the fundamentalist belief system since the 1950s. They have developed views that are different from those held by the proponents of cultural Islam. These differences revolve around issues such as women's employment and education, their social and political activities, and veiling. Unlike the traditional Shi'ite school of thought that believed in the exclusion of women from social spheres, Islamic fundamentalists displayed a formative, if not extensive, change in viewing women and gender issues.

Fadaiyan-e Islam, for instance, believed that women should receive a kind of education that would be appropriate for their responsibilities within the Muslim family. They rejected, therefore, the coeducational schools, gender policies of Pahlavi regime, as well as unveiled women and their presence throughout Iranian society (Paidar, 1995, p. 122). Such an attitude was in conflict with the traditional doctrines such as that of Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri, one of the most influential clergy at the beginning of the twentieth century who opposed the secular constitutionalists. Unlike Nuri, who was absolutely against women's education as well as their economic and social activities (Nuri, 1983), *Fadaiyan-e Islam* were not entirely opposed to women's education and their political participation, even as they opposed the coeducation of boys and girls as one of the manifestations of a corrupt modernizing project. Hence, two modes of thinking started to compete. On the one hand, extremist groups like *Fadaiyan-e Islam* were eager to revitalize Islamic beliefs in order to challenge Western imperialism and Iranian modernization. On the other hand, traditional Shi'ite authorities like Ayatollah Kashani, a prominent Shi'ite cleric of the 1950s, rejected women's active participation in the social spheres. In his writings he argued that women's active presence in society is against Islamic law and a woman's main tasks include staying at home and raising children (Paidar, 1995, p. 132).

Despite their acceptance of women's education and their social activity, *Fadaiyan-e Islam* held very conservative views regarding women's issues. They approved of polygamy, Shi'ite temporary marriage, veiling, other forms of gender segregation, and so on. In these cases, their perspective is not very different from other traditional perspectives. Their claim was that Islamic rules would turn Iran into the "paradise of the world" (Paidar, 1995). In spite of optimism and the naiveté of their ideas, it is important that we consider why Shi'ites did not address the question of modernization. For *Fadaiyan-e Islam* and others with similar views (e.g., Morteza Motahhari), gender roles and women's position are written into the political system. Viewing women's issues in this way, they disapproved of Pahlavi's modernizing project, which they claim to be corrupting women and men. Unveiled women (or "naked," according to *Fadaiyan-e Islam*), they argued, are sexual objects, and sources of social disorder and decay as they encounter male sexual instincts. Such a view of women's position does not deviate considerably from the traditional Shi'ite Islamic ideas in which women are considered passive (see Haeri, 1989).

A similar line of argument in condemning unveiling and promoting women's rights by modernizing states followed later by other fundamentalists in the first phase. Among them was Morteza Motahhari, one of the prominent fundamentalists who tried to outline a systematic view on women and gender in 1970s. Unlike fragmented and sometimes confused ideas of *Fadaiyan-e Islam*, Motahhari attempted to propose a systematic argument on the question of women. He did this based on a "scientific" interpretation of Islamic concepts in the fundamentalist tradition. In his widely read books such as *The Question of Veiling* and *The System of Women's Rights in Islam*, which have been reprinted numerous times during the Islamic Republic,[3] Motahhari attempted to promote a counter-argument against the critics of Shi'ite beliefs, especially secular intellectuals and feminists. His argument also implicitly rejected traditional jurists who believed fundamentalists were misusing *Shari'a* law in their attempt to "corrupt" women through education. The claim of scientific status for his Islamic system of women's law, and its acceptance as such in many quarters, made his discourse a product of the knowledge/power relationship, as Michel Foucault and Edward Said would argue.

Motahhari mounted polemics against Iranian feminists of his time, especially Mehrangiz Manoochehrian (a feminist and a first female Member of Parliament in the Pahlavi era). He also argued against the International Declaration of Human Rights and CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women). In doing so, he legitimized the prevailing power relations and social order. He frequently cited patriarchal aspects of writings by Western thinkers (e.g., Rousseau, Montesquieu, Durant, Russell, Freud), which was unprecedented in the fundamentalist literature. Referring to Western thinkers was a strategy to engage younger audiences.

Drawing from these sources, and couching his arguments in a pseudoscientific language, Motahhari based his discourse on the concept of "nature." By "nature," he ambiguously meant overlapping concepts such as "law of nature," "natural sciences," "instincts," "embodiment," "natural disposition," "natural temperament," and so on For him, and for other fundamentalists, "nature" carries much "explanatory" power. By a natural system of women's rights, he generally means the "natural" hierarchy of distinctions and functions that are attributed to women, which in turn determine their rights. "Man is a slave of passion," he argued, "while, woman is a slave of love" (Motahhari, 2004, pp. 38–39). "Man's instinct is to desire, woman's is to be desired and be loved." Moreover, "man does not like a woman to be his rival … he is a world conqueror, whereas woman is a man hunter" (p. 164). Since fundamentalists do not recognize the social construction of gender, their notions of "man" and "woman" remain essentialist, and reducible to "biology is destiny."

The most significant contribution of Motahhari, therefore, lies in his methodology. Motahhari, in his attempts to engage modern intellectual movements and scientific discourse, responded to the changing social conditions of contemporary Iran. At the same time, his arguments attempt to unify the tenets of Islam (Shi'ite fundamentalism) as a comprehensive scientific system of thought. With this methodology, he tried to prove that the existing religious practices that are in accordance with fundamentalist beliefs are indeed the Islamic *Shari'a*. In this regard, the prevailing social order to which women are subjected remain intact. He uses the term "nature" as a catch-all concept, based on which social organization of human beings could be established. In doing so, he places human beings as static beings who are trapped by the order of biology, not the active agents who are social, political, and cultural beings. As a result, Motahhari's references to modern science amounts to an instrumental application of "scientific" discourse to justify patriarchal gender roles. One of his main targets in this book is Western feminists. He called Western feminism (and its Iranian "imitators") a "black movement" (Motahhari, 2004, pp. 75, 172). He posed as an alternative "white movement," or the Islamic women's movement inspired by Fatemeh (the prophet Mohammad's daughter), Zeinab (Fatemeh's daughter), and Khadije (the prophet's first wife).

In *The Question of Veiling*, he sets out to offer a "scientific" approach toward veiling. He argues that in contrast to the Western civilization in which sexual instincts of both men and women are brought into social sphere, Islam believes in a dichotomy of public/private spheres with specific functions to meet human needs. While the private sphere satisfies physical and emotional needs, the public sphere satisfies social needs. Islam, he argues, is opposed to confusing these two distinct domains because they have distinct functions. The underlying assumptions and the approach to the question of gender and sexual difference in this book and in *The System of Women's Rights in Islam* remain the same. Here again, there is a tendency to sexualize all aspects of the relationship between men and women throughout society. *The Question of Veiling* is primarily interested in the differences between men and women. One of the basic assumptions is that men are driven by instincts and are incapable of containing their sex drives. Their sexual appetite necessitates women's veiling in order to preserve their honor (Motahhari, 1974). Hence, unlike traditional Islam in which veiling has to do with the socio-economic status of women and their access to power, Motahhari treats women's veiling as a device to prevent men's sexual advances. In doing so, he not only implicitly and explicitly accepts men's alleged perpetual and aggressive sexual advances as legitimate, natural, and beyond the law, but also disempowers women. Unlike traditionalists, however, he emphasizes women's rights to education and employment, only if the rules of segregation are observed.

Motahhari's writings have been influential in Shi'ite fundamentalist thinking. Fundamentalists have embraced his attempts at a systematic and scientific approach and especially the concept of "nature" in his discourse. As a measure of the persistent influence of his discourse, we may cite a special issue of a journal such as *Ketab-e naghd* (Book of Criticism) published in 2000. The special issue was devoted to a critical look at "feminism."[4] The views expressed in this issue were largely adopted from Motahhari's discourse.

Foucault's formulation of "power/knowledge" is a useful framework for understanding the Motahhari's discourse and how it is related to gender politics and its wider socio-political contexts. Here such a form of "knowledge" is intertwined with strategies of power, with the reproduction of social relations that naturalize the subjugation of women.

Post-colonial critics such as Edward Said (1978) and Chandra Mohanty (1986) deploy the concept of power/knowledge to show the relationship between knowledge produced by a dominant group and its role in the subjugation of the

"Other." The discourse produced by the "Orientalists" enabled the colonizer to define itself against what it is not, its Other. Orientalism, Said argued, forged a dichotomy and a binary opposition of Occident/Orient. In that process, it attributed to the "Orient" all that was the devalued in that opposition. For the Occident to imagine itself as the epicenter of rationality, it had to define its Other as irrational. Adjectives such as irrational, exotic, lazy, uncivilized were easily employed to construct a discourse that naturalizes the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. "Knowledge" about Islamic societies was, and continues to be, produced in an Orientalist framework that purports to explain Muslims as Other, a knowledge that is intertwined with power relations, one that aims to legitimize the global order.

Motahhari's representation of women based on the so-called scientific knowledge, and his view of women as passive, emotional, sentimental, and intellectually inferior, reproduces the Orientalist approach of Western imperialism toward Muslim women. Although he criticizes imperialism as well as Western feminism, Motahhari sees Muslim men and women in an essentialist framework, as unified homogenous and static beings. Muslims, in this approach, are divided into two categories, namely man and woman. In such a dichotomy, each pole carries essentially and naturally fixed characteristics, while reinforcing the alleged superiority of man over woman. Such a discourse, as a form of power/knowledge, legitimates the patriarchal hegemony of Iranian society through a new framework.

The transformation of functions of veiling in Islamic fundamentalism

However, the question remains why and how veiling became such a significant issue in Islamic fundamentalism, despite its pseudo-modern claims for women. To provide an answer to this question it is important to distinguish between veiling as a practice in its traditional context of "cultural Islam" and veiling as it appeared in Islamic fundamentalism. I would argue that to the extent that profound differences exist among these, veiling in traditional Islam and Islamic fundamentalism represents substantially different kinds of meaning. This difference, as mentioned previously, has to do with gender discourse in cultural Islam based on seclusion (*Pard-e neshini*) and in Islamic fundamentalism based on segregation (men and women occupying separate social spheres).

Veiling based on the principle of seclusion was a dominant form of veiling until the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in Iran. This discourse is not only a discourse of body and sexuality. More important, it is a discourse of functional distribution of standing and status in a traditional society. In studying the practice of veiling we have to move beyond the Orientalist discourse, which sees veiling as a sign of women's backwardness, and something that reduces women to mere sex objects. In order to avoid pitfalls of an ethnocentric discourse we have to provide a context in which veiling as practiced by fundamentalists is only one among many different forms of religious-cultural practices of veiling. Reconsidering different significations of veiling in Islamic fundamentalism and cultural Islam would go beyond characterizing veiling as a sign of cultural identity of being a Muslim woman. Such a claim to particularism and cultural relativism has often been used by fundamentalist and officials to deflect charges of discrimination against women. By articulating veiling in this way they claim that every culture and civilization has its own norms and values, which are incommensurable with universal claims of human rights.

Let us start with a discussion of the difference in veiling between fundamentalist Shi'ites and traditional Shi'ites. In the traditional Shi'ite discourse, veiling signifies class, social status (in Weberian sense), economic, and gendered distributions of social standing. Veiled women in traditional Islamic societies signified the high social positions of men with whom they were associated. Unlike women from certain segments of the society (e.g., from rural areas), being veiled meant that a woman enjoyed a certain social status in that she did not have to be in the social sphere as a worker.

The traditional mode of veiling could be characterized as what Thorstein Veblen (1957) has called "conspicuous leisure." As he puts it,

> Abstention from labor is not only an honorific or meritorious act, but it presently comes to be a requisite of decency. The insistence on property as the basis of reputability is very naive and very imperious during the early stages of the accumulation of wealth. Abstention from labor is the convenient evidence of wealth and is therefore the conventional mark of social standing.
>
> (Veblen, 1957, p. 44)

Veblen's theory of leisure class in pre-modern societies may be applicable to veiling in Muslim societies. Unlike contemporary Islamic societies, the institution of veiling in pre-modern Islamic societies (that of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Iran, for instance) is the "prerogative" of women of leisure class whose socio-economic status implies that they are exempt from labor. Therefore, in pre-modern Islamic societies a veiled woman was in most cases an urban woman who belonged to an upper-class family.

Signifying socio-economic status of a leisure class through clothing is not unique to Islamic societies. Bourgeois women in Western societies were often excluded from public affairs, including economic activities, based on their clothing. Furthermore, attire also expresses what Veblen calls the "pecuniary culture." He argues that

> expenditure on dress has this advantage over most other methods, that our apparel is always in evidence and affords an indication of our pecuniary standing to all observers at the first glance. It is also true that admitted expenditure for display is more obviously present, and is, perhaps, more universally practiced in the matter of dress than in any other line of consumption.
>
> (Veblen, 1957, p. 119)

Expenditure on dress is not exclusive to Western civilization. Veiling in Islamic societies performed this function as well. Types, colors, as well as forms of *chador* distinguished upper-class women from those of the middle and lower classes. In fact, the difference between Western and Muslim women (at the same time) lies in the usage of dress. Unlike Western women who were obliged to wear long, tight dresses to prevent movements of body parts, Muslim women were obliged to wear long, wide dresses like *chadors* to hide their bodies from the male, and sometimes female, gaze. Historically, clothing in Western and Islamic societies has been mostly based on the notions such as "appearance" or "garb" rather than "dress" (*lebas* in Farsi). Garb (*Kesvat* in Arabic), as it is deployed in this argument, signifies more than mere clothing. It has implied social status, social and cultural privilege or lack thereof, gender-specific norms, and even semiotics of power relationships. In pre-modern societies, every body had its specific garb, rather than a mere dress. With each garb, individuals presented their social status associated with specific economic position. In a pre-modern society, people became socially distinguishable from one another based on what they wore.

Such a function of garb has disappeared in most modern societies, including Muslim societies.[5] In modern societies, however, individualism marks a person as different. In these societies, individuals are not confined to their preordained and unalterable social position. In this argument, in pre-modern Islamic societies, women's veiling functioned as a symbol of social position and hierarchical distinction, which warranted their access to power as well. Veiling, therefore, separated urban upper-class, honorable, and distinguished women from rural, lower-class women, and women of lesser standing in society. However, though it may signify their wealth and economic position and income in modern Islamic societies, veiling does not determine their social positions.

As such, pre-modern veiling had aesthetic and erotic dimensions. The same may be said about Western modes of dress before the dress reform movement of the twentieth century as well. Both Western dress and Islamic veiling imply not only social stratification, but also aesthetics and eroticism in the form of clothes and the manners in which they were used. In Western societies, for instance, dressing the upper body entailed specific designs, meanings, and behaviors. Likewise, in Islamic societies, color, make-up, and how one wears the veiling had aesthetic and erotic dimensions. Such dimensions of veiling, and its socioeconomic significations, have been denied or diminished in the fundamentalist discourse of veiling. This transformation from traditional discourse to a modern one may be explained with what Foucault expressed as two kinds of body discourses: *ars erotica* (the art of eroticism) and *scientia sexualis* (science of sexuality) (Foucault, 1984, 1986). While the former is applicable to the traditional view of veiling, the latter explains the modern, fundamentalist. Yet the traditional application of veiling in modern Islamic societies preserved an erotic meaning, which is completely different with the fundamentalist kind of veiling. As Shirazi (2003) argues, "The veil has many meanings as it has colors and shapes. This semantic versatility has made the veil a lucrative tool for advertisement in the East and the West" (p. 38).

These dimensions of traditional veiling have disappeared in the discourses of veiling in Shi'ite fundamentalism. To begin with, fundamentalist discourse of veiling lacks hierarchical stratification of society based on what one wears. Rather, it has been replaced by a kind of dress code that evokes uniformity and lack of differentiation (as in wearing a "uniform"). In this context, compulsory veiling, which entails segregation, applies not just to urban upper- and middle-class women, but to all women regardless of their social position. Hence, instead of hierarchical society, fundamentalist discourse polarized the society, and divided it into two opposing domains, those of male and female. Equality in this sense does not imply the equality of men and women; rather, the equality of women is based on universal and uniform female sexuality. It is noteworthy that although revolutionary voices articulated many times that the Islamic Revolution will bring about equality for dispossessed people (*Mustz'afin*), they meant more than anything the redistribution of material resources, not gender equality.

By imposing new forms of clothing and veiling, Islamic fundamentalist discourse of veiling re-established the dichotomy of private/public. This dichotomy is not simply a division of female/male, but a dichotomy of sexual/social. In other words, the aesthetic and erotic dimension of veiling has been replaced by a pan-sexual discourse, which ironically attempts to erase all forms of contacts (e.g., intimate, romantic, companionship) between men and women in workplaces, streets, and other public spaces. Thus, the traditional Islamic discourse of veiling has been replaced by the Islamic fundamentalist discourse of veiling, which reduces every interpersonal contact to a question of sexuality. Such a pan-sexualism in Islamic (or other) fundamentalist discourses reduces women to mere passive sex objects who, paradoxically, have to be desexualized in the public sphere.

Although Islamic fundamentalists never advocated women's equality, their positions have been more practical than ideological. In several circumstances and in response to practical needs, they have modified their original positions. The national war efforts during the Iran–Iraq war necessitated women's participation. Women supported Ayatollah Khomeini and his project of Islamic government. Some women who had not previously practiced veiling started doing so to articulate their sympathy for the revolutionaries. They were inspired partly by Dr. Ali Shariati's ideas.

Shariati was an influential intellectual, with a doctorate in sociology from France. He was inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial writings, and many left-leaning thinkers. His important and novel approach brought together Shiism and modernism. In doing so, he reinterpreted Shi'ite thoughts and inflected them with a modern intellectual and political vocabulary. For instance, he presented Shi'ite figures, such as Fatemeh, as revolutionary women who were far from passive and subservient figures. He viewed Fatemeh as a heroic figure who was in a battle against tyrants of her time. Shariati criticized the gender policy of the Pahlavi regime in making Iranian women into Western dolls whose main task and ambition entailed material objects and superficial gratification. His criticism, therefore, was directed not only at traditional clerics, but also at the modernizing Pahlavi regime.

In spite of the Islamic fundamentalists' rejection of Shariati's ideas on women at the time of the Revolution and its immediate aftermath, his arguments helped fundamentalists in mobilizing women to protest against the Pahlavi regime. Therefore, most Islamist as well as secular women, inspired by Shariati's ideas, shook Islamists' hands and claimed their solidarity with Islamic fundamentalists. Wearing scarves and monteaus, which were used by some leftist female fighters, they participated in political and ideological gatherings, as well as street protests. Recently veiled women along with Islamists played an important role in the Revolution. As Miriam Cooke (2001, p. xi) notes, some women adapted the veil,

> which confounded political and religious symbolism, to demonstrate their anti-West nationalist convictions. They were eager to veil because they believed that to wear this symbol of nationalist mobilization against the Westernized Shah would demonstrate their commitment and importance to the nationalist movement and speed the advent of a new pro-women era.

It did not take long for it to become clear that women's ambitions may not coincide with those of fundamentalists'. For, in the first step after seizing power, the Islamists declared veiling compulsory, much to the dismay of many women, including some Islamist women. As Cooke states, "the nationalist choice thus became a religious mandate" (p. xi). Soon after the Revolution, the black *chador* became the symbol of piety.

Nevertheless, during and after the Revolution, especially during the Iran–Iraq war (1980–1988) it became clear that women's participation is vital for the establishment and survival of the Islamic Republic. Soon after the Revolution, women who were sympathetic to the Pahlavi regime were dismissed and replaced by Islamic women in many professions such as nursing, teaching, and public services. Hence, it became a matter of practicality to set aside rigid ideological postures and to accept women's active presence in the social sphere for the sake of Islam. There was, however, ambivalence in this acceptance. Therefore, in spite of celebrating female Islamic figures like Zeinab, who left her husband to help his brother in the war against Omavid, the revolutionary figure has been gradually replaced by a more conservative one that accepts the "true Islamic" tasks of being a good daughter, wife, and mother. Zeinab's revolutionary image has been gradually replaced by the model of Fatemeh, whose image has been interpreted by fundamentalists to be more compatible with their view of a model Muslim woman, one that might be in conflict with Shariati's view. Such a transformation happened during the post-war period.

Despite Motahhari's attempts at scientific interpretation, the next phase of fundamentalism following the establishment of the Islamic Republic is not completely faithful to his ideas or those of his predecessors. The political realities brought about by the 1979 Revolution, and the Iran–Iraq war, created a new context that called for new arguments, different policies, and new ideas. Fundamentalist discourse has tried to retool itself to accommodate new political realities. The move from an ideology to utopia (to use Manheim's expression), from mere revolutionary slogans to seizing political power and governance, meant modification in ideological posturing and allowing pragmatism to prevail. With the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Iran, a part of the fundamentalists' dream, the Islamic utopia, became a reality. Utopias, however, tend to run into harsh realities that are never anticipated. Although the ensuing gender discourse in the second phase of Shi'ite fundamentalism stressed veiling, the Islamic Republic has had to contend with women's demand for greater freedoms and to relent on some of its demands.

In the second phase of fundamentalist discourse, veiling played another decisive role, and took a new dimension. It became a signifier of resistance against Western norms and Western imperialism, which threaten the Islamic Republic of Iran. Viewed as such, women's issues cannot be seen as part of Islamic fundamentalism's belief system only. In the second phase, veiling is believed to signify the identity of the nation, and of Islamic society, fighting against the West for independence. Women's veiling as well as their acceptance of the Islamic fundamentalist gender codes became a symbol for such an identity. One may assume, then, that in the absence of a Western enemy, the Islamic Republic would not treat it as vital for its survival. Veiling in the second phase of Islamic fundamentalism signifies more than mere sexism, or pan-sexualism. Fundamentalist discourse of veiling in that phase has put women at the core of the debate. Since it has been formally and conceptually transformed, it is hardly justifiable that veiling signifies Muslim women's identity, as many different meanings are attached to veiling. In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, more than authenticity, it signifies a conflict between Islam and the West. Not only Islamic fundamentalism, but also the West view veiling as a symbol of Islamic resistance. As a result, veiling in fundamentalist form has changed so dramatically that it hardly resembles the traditional practice of veiling. It has transformed from a cultural to a political signification, one that is absent in traditional Islam. It is not surprising that women's veiling is being dramatically emphasized in the Islamic Republic. For the Islamic Republic, rejection of veiling signifies a failure in establishing an Islamic utopia and a defeat in the war against the West.

Conclusion

Shi'ite fundamentalism created its own version of tradition, which is distinguished from traditional Islam. There are "many discursive traditions" (Moosa, 2004, p. 143), ranging from cultural Islamic ideas to fundamentalism. Figures like Mohanmmad Iqbal Lahoori, Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as Islamist and Muslim feminists argued for their own versions of Islam. Shi'ite fundamentalists in Iran produced their own justification of veiling, which is different from the traditionalists. Islamic fundamentalism presented a reading of Islamic ideas in which women and gender issues were included as a part of a whole system. In that phase, veiling was included in the systematic fundamentalist teachings on women and gender. After the Revolution, however, with the changing political context veiling became intertwined with the Muslim identity. In that phase, women, instead of being peripheral, subaltern beings as they were in traditional Islam, became political actors. In this phase, women's issues and bodies signified a battlefield in the clash of contradictory worldviews between Islam and the West. Not only Islamic fundamentalism, but also Westerners treated Muslim women instrumentally to promote their own views. In doing so, both rivals, by either compulsory veiling or unveiling (as in the cases of France, Turkey, and Iran in the Pahlavi period), regarded and identified veiled women as representing true Islamic identity. From the Western point of view, a veiled woman signifies submission, backwardness, misery, and passivity. From the fundamentalists' point of view, it represents the honor, the identity, and the power of Muslim male elites. Both tried to make Muslim women choose one pole of this dichotomy.

Traditional Shi'ites and fundamentalist Shi'ites differ not only in their interpretation of Islam but also in their ideas about the role of women in society and the question of *hijab*. This chapter has attempted to explicate these latter differences. If women were considered passive beings for traditional Islam, they played a crucial role in establishing and maintaining the Islamic system for the fundamentalists. In a society where Islam traditionally regulated the social and personal relations among men and women, it also affected status, social standing, hierarchical distinctions, differentiations of functions, and social and economic positions. In this sense, the more women had higher status and eminence in society, the more they were expected to be covered and in "seclusion." In fundamentalist Islam, such distinctions are questioned. Women have entered different strata of society, but they have remained "segregated" in many regards. Men's spheres and women's spheres have become segregated. Moreover, unlike traditional Islam where sexuality and women's role in society were parts of a larger system of thought, the fundamentalist Islam, especially after the Revolution, turned these latter issues into ideologies at the service of political projects.

None of the changes that facilitated the transition from traditional Islam to political Islam guarantees its strength or its permanence. In these transformations there are elements of modernity (e.g., notions such as equality) that have positive consequences for women. In order to be viable in the modern world and to gain power, political Islam in Iran has had to reject some of its traditions, which will ultimately lead to its weakening. For example, after the Revolution reality showed that fundamentalist thought in its encounter with women's everyday issues and problems in Iran, especially for the next generation of women who did not show much interest in the project of Islamization, could not remain committed to a discourse such as Mottahari's with its systematization of women's issues. That is why I have referred to this stage as the second phase of fundamentalism in Iran, even if in its discourse it has not gone beyond the discourse of Motahhari when it comes to sexuality and the issue of *hijab*. Therefore, this thought, on the one hand, has had to reinvent itself like other ideological systems (as I have demonstrated in this chapter). On the other hand, women have been able to resist its power and have forced it to accommodate some of their demands.

Notes

1. *Editor's note:* While I have edited this chapter for style, organization, and language, I have tried to preserve the author's voice.
2. In this chapter I use the terms "cultural" and "traditional" Islam interchangeably. Likewise, I use the terms "political Islam" and "fundamentalism" interchangeably. The Farsi terms that these last two represent are "*Islam-garaie*," "*bonyad-garaie*," and "*osool-garaie*." The word "Islamist" might be another appropriate and universal term to use. However, I have retained the labels in order to preserve the tenor of the debates and discourses in their respective contexts. My overarching objective remains the same, which is to show how the Islamists have treated the category of gender in contemporary Iran.
3. This happened during the economic embargo with the shortage of papers in Iran after the Revolution. The latter book is being taught in women's studies courses in Iranian universities. My copy of this book is the 35th edition printed in 2004.
4. This journal was published by Entesharat Fayziyeh under the editorship of Hassan Rahimpoor Azghadi.
5. Here, I refer to Islamic societies, even the fundamentalist ones, as modern, which are experiencing modernity. I do not view them as pre-modern or traditional as they have sometimes been called. Addressing such distinctions is beyond the scope of this chapter. Here I am adopting Agnes Heller's treatment of Islamic societies as "modern" in the context of arguing for "omnivorous modernity" (see Heller, 1999). It is noteworthy that that in most cases Islamic fundamentalist movements present themselves as modern movements. Ayatollah Khomeini, for instance, embraced modern communication technologies and some of the other trappings of modernity (see Mernissi, 2002).

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12 Religious intellectualism, globalization, and social transformation in Iran[1]

Abbas Varij Kazemi (translated by Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar)

Introduction

This chapter explains how religious intellectuals in Iran in the 1990s advanced two projects simultaneously. The first one was the project of indigenizing (*boomi-sazi*) modern principles in Iran. In this project, the efforts focused on injecting the general, universal, and modern principles into the structures of traditional society. The social and political modernists are encountering numerous problems both in establishing modern concepts such as freedom and the rule of law, and in forming civil society. By reconciling incompatible traditional concepts with these modern concepts, the religious intellectuals are helping the social and political modernists to strengthen their project. A change in the socio-political structure cannot happen without a transformation in the epistemological structure of Iranian society; and this transformation cannot happen without intellectuals.

The second project pertained to the global role of the religious intellectuals. In this project, religious intellectuals strove to bring religion and religious principles to the "global society." If in the past religious intellectuals' concern was to revive religion in society within specific limits and boundaries, today the global intellectuals do not see themselves apart from the global society. The global intellectuals are preoccupied with the vitality of religion in the global arena. Thus, as intellectuals in the globalized world, they seek to act on a global scale by thinking locally. They have to interpret religion in such a way that it is compatible with the structures of the globalized world. Iranian religious intellectuals endeavor to use their particular model (religious thought) to rebuild a universal model (global religious thought). Hence, they take a leading role in forming a "global religion." Religious intellectualism can only be understood by taking this dual and mutual role into account.

Moreover, this chapter explains the status of the two generations of religious intellectuals in Iran according to the role that they envisioned for religion in Iranian society. By ideologizing religion, the religious intellectuals of the 1970s emphasized the complementary role of religion, and reduced religion to a program of worldly (*een-donya-e*) affairs. However, the religious intellectuals of the 1990s emphasized the role of religion with regard to its expertise and therefore strove to bring religion out from under the domination of politics, and to provide a more efficient and, at the same time, global interpretation that corresponds to the globalization process.

Religious intellectuals as indigenous intellectuals

Establishing civil and democratic institutions in a traditional society, especially a society in which religion has had a culture and civilization- building role, is highly onerous and difficult. The most common encounter of religion with modernity has been a defensive reaction by religion, an encounter that has entailed the rejection of modernity's achievements and foundations. In its transition from tradition to modernity, Iranian society has been very successful in the material aspect of modernization. However, those aspects of modernity's achievements that are based on human and social sciences have faced serious problems. Concepts such as freedom, democracy, civil institutions, protecting citizens' rights, tolerance, and so on have not yet been institutionalized in Iranian society not only due to the despotic structure of Iranian society, but also because of its understanding of religion and the *shari'a*.

Here the Iranian religious intellectual is engaged in an indigenous action. He is facing a situation and structures that exist only in his specific society. The obstacles and situations are different in other societies. Thus, as an indigenous intellectual, he has to reinterpret tradition and religion. It is in this context that one aspect of the religious intellectual's interpretation in society is born.

It should be noted that the new religious intellectual interpretation has emerged in reaction to the official interpretation of religion. In fact, the former is struggling to replace the latter, which has acted as an obstacle to the establishment and expansion of civil institutions. The official interpretation of religion is a mixture of ideological and jurisprudential readings of religion. The interpretation bases the relationship between God, individuals, Satan, and others upon jurisprudence. Some of the characteristics of the official interpretation of religion are as follows:

1 According to the official interpretation, human knowledge has only one source and all other knowledge is superseded by religious knowledge. It measures the truth or fallacy of other knowledge with the standards of religious knowledge. As a result, social sciences, humanities, philosophical anthropology, and modern religious studies are of little value. More importantly, this interpretation emphasizes the religious epistemology of ancient scholars (Mojtahed Shabestari, 1998).

2 This interpretation, with its jurisprudential understanding of religion, perceives the structure of politics and society within the framework of jurisprudential Islam. In this framework, which is based upon the theory of imitation (*taqlid*), a majority of the masses, known as the *muqallid*, are on one side and a minority, known as the *mujtahid* (a learned jurist who is the source of imitation) are on the other. This structure is reproduced at the

mass level by becoming hegemonic in political and societal spheres. In other words, this structure has the capacity to create a mass society in which shapeless masses act in politics and society as mere followers. Therefore, this massism (*todeh-garaye*) will inevitably oppose any type of party or institution of civil society (Mohammadi, 1999).

3 This jurisprudential interpretation and its hegemony over religion turns political and governmental structures toward a kind of "aristocratic" structure. The lack of a democratic government, the unaccountability of the rulers to their imitating masses, and the resulting establishment of a form of feudalism, are among the ramifications of this interpretation.

4 A massism which is based on the jurisprudential and ideological understanding of religion creates dutiful individuals and does not tolerate individual rights. This interpretation creates dutiful individuals as opposed to individuals with rights and even takes away its citizens' right to choose their political system and ruler. People have a duty to participate in elections and are bound to pledge their allegiance to the ruler that has been chosen by God (Makarem Shirazi, 1998).

5 The official interpretation of religion is a maximalist understanding of religion. According to this interpretation, religion can provide answers to all of humankind's worldly and other-worldly questions. Therefore, religion includes economic, political, and legal systems that are applicable to all humans in all conditions at all times. Moreover, with the help of *ijtihad*, the solution to all of humankind's problems may be found in jurisprudential principles. Hence, religion omits nothing.

6 Since the official interpretation of religion provides a maximalist and totalizing understanding of religion, it does not believe that it is in need of modern concepts such as freedom, democracy, and human rights. It explicitly pronounces Islam incompatible with these concepts. According to Mesbah Yazdi (1998), "Western democracy means there is no need for religious decrees, and collective votes are sufficient. Giving importance to people's votes as opposed to divine order, turning away from monotheism (*towhid*) and accepting idolatry in the contemporary world is nothing but disobedience to God. We have to fight against this new form of idolatry" (p. 41).

7 The official interpretation of religion has a particular understanding of individual rights in society, which is different from the civil society interpretation of citizens' rights. Based on this interpretation, not all humans are equal. Individuals are divided according to their religiosity, commitment, inclusion in the system, and insider status. In other words, the dominant discourse creates an "internal other." According to the dominant jurisprudential structure, this internal other is measured by an individual's appearance. Dividing individuals into insiders and outsiders is one of the major obstacles to the establishment of civil society in Iran.

These characteristics of the official interpretation of religion are obstacles to the establishment of civil and democratic institutions. From this reductionist perspective, freedom is seen as "sexual freedom" or "laic freedom" (*azadi lamazhabi*). Democracy is interpreted as placing the people's view above God's view. Human rights contradict an individual's duties and the Divine foundation of "right." Since human sciences, especially the humanities and social sciences, do not receive legitimacy, jurisprudential management and knowledge dominate over "scientific management." Governance, economics, and politics are perceived in terms of jurisprudential discourse. Moreover, because of the dominance of the structure of imitation (*taqlid*), plurality in religious understanding among the masses is not legitimate. Therefore, there must be only one dominant understanding of religion. Since the jurisprudential interpretation of religion involves mass society and homogenous individuals, it impedes the emergence of civil institutions and parties.

Iranian religious intellectualism is seeking a way to remove the subjective obstacles to the reform-minded modernists through new interpretations that seek to redefine the relationship between individuals, God, and Satan, and to rearticulate religious texts. By distinguishing between religion and religious understanding, the intellectuals strive to reduce the latter to a form of human knowledge, and consequently make it subject to criticism. By legitimizing the independence of other forms of human knowledge, they make it possible to view religion from an external perspective. By considering modern concepts such as freedom, human rights, and justice as external to religion, they make it possible to deal with these concepts outside of religion. Moreover, the intellectuals consider religious knowledge in interaction with other forms of human knowledge, which subjects the former to both expansion and contraction. This renders an official interpretation of religion impossible.

On the other hand, the religious intellectuals take away the cleric's monopoly over religious interpretation by proposing the idea of the susceptibility of religious knowledge to the galaxy of human knowledge. They argue that "religion is too important to be left to the hands of the clergy alone" (Soroush, 1995). Therefore, it becomes possible to have multiple religious interpretations. After legitimacy was granted to critiques of religious understanding, religious intellectuals began to restructure the dominant religious understanding. The first step was the de-ideologization (*ideology-zedayee*) of religion and the removal of the totalizing mask from it. At the same time, there was a move against jurisprudence (*fiqh*), an attempt to minimize it, or to "thin it out." At this juncture, the main mission of the religious intellectuals was "minimizing religion." It is only through minimizing religion and giving it a minimum role that religion can allow other forms of human knowledge to enter the sphere of politics and society.

The project of minimizing religion was made possible through the re-examination of the structure of religion. Here, the structure of religion is divided into three parts: jurisprudence, beliefs, and ethics. Since jurisprudence is considered to be the most mundane or worldly (*donyaee*) part of religion and seeks to intervene in worldly affairs, there has been a major attempt to minimize its role. In the new interpretation, jurisprudence is seen as the outer shell and skin of religion that protects its essence. According to this argument, jurisprudence does not have the richness to provide plans for a modern life. Neither does it have the richness to issue any decree for all modern problems (Bazargan, 1998; Mojtahed Shabestari, 1996; Soroush, 1994). Iranian religious intellectuals have resisted the ideologization of religion through their critique of jurisprudence and lessening of its importance. The intellectuals' most abstruse problem has been the domination of jurisprudential Islam, which seeks to interfere in all spheres. By reducing the role of jurisprudence in the new interpretation, modern society is permitted to use the modern sciences to build civil institutions.

Religious knowledge and beliefs as another dimension of religious structure have been subject to revision. By importing new theology and invoking other realms such as "philosophy of religion" and "philosophy of science," these intellectuals have transformed the structure of religious knowledge. By proposing a debate over "the expectations of religion," and considering them to be external, the Iranian intellectuals were able to provide expectations of religion that correspond with modern society. This reduced the expectations of religion and removed the "extra burden" from the shoulders of religion. Thus, they turned the "maximalist religion" into the "minimalist religion." The latter presumes that religion plays a minimum role in everyday (*een-donyaee*) life. In other words, religion has determined the minimum that is necessary for this life in such a way that also helps to achieve the main goal (which is an other-worldly matter). The minimalist definition of religion is compatible with the social and political spheres. This interpretation brings about the least religious interference into the economic, political, and social spheres. Based on "modern epistemology" and "modern theology," it is religion that is measured against modern external concepts such as freedom, justice, rights, and individuality, not vice versa (Soroush, 1993, p. 275). In fact, it is religion that has to be humane, just, and justice seeking. This means that not only can modern concepts enter society, but also that religion is obliged to adjust its interpretation to human concepts.

Religious intellectuals have been the most active in the fields of ethics and religious experiences because ethics has had the smallest claim to intervene in the public sphere. In addition, the more prominent a role ethics plays, the less influential jurisprudence becomes within the structure of religion. In fact, religious intellectualism is concerned with the lack of balance and harmony jurisprudence as an organ in the body of religion has had. The intellectuals have been trying to create a more balanced religious structure by reviving other branches of knowledge such as ethics and mysticism (Soroush, 1994: 43). The expansion of ethical and mystical ideas in the modern interpretation allows for the advent of liberalistic and pluralistic principles. On the other hand, the mystical understanding of the relationship between God, humans, and Satan helps the modern interpretation to downplay the jurisprudential interpretation of these concepts. In the mystical interpretation, the relationship between God and the individual is similar to a mutual relationship between two people. In contrast, in the jurisprudential interpretation, the relationship between God and the individual is a one-way relationship, and humans have only duties before God

(Mojtahed Shabestari, 1997; Soroush, 1996). The God of jurisprudence is an ideological God, whereas the God of mystics is a tolerant God.

On the other hand, in the official interpretation of religion, Satan is powerful and dominant. He always has many humans captive in his clutches. But in the mystical interpretation, Satan has a less important role and in some respects he even has a positive role. All these relationships can be reproduced in the societal sphere and have an impact on both the relationships individuals have among themselves and the relationships between individuals and the rulers. This clearly explains why the modern intellectual interpretation is in conflict with jurisprudence but at the same time coexists with mysticism. It also explains why it criticizes the jurisprudential interpretation and replaces it with the mystical interpretation.

Religious intellectual as global intellectual

In the 1990s, religious intellectuals became part of the bedrock of "the globalization of affairs." Therefore, they have become global intellectuals. Globalization has enabled "locality," and "globality" to be present, and be a condition of life in the modern world. Thus, every intellectual is at the same time a local as well as a global intellectual. Similarly, every national citizen is a global citizen. The collapse of geographic and national borders by the media has brought individuals closer to each other. This closeness has removed many subjective and psychological borders, as well as ideological divisions. Many problems and threats are common among all people, including intellectuals. Therefore, a global intellectual is concerned with global problems. Similarly, a global citizen thinks in terms of a "global society."

While Iranian intellectuals deal with local challenges, as global intellectuals they are also concerned with global challenges. If in the "local society" they try to actualize universal and general ideals of humanity, in the "global society" they attempt to restructure the society in which "others" have been allowed to participate in recent decades. The global society seeks common human values that global intellectuals are supposed to construct. With the collapse of the authority of the Western-universal model in the globalized era, all nations and civilizations can play a role in restructuring global civilization. In the field of religion, religious scholars endeavor to come closer to each other through dialogue. At the same time, by making their interpretations of religion more humane, they increase their own tolerance so that they can embrace the followers of other religions.

The important question is this: What kind of religion does the global society seek? In other words, which kind of religious understanding can be embraced by the structures of the globalized world? Have the Iranian intellectuals attempted to modernize religion in the global sphere? There is a complete relationship between the cosmological order (*nezam kayhan-shenakhti*) that religion proposes and social rules. A special form of this relationship is prevalent in traditional society. Therefore, social order corresponds with the cosmological order or system. In traditional society, societal divisions correspond with the cosmological order, which was based on the duality of good and evil. It has always been possible for religions and religious groups to accuse each other of being on the side of evil. In the conflicts among religious societies, the word "enemy" has been used as the embodiment of Satan. In other words, a religious society that has not entered the global sphere limits its domain and closes the window to the world by constantly creating borders and external "Otherization" (*deegar-sazi-ye kharejee*). In this society, anyone who is not "one of us" and does not think like "us" is under the spell of Satan. Any group that does not play based on the rules of "our" religion and ethics is "marginalized," a "stranger," "alien," "apostate," an "outsider." The only way individuals can be saved and become "insiders" is through religious conversion and efforts to become "one of us."

On the other hand, the global society has removed borders and has therefore turned individuals from all parts of the world into "global citizens." Traditional groupings and borders have disappeared. One who was considered a stranger in the past is now a neighbor. Individuals are so close to each other and so in need of each other that they can no longer function in the inside/outside division of traditional society (Albrow, 1996). The traditional cosmological order no longer functions in modern society. Only "global religion," in which all individuals can enter, is allowed to participate in forming the new society. Therefore, the God/Satan or good/evil division that was prominent in traditional society becomes less prominent in global society, and consequently it is no longer easy to locate the place of evil. Satan is still present but there is no definite rule about his whereabouts. Evil is not concentrated anywhere, its face could be everywhere.

"Pluralism" can survive based only on the assumption of the presence of "evil" in global society. In the global society, not only does religion decrease the role of Satan, but his function is relegated to the private sphere. This sphere largely pertains to the relationship between God and humankind. Pluralism is born in this sphere. But in the sphere of the operation of religion, meaning the role of religion as a subsystem in relation to other subsystems, religion can increase its new role in the public sphere by assuming a complementary role (Beyer, 1990). The more religion's expert and professional role moves it toward the private sphere, the more religion's complementary role returns it to the public sphere. In other words, the services religion provides for the political, social, and economic spheres can increase its general influence in the global society.

In Iranian society, religion has been understood in contradiction to its presence in the global society. Therefore, the religious intellectual strives to take this issue into account in his or her new interpretation of religion. The official interpretation of religion in this sphere creates problematic understandings that force religious intellectuals to modernize the official interpretation:

1 The official interpretation of religion makes the discourse of jurisprudential Islam the dominant discourse and creates a division between jurisprudential

unbelief (*kofr*) and jurisprudential religiosity. Thus, all those who do not believe in the dominant jurisprudence of this discourse are considered to be infidels. This can take place even within Islam between Muslims of different sects. Obviously, this division is not in harmony with the general and expanded circle of the global society.

2 The official interpretation of religion gives a prominent role to Satan and thus considers history, society, and humans Satanic. It is Satan who directs the waves of history. Historic Islam is a both a deviant and Satanic Islam (the Islam of the Caliphs, the Umayyads, and so on), and it is only in those periods of history in which the Imams and other Shi'as were in power that Satan retreats. It is assumed that humans are captives in Satan's chain. Therefore, it is not reasonable to give them choice and free will; rather someone who has already been guided should guide them. Satanic religion, history, humans, and "outsider" societies pollute the official interpretation of religion with conspiracy theories.

3 The religious basis of conspiracy theories in official interpretations of religion is that the world is founded on the duality between good and evil (Ashraf, 1995). In this duality, it has been Satan who has directed the world, created history, corrupted religions, and misled all humans. Therefore, based on conspiracy theories, which have a very serious presence in this discourse, guidance of the public is meaningless. If Satan dominates history and society, how is it possible to assume that humans are not misguided? Second, the pluralistic understanding of religion is not possible where the role and presence of Satan is determined and clear. Therefore, the official interpretation believes in the monopolization of religion. Third, all nonbelievers (meaning those who are not on "our" religious path) are considered to be strangers, enemies, and Satanic. Therefore, coexistence and dialogue between these "neighbors" in the global society do not exist.

4 In the official interpretation, "certainty" and "truth" are commodities that are only in the hands of the owners of that interpretation; "others" and "dissident" communities do not possess them. "Ignorance" is only the product of such humanity. All humans exist in a sea of ignorance. Modern civilization is drowning humankind in sin and corruption.

There is nothing more important for religious intellectuals in their encounter with conspiracy theories and religious jurisprudentialists than rereading the role of God and Satan (Soroush, 1997). Instead of paying attention to jurisprudential interpretations, the new religious understanding focuses on a mystical approach in which Satan plays a minor and sometimes positive role (Soroush, 1998). The new interpretation makes God's presence in the world more conspicuous, which is equivalent with God directing the whole of history. Therefore, the history of religion is a history of religious understanding, which is incompatible with the history of Satan's conspiracy.

The assumption that history has been directed by Satan is equal to questioning Divine power. If Satan is removed from history, humans can no longer be assumed to be captives in his chain. Moreover, the fact that one of God's names is Hadi (Guide) shows that we should assume that humans are indeed guided by God. It cannot be said that only a Shi'ite minority is guided and that the rest of humanity is deprived of Divine guidance. Otherwise, God's name (Hadi) would be meaningless. In addition, this new interpretation considers truth to be distributed, not unified. In the same vein, it also portrays unbelief (*shirk*) as distributed, not unified (Soroush, 1998). To put it differently, in the new interpretation, Satan's place is not determined. We cannot accuse either societies or humans themselves of being Satanic.

The most important fruit of this interpretation is accepting pluralism, upon which the followers of all religions have the same opportunity to reach the truth (Naraghi, 1998). This is the interpretation that, regardless of jurisprudential borders, can bring all humans together under any religion. This is why the new interpretation is fighting against any jurisprudential division of religion and unbelief, and refers to it as an issue of the heart. By distinguishing between religion and faith (*iman*) and emphasizing religious experiences, this interpretation makes unity among individuals in the human society possible.

The pluralistic interpretation of religion portrays certainty as rare, and truth as unreachable (Soroush, 1993). Thus, it places all humans on the same level with regard to these two concepts. That is how the new interpretation fulfills its global role. In other words, by "globalizing religion," it enables Islam to partake in constructing a "global religion." This interpretation, more than any other has created the necessary context for dialogue among religions and among civilizations (see Bazargan, 1995).

The function and performance of religion and religious interpretation

Iranian religious intellectualism partakes in the social development of Iran through the dual roles that the global age has created for it. On the one hand, it helps social modernists and reformists in the structural transformation of society and politics. It also facilitates the removal of the conceptual and subjective obstacles to these actors, and therefore provides them with an environment for their historic action. On the other hand, Iranian religious intellectuals have a duty in the "global society," and as a member of this society they participate in its intellectual reconstruction.

In the sphere of "local" action, the main task of new religious intellectualism is to develop a "new way of thinking." In their project of modernity and establishing civil institutions, the social reformists seek to institutionalize freedom, law, and democracy. After beginning the process of gradual reform toward a balanced development, they became indebted to religious intellectuals for two reasons. First, religious intellectuals, like other intellectuals, have played a significant role in importing modern principles to Iran. Thus, by engaging in the theoretical debate surrounding these principles and the obstacles to their institutionalization, religious intellectuals have paved the way toward reform. Second, religious intellectuals have implemented their project of reconciling religion with modernity. In recent decades, this project has begun to take the desired form. By initiating many debates over topics such as the relationship between "religion and freedom," "reason and freedom," "religion and democracy," "religions and politics," "religious pluralism," and "religion and human rights," (Yousefi Eshkevari, 1994; Farasatkhah, 1994; Hekmat, 1994; Mojtahed Shabestari, 1996; Salehpour, 1994) they strive to gradually reconcile religion with different aspects and institutions of modern society. Much of religious intellectual interpretation in our time has been focused on implementing this project.

Religious intellectuals have paid attention to the distinction between the function and the performance of religion and have proposed new interpretations of each one and their relationship to each other. The functional sphere of religion pertains to the role of religion as a subsystem in the societal system as a whole. However, the performance sphere of religion pertains to the relationships between subsystems. The locus of the professional and expert (*takhassosi*) role of religion is in the functional sphere of religion. However, in the performance sphere, religion has a complementary role that is not necessarily part of the essence of religion. For example, religion has a complementary role with regard to subsystems such as the family, government, economics, and health. Intellectuals play this complementary role in their local capacity.

The official interpretation of religion considers an expert role for religion in the fields of politics, economics, and so on. In contrast, the new intellectual interpretation criticizes the totalizing and ideological understanding of religion, and therefore assumes a complementary role with regard to these fields. The new interpretation respects the independence of subsystems. In this interpretation, religion is by no means an "extra institution," but rather one institution among many interacting institutions. Religion can only help other subsystems and therefore assumes a complementary role. Having a general influence in society does not necessarily lead to secularization (*donya-e shodan*) of religion. In other words, in order to make religion present in society, we should not reduce its function to secularization (*donya-sazi*). Rather, by assuming a complementary role, religion can remain in the social sphere.

Based on a complementary role, the new religious intellectual interpretation pays special attention to the performance of religion. It strives to elucidate the relationship that religion has with modern concepts such as democracy, rights, freedom, and so on. Thus, it helps reformists to establish civil institutions. In other words, religion as a subsystem seeks to make the relationship between religious principles and modern principles transparent, and therefore helps other subsystems such as politics, economics, culture, and society. The solutions that religion provides for problems are not religious, but rather are directed toward their ultimate systems (politics, culture). In other words, by providing these solutions, religion is not going to revive itself. However, the complementary role of religion entails the restructuring of society through its performance. The fact that religion is directed toward these ultimate systems means that religion endeavors to adjust itself to modern principles. This aspect of the new interpretation, which is in congruence with the performance sphere of religion, emphasizes the local dimensions of implementing religious intellectualism. In this respect, intellectuals, more than anybody else, try to play an active role in expanding the project of modernity.

In the ideological interpretation of religion, religious intellectuals had a different take on the complementary role of religion. It should be noted that the ideological interpretation of religion is the political interpretation of religion that was dominant in Iran in the 1970s. The main representative of this interpretation was Dr. Ali Shari'ati. However, the new interpretation, which is more focused on ethical aspects of religion, emerged in the 1990s. Abdolkarim Soroush is the main representative of this interpretation. The goal of those with ideological interpretation of religion was to make religion involved in radical and fundamental societal change. The ideological interpretation of religion was a form of liberation theology in the sense that its emphasis was upon radical transformation, social justice, and the ideals of oppressed people. The ideologization of religion was based on the potentials of religion. It was mixed with non-governmental principles such as Marxist ideas. The intellectual interpretation of religion in the sphere of performance is now less focused on the purity of religion and more on its capacities. In contrast, the ideological interpretation was not concentrated on the function of religion as much as it was on the performance of religion. Therefore, it preferred actualizing capacities to the purity of religion. Ideological religion relied on the role of the performance of religion and desired to radically reconstruct society. However, in the new interpretation, the role of the performance of religion is geared toward reconstructing the society in a more moderate way.

In recent decades, the religious intellectuals have paid new attention to the functional sphere of religion. By emphasizing its expert and professional role, they are attempting to revive religion. This aspect of religion's role helps religious intellectuals to be active in the global sphere. It is in this area that epistemological questions (e.g., "What are our expectations of religion?") are raised. The professional role of religion is one of the most fundamental functions of religion that other subsystems cannot fulfill. Therefore, the new interpretation reconstructs religion by deconstructing the ideological interpretation of religion and transforming the functions of religion (Soroush, 1997). In this area, intellectuals pursue a revivalist project. According to the new religious intellectuals, religious revivalism is possible only through the utilization of their own interpretation. The new interpretation primarily emphasizes the distinction between the function and performance of religion and prevention of the domination of one over the other. In other words, enough attention must be paid to both the purity and the capacity of religion, and one should not be sacrificed for the other (Soroush, 1998).

That functional and performance spheres of religion are separated from each other does not mean that they do not have any interaction or that they are not dependent upon each other. Rather, these spheres are perceived through the relationships they have with each other. Religious intellectualism is concerned with the quality of the relationships between the two. The ideological interpretation of religion made the complementary role of religion subservient to the professional role of religion. In contrast, the new interpretation is interested in returning the independence to the former. In the ideological interpretation of religion, the main role and function of religion was limited to its performance. In other words, the previous interpretation saw religious revivalism in terms of its ability to reconstruct society. According to this interpretation, religious revivalism was supposed to play a leading and fundamentally transformative role in society. This interpretation led religion to a kind of secularization. The ideological interpretation did not pay attention to the pure areas of religion, such as religious experiences and the relationship between God and the individual. It sacrificed these main functions of religion for social and political schemes.

From this perspective, new religious intellectuals argue that the main problem with the ideological interpretation was that it allowed the functional sphere of religion to be colonized by the performance sphere of religion. In other words, religion had become mundane (*Donya-e*). Therefore, the new interpretation regards revivalism as saving religious functions from religious performances. Religious intellectuals should interpret religion in a manner that allows it to be saved from the claws of secularization. It is not that in the new interpretation the main function of religion is disinterested in humankind's world, but rather it is that the function of religion goes beyond building the world for humankind. While the ideological interpretation of religion considered revivalism as bringing religion back to the social and political scenes and limiting it to these areas, the new interpretation sees revivalism as placing religion where it originally belonged and as preventing the mixture of religious functions and religious performances. While for the ideological interpretation, withdrawing religion from the political and social spheres was equal to separating religion from the world, for the new interpretation the advent of religion to the sphere of building the world amounts to secularization (Soroush, 1997). Therefore, revivalism has a different meaning for these two interpretations.

The new interpretation delimits the expert role of religion and its functions to the pure relationship between God and humankind. This sphere is in fact the sphere of ethics and religious experiences (Mojtahed Shabestari, 1997; Sorouh, 1997). Therefore, the new interpretation has focused most of its debates on these spheres in order to harmonize the structure of religion. According to this interpretation, religion is alive as long as individuals constantly enrich their faith in God. In contrast, according to the ideological interpretation, people's religiosity entails the ability to build a weapon from religion in order to struggle or reconstruct society and change the world. Therefore, the new interpretation involves "privatizing" religion.

On the other hand, the privatization of religion affects the sphere of religious performance. In fact, if the two spheres of function and performance are placed in interaction with each other, religion will lose its authoritarian claim over other institutions and subsystems. Reconstructing a "minimalistic religion" in the functional sphere renders religion a complementary role that corresponds to the modern world. Based on this interpretation, religion respects non-religious knowledge. It relegates planning to science and plays a minimal role in politics and economy. Thus, the new interpretation of religion in the functional sphere paves the way for the reconstruction and expansion of the modernity project, and therefore helps the social reformists to establish civil institutions.

The pluralistic principles, the merciful image of God, and the belief in the ability of the majority of the people to be guided are among the fruits of this new interpretation in the functional sphere. Moreover, in this interpretation, the reduction of the role of Satan in the world, the indefinite place of evil, and the impurity of truths all lead toward tolerance. According to the new interpretation, all people can achieve salvation and no one is deprived of a religious function. Modernizing religious knowledge in the functional sphere of religion greatly aids religion to become globalized. This interpretation removes the ideological divide of insiders/outsiders, and more importantly saves the functional sphere of religion from colonization by jurisprudence. By reducing the role of jurisprudence in the structure of religion, it places the essence of religion (ethics and religious experiences) in the superior position. To emphasize "religious experiences" as the essence of religion is to emphasize the commonalities of all religions in the world. This, more than ever, helps religions to engage in dialogues with each other. Moreover, by respecting humans and reducing the role of Satan in the world, this interpretation lays the foundations for the dialogue of civilizations.

The previous interpretation placed ideology over religious experiences and ethics, and circumscribed individuals in the geography of religious convictions (*agheedati*). With the collapse of geographic borders in global society, "global religion" too removes the borders of geographies of convictions. Thus, it sees all humans as equal and as parts of one body with rights and freedom of choice. Iranian society is a fertile ground for the growth of concepts such as freedom, citizenship, human rights, democracy, pluralism, and many other human principles of the modern world. This ground did not exist in previous interpretations of religion.

Conclusion

Understanding social transformation in a "religious" society such as Iran necessarily entails understanding society's interpretations of religion. These interpretations may impede the development and expansion of the project of modernity. Alternatively, they may facilitate societal transformation on a positive path. It is in this latter direction that the religious intelligentsia in post-revolutionary Iran have exerted their efforts. On the one hand, they have tried to indigenize modern principles and to inject universal, modern, and broad principles to the structures of the traditional society. On the other hand, they have tried to reinterpret religion as citizens of "global society." In this regard, religious intellectuals have endeavored to bring religion and religious principles to the public sphere as "global intellectuals." Unlike the religious intelligentsia of the past whose intervention was meant to revive religion within the limited spatial geography of a nation, today's intellectuals see themselves as actors within an expanded but singular spatial geography of the global society. As such, the global intellectuals are preoccupied with the vitality of religion in the global arena. Their interpretations of religion take into account the structures of the globalized world.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the religious intellectuals to the future of Iranian society. It is clear that the social and political modernists and their reform projects have encountered difficulties both in establishing modern concepts such as freedom and the rule of law, and in creating a strong civil society. If we accept that fundamental change in the socio-political structure of Iranian society cannot happen without a transformation in its epistemological structure, then the importance of intellectuals to such a transformation becomes clear. In a society where religion has been a major source of authority, religious intellectuals are in the best position to reconcile traditional concepts with modern concepts and principles such as civil society, rule of law, individual rights, and pluralism. This is where religious intellectuals can help social and political modernists and their reform projects. The religious intellectuals can act as a bridge between the public with religious inclinations and the social and political modernists. Episodes of progressive politics exercised by the religious class in contemporary Iranian history certainly give us reason to be optimistic about religious intellectuals' contribution to a better future for Iranian society.

Note

1 *Editor's note:* The translator would like to thank Caitlin Elizabeth Browne for her help. I have retranslated a few words or phrases for the sake of consistency. While I have edited the text for style, organization, and language, I have tried to preserve the author's voice.

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13 Secularization in Iranian society[1]

Yousef Ali Abazari, Abbas Varij Kazemi, and Mehdi Faraji (translated by Ali Hoseinipour)

Introduction

There is no society in which some form of religion does not exist. However, each society is different from others in the form and type of religiosity. Religion in Iran has a long history and is entwined with long traditions. The structures of religious norms have been relentlessly reproduced, and religiously oriented institutions have always been active. Often governments have formally preached religion. Iran has undoubtedly been an utterly religious society. A social revolution that was termed the Islamic Revolution reintroduced and re-energized religion in Iranian society in unprecedented ways. What made this revolution all the more perplexing is that it had taken place in the wake of years of modernization projects that had tried to secularize Iranian society. After nearly three decades of "Islamization" projects, one would expect secularization to be at its end. Although it is widely assumed that the establishment of an Islamic regime would elevate religiosity to its highest level, we argue that secularization nowadays challenges society's religiosity.

Secularization is primarily regarded as inevitable. As societies undergo specialization, rationalization, and structural/functional differentiation, they are destined to be secularized. Parallel to this process, autonomy of subsystems (e.g., economy, science, polity) and their independence from religion prepare the ground for society's secularization. On one hand, subsystems, with their independence from religion, derive their basis for legitimacy from norms, laws, and regulations. On the other hand, religion itself turns into a subsystem, one that can provide society with some of its functional requirements. In this context, one cannot speak of a religious system any longer, since religion has turned into a type of subsystem. If secularization implies that the society in proportion to specialization and complexity of its segments attains sovereignty from the institution of religion, the process of secularization will necessarily be inevitable.

Considering Iranian society against this background raises several questions. If we assume that Iranian society has undergone structural and functional differentiation, specialization, and rationalization, is secularization in Iran an inevitability? What do the Islamization projects of the states with its various institutionalizations of religion at the systematic level entail for the religious beliefs of individuals? Will religion lose its influence in Iranian society? These questions address fundamental issues in Iran. In this chapter, we address the problem of analyzing secularization, religious revival, and the consequences of Islamization projects for the religiosity of individuals in Iran. The first section reviews some of the relevant literature on religion in society. In the second section, we discuss an analytical tool for answering the questions we have raised. The final section discusses secularization in Iran by using conceptual tools described in the previous section.

Secularization: a framework for analysis

Theoretical views on secularization are not homogeneous. There exist various definitions of religion and secularization. However, many explain the phenomenon of secularization by emphasizing internal religious factors in relation to Max Weber's "theory of rationality." According to Weber (1958), the history of the Church and religious rules are another part of this process. Based on this view, Peter Berger emphasizes factors and forces of "rational drive" that contribute to religious and social secularization (Berger, 1967, 1991). Other theorists attempt to account for external religious factors, rationality, social institutions, the development of science, and specialization. Some believe that secularization denotes the decline of religious beliefs; others believe that these two phenomena should be studied independently of each other. Others talk of emergent movements and cults created in the modern world. To them modern society might have weakened the institution of the Church, as a result of which ritual and church religion have declined – though it may have caused new forms of religion (see Hamilton, 1998).

Bilton *et al.* (1987) question the idea that society is increasingly moving toward secularization. Our analytical and methodological tools determine the kind of explanation we can provide in addressing the degree of the secularization or religiosity of a given society. For instance, one aspect of secularization process relies on our definition of religion and the level, condition, and status of religiosity in a given society. Most sociologists define religion and secularization based on the category of institution. In terms of institutional definition, religion is delineated as church attendance, observation of religious rituals, and every single movement away from this institutional participation is called the decline of religion. Some have described secularization as a process through which religious institutions lose their significance in socialization. They point to statistical evidence of secularization from England and America that reflects the decline of "organized religious participation." As a result, the Christian Church has lost its direct influence on individuals' ideas and behavior (see Bilton *et al.*, 1987). However, there is evidence that indicates the opposite might be true. Contemporary studies show that the following trends have not declined: interest in religion, membership in church, attending church weekly, believing religion is important in one's life, and believing God's will is important in one's life (See Glasner, 1977).

Secularization takes place concomitantly with the process of rationalization and industrialization of society, and thus is reflected in the separation of religion and the state, where the state is the dominant factor. Parsons (1999) assumes that this separation is an evolution from a simple form to more complex ones. This separation identifies society's increasing "structural differentiation." Should one accept that a religious institution has adapted itself to its environment, it does not follow that the process of industrialization has had the same effect on religious acts. For example, while participation and membership of British religious institutions have declined, the level of American religious acts has remained constant, if not increased (Bilton *et al.*, 1987).

Some believe that secularization signifies the death of religion, i.e., it has been reduced to entertainment in society. Others argue that religion is undergoing a process of transformation, not extinction. Robert Bellah (1991) emphasizes individual autonomy as the salient characteristic of modern religion. Today people hardly accept their religious ethos without question. He considers this idea as a by-product of religious evolution. Bellah thinks that civil religion is an evidence of everyday needs of sacred symbols (see Thompson, 1995).

All these theories illustrate that sociologists disagree about the form of the secularization process and the meaning derived from that concept. Our understanding of secularization in this chapter is that secularization largely goes hand in hand with each society's socio-historic background and transformations to the extent that the meaning of this process is generally context-specific. This is so because the level, condition, and status of religiosity are different in each society (depending on the type of religion and society). Therefore, religious resignation, or lack thereof, must be analyzed based on its previous status, which is different in each society. Apart from attention to the level, condition, and status of religiosity, we can analyze secularization based on other factors present in every society. For instance, while in the West religion's relationship to familial and cultural domains is considered as a significant variable for the analysis of secularization, in Iranian society it must be assessed at other levels such as economy or polity. Economic and political levels, according to Berger (1991), are among the first on which secularization occurs. This process occurred in the West during past centuries and now it has reached deep into the lower levels (e.g., family, values and norms, and culture). However, in Iranian society, where religious frameworks are more dominant, following secularization at the lowest levels of the life-world may not be meaningful. Thus, taking into account the level of society's industrialization and modernization, we should strive to analyze the process of secularization.

Given the disagreements about the secularization theories and their universal applicability, we need to construct a framework and an analytical tool in our analysis of secularization in Iran. We will look at Karel Dobbelaere's (1999) work on levels of secularization and Yves Lambert's (1999) work on religious institutions and religious symbols for the purpose of our analysis.

According to Dobbelaere (1999), secularization should be addressed at three levels. First is the macro (societal) level. Second is the meso (subsystem) level.

Third is the micro (individual) level. The macro-level analysis addresses processes dealing with structural and functional differentiations often associated with modernity. The meso level addresses religious changes and the tendency toward *this-worldliness*. The micro level addresses individuals' faith in their participation in religious activities.

Referring to the existing literature, he cites different "exemplars" to organize various secularization "paradigms" according to the three different levels of analyses he has proposed. He locates institutional differentiation or segmentation, autonomization, rationalization, societalization, disenchantment of the world, privatization, and generalization on the societal level. The meso level includes pluralization, relativization, and this-worldliness. At the micro level, he locates individualization, bricolage, unbelief, and the decline of church religiosity.

Dobbelaere (1999) points out that among these exemplars segmentation, rationalization, and this-worldliness are central to the secularization paradigm to the extent that other exemplars are related to these three. For the macro analysis at the societal level, differentiating between public and private spheres is important to the analysis of secularization. Dobbelaere (1999) criticizes this dichotomy from two aspects. First, it limits secularization only to the public sphere by leaving out types of secularization that happen in the family (private sphere). Second, he argues that this dichotomy is not a structural feature of society but concepts that sociologists have adopted from the discourses of liberal and socialists of the nineteenth century who wanted to legitimize the autonomy and differentiation of those institutions they deemed "secular." Dobbelaere believes the Habermas's conceptual dichotomy of system versus life-world is a better conceptual tool because it allows us to account for "societalization" (where relationships become formal and utilitarian) and life-world (where relationships among family and friends remain communal). In this sense, secularization comes back to the social system; secularization of the social system does not necessarily cause the decline of individuals' religious participation (see Willaime, 1999).

On the meso level, according to Dobbelaere (1999), secularization is discussed in terms of pluralization and the emergence of new religious movements (NRMs). The multiplicity of religious views has meant that a competition-based "religious market" would take hold. Either through lower levels of transcendence accepted by new religions or through involvement in mundane and "this-worldly" affairs by historical religions, we approach what is called "internal secularization." Berger (1991) has extended this type of secularization. Here internal secularization is decentralized. This decentralization builds the foundations for pluralization. A pluralistic situation is one in which faith is a voluntary issue; man is free to be or not to be faithful to religion. Thus, religious tradition that could once impose itself on individuals can now only display its products in a market where customers are free to purchase or not to purchase. With this, Berger (1991) sheds more light on the relationships between pluralization and secularization. A commodity (or in this case a religious act) with a reasonable price will dominate the market, because of which the social structure of religious groups will be changed. Religious groups transform from monopolistic groups into competitive groups. In such a situation religious groups organize themselves in a new form. In a competitive environment, all members with a common goal need to attract customers and consumers' attention, so a record of achievement gains importance. Attempts to be successful in a competitive situation lead to rationalization of socio-religious structures.

Exemplars for the micro level include individualization, bricolage, unbelief, and a decrease in church religiosity, by which Dobbelaere (1999) means the "unchurching" of individuals and lower levels of church involvement. Religious individualization addresses the movement of religion into the "private sphere." Here attending church is a matter of belonging to a particular community and all it has to offer. This is a community that one chooses. Thus, attending church expresses individuals' preferences and inclinations. Church attendance as a matter of expression places the Church in the domain of the life-world (see Bellah *et al.*, 1985).

So far, we have described Dobbelaere's (1999) views on the levels of secularization. Lambert (1999) provides a sharper analytical tool by discussing two "thresholds" of secularization across Dobbelaere's levels of secularization: autonomization from religious authority in the form of religious institutions and a decline of religious symbols. He argues that secularization in each domain (religious institutions and religious symbols) must be studied at the three levels of secularization independently of each other to provide a richer account of secularization. His account of religious institutions in this regard is as follows. The macro-level analysis shows that states have become independent of religious institutions, even if some form of relationship exists between them (e.g., civil religion in the U.S.). On the meso level, we can examine school and education and point out that even when religious authority still exerts some form of influence, they operate within the constraints of the national norm. Other institutions of culture remain independent of religious authority. At the micro level, Lambert (1999) argues that individuals give themselves a certain degree of autonomy from religious authority even as they accept the importance of religion in their lives (pp. 303–308). As for the second threshold of declining religious symbols, Lambert argues that we have crossed that threshold in a limited scope. His account of religious symbols on the three levels is as follows. On the macro level, only a handful of states have eliminated references to religion from their constitution. On the meso level, only science and economy could be said to have passed this threshold, although that should not be perceived as rejection of religion in these sphere entirely. Religion undoubtedly remains a presence in the cultural arena. On the micro level, two contradictory trends are observed. A decline in belief in God and a rise in the percentage of non-religious are accompanied by the rise in belief in afterlife, spirituality, miracles, NRMs, and loosely organized groups. In short, Lambert (1999) concludes, although there is widespread secularization for the first threshold (autonomization in relation to religious institutions), secularization for the second threshold (decline in religious symbols) depends on the state, (sub)populations, and the presence of parallel beliefs.

In this chapter, we incorporate both Dobbelaere's classification as well as Lambert's dichotomy, and benefit from Habermas's (1984, 1987) critical theory in systematic rationality in the life-world. We show how stratification of religion leads to secularization and identify its dominance over the life-world.

Secularization in the Iranian society

Socio-economic modernization has changed all dimensions of Iranian society. One major consequence of modernization is structural and functional differentiation of institutions. With the advent of this process in society, the life-world is separated from system and every element acquires a definite function. In the traditional society, the institutions of economy, religion, family, and polity used to be merged. Functions such as judgment, education, and information all belonged to the domain of religion. With society's modernization and functional differentiation, religion, once in charge of a part of people's needs, relinquished some of its functions to modern institutions such as the judiciary and education. On the other hand, religious domination over society was diminished due to this differentiation, and religion as an institution alongside other institutions started to interact with them. As a result, religion itself turned into a subsystem. The changing of religion into a subsystem means that it must respect the legitimacy of other institutions. The institution of judgment received a different structure with the formation of modern rights as college graduates undertook this institution. Traditional schools (*Maktabkhane*) were eliminated with the advent of modern schools and universities in Iran. This development caused the institution of religion to lose its educational function at the monopolistic, macro level, whereby this function was reduced simply into religious teachings. In the past, the clergy's pulpit was among the most valid of communication and information means and the clergy played a leading part in the delivery of information. Because of modernization, this role was handed down to the modern institutions of news media. Moreover, the institution of economy opted for its secular devices (tax instead of *Khoms*, civil law for *Feqh*, and so forth) and attained a greater degree of autonomy. This process of autonomy is another characteristic of Iranian society's secularization.

As they strive for growing rationalization, modern organizations attempt to select the most efficient means to achieve their goals. Modern institutions move ahead with the aid of rational programming, decision-makers' calculations, and scientific supervision. Rationalization directs subsystems to structural bureaucracy; religious subsystems go through this process as well. Modern organizations with their rising bureaucracy contribute to greater complexity of society. Finally, a new realm named as system comes into life that is the realm of this-world and instrumental rationality. Religion, as a subsystem whose previous prowess is diminished through relinquishing various functions to complex and modern institutions, is subject to secularization in Iranian society.

Rationalization of the life-world

Sociologists like Weber who assumed merely the negative aspect of rationality and instrumental rationality in the modern world supposed that through the processes of modernization the entire society suffers disenchantment. Historic experience clarifies that extensive disenchantment does not ensue in any society, and religion can still be present in numerous forms in the modern society. Secularization analyses in Iran are largely related to the system level. It is possible for Iranian society to go through secularization on the system level. However, in the life-world, religious associations consolidate, and the rate of participating in ad hoc religious gatherings, visits to holy shrines, and contributions to charities increases. Although Iranian society is in a transition, it still has the following features: it has a tough life-world; tradition remains powerful; religious culture guarantees the basis of the government's legitimacy; and social integration is provided partly through religious and traditional sources. Cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization are three categories contributing to the expansion of rationality and the transformation of the life-world.

In Iran, the system found a way into Iranian society that was alien to the Iranian life-world. This alienation agitated the life-world and put Iran into a "compounded crisis" (*bohran mozaaf*). The first one was created due to the presence and dominance of system in the life-world. Unlike Western societies where the subsystem of economy has made social relations "monetary" and "utilitarian" (Bowring, 1996), in Iranian society this subsystem has not played any role in the colonization of the life-world. Basically, economy as a subsystem has always followed the political system, and in general all other social and legal spheres as well as the life-world have been under the colonization of the political system. This colonization throughout the history of Iran has impeded the rationalization of the life-world.

One of the ways through which the life-world can be rationalized is the expansion of the public sphere, which has always been under the ruling of the ideology of the system. Among those spheres protected from colonization by the system were religious ones. Mosques, religious groups, and the clergy's pulpit partly undertook the responsibility of criticism, thinking, and rethinking of society, and contributed to the maintenance and reproduction of cultural elements and the reinforcement of social integration.

Influence of power in the life-world, where it should not be present, troubled reproduction in this realm. Relations based on power have always existed either in the public or the private sphere of Iranian society. Thus, the Iranian life-world did not succeed in its evolution and rationalization. The fact that the "system" was not entirely indigenous and had come from the West caused another crisis. This caused a reaction on the part of the life-world in the process of system secularization. Governmental power during the Reza Khan Dynasty interfered in the life-world: the fight against *hijab* (cover for women) was carried out vigorously; religious schools were abolished; and mosques were monitored. Interference in the life-world disturbed social relations. Public and private spheres have always been under the supervision of power. Although the life-world was pushed toward secularization during the Pahlavi dynasty, this top-down dictated secularization did not significantly affect the laity and people's religious faith. In contrast, the scant remainder of the Iranian public sphere continued to criticize, think, reflect, and reproduce, even though the political system in the Pahlavi era was anti-religious and its formal organizations advocated secularization. In everyday life, the level of religious and social relations did not fall but rose, and the emergence of political-religious communities in the public sphere accelerated. The Pahlavi's secular education was overwhelmed by the life-world's secularization, and in the end the Pahlavi regime collapsed due to the crisis of legitimacy. The Revolution, as a cluster of radical acts, came out of the life-world, and consequently the new government's structures relied on the legitimacy of this sphere, and constructed religious frameworks. The religious government struggled to make the system, as well as the life-world, religious through the religiosity of subsystems and all institutions. The systematization and bureaucratization of the society that is related to specialization of institutions and their independence from each other continued on its own route following the Revolution. Structural and functional differentiation of institutions is a procedure occurring in proportion to greater complexity and modernization of societies. Therefore, in spite of the religious government's endeavors, the system pursued its own secularization process. Moreover, some spheres of the life-world, enchanted by secularization, entered the system.

The life-world after the Islamic Revolution is still under the dominance of "power." The Islamic government has attempted to play a direct role in making Iranian society religious. In its attempts to impose religion on the entire society, it has tried to inject religion into the veins of governmental offices, ministries, and laws. The *hijab* has become mandatory and even the color schemes for clothing have been subject to interference. Furthermore, beliefs, individual attitudes, and gender relations that belong to the private sphere became the target of attention and were subject to interference and domination. In the public sphere, publications and the media were controlled and religious institutions such as mosques and religious schools that were beyond the state's control were supervised to a great extent. The colonization of the life-world resumed. This time the crisis of legitimacy captured the subsystem of religion by means of agitating reproduction in everyday life. Overall, one may argue that since the legitimacy of religion has become the target of criticism and suspicion, the process of secularization has accelerated.

The subsystem of religion

The complexity of the modern world causes each subsystem to have definite and limited responsibilities. This condition eliminates the absolute domination of one over others. This way when religion loses its dominance, society becomes secular. In conjunction with the secularization of other parts of the system, religion also becomes secular. This secularization in systematic analysis is illustrated with proxies such as institutional differentiation, rationalization, this-worldliness, and pluralization. The subsystem of religion akin to other ones is founded on rational programming. At the meso level, there is mainly a discussion of formal organizations and groups. Like other formal organizations, religious organizations are based on bureaucracy, rationalization, and specialization. For instance, following the Revolution the growth of religious bureaucratic organizations in Iran was observed. The religious school (*Howze*), as a traditional, religious institution, has progressed toward bureaucracy and rational programming. Granting academic degrees to religious students (*Talabe*) charmed the clergy with secular, academic rankings.

Bureaucratic status of religious organizations and rational programming for the ease of affairs invite religion to this-worldliness. On the other hand, religion's entrance to the systemic sphere, social reconstruction, and the constitution means religion is evaluated and critiqued in the same vein as other subsystems are evaluated and critiqued. Religious organizations, as others, are subject to monitoring, report writing, and audits. As such, these organizations are subject to processes of judgment. This procedure of organization bears desacralization too. Religious organizations under the influence of religious subsystems direct their members' acts toward rational goals and provide frameworks based on rules and regimentations to encourage those acts. Religious organizations too can form competitive organizations. They, for example, hold different game shows and contests with secular prizes (e.g., car, PC, house, free excursions, sport and art classes) in order to attract the youth to religion. This process is a rationalization of religious internal structures. Secularization at the system level and in formal organizations does not imply that religion has declined in the public and inter-subjective sphere. System secularization does not indicate the situation of believers' acts in the public sphere of the life-world. Research carried out in Western societies shows that system secularization does not mean a decline at the level of religious acts (Wilson, 1982, 1996). However, this does not mean that changes in the system sphere do not affect the life-world. Therefore, even though the public sphere of believers' acts such as mosques, Friday Prayer, religious gatherings, and communal prayers have not been secularized to the extent that the system level has, studies conducted in Iran suggest that the level of religious activities in the public sphere has decreased and the presence of this process is observed more in the public rather than in the private sphere (Faraji, 2000; Serajzadeh, 1998). This situation emerged because the system has influenced religious relations. Mosques, Friday Prayer venues, and other religious places are directed by system centers. In proportion with religious elements' moving from the life-world to the system, the level of people's participation in these spheres dropped (Marjaei, 2000). Many of the elements of the life-world have been transferred to the system sphere: specific associations were established for prayer (*Namaz/Salat*) and religious advice (*Amr-be-Maroof*). The Islamic Propagation Organization (*Sazeman Tableeghat Islami*) manages some affairs that used to reside in the sphere of people's everyday lives. Even cleaning the mosques is among its formal activities and a day is devoted to this activity. Therefore, some major parts residing in the system level should be brought back to the sphere of everyday life. Here, we aim to point out some spheres that belong to the believers' life-world.

Mosque and the life-world

The mosque, like every other institution, is always a part of the life-world; some people spend many hours in such a place. It is a part of society, and a "loving community" (Bellah *et al.*, 1985) in which people live. People attend it voluntarily and feel the joy of belonging. While it is considered a local communion, church has this potential to be institutionalized and formalized: mosques are fundamentally different from churches. Although all through the history of Iran rulers have tried to take control of the mosques, they have never been formalized or stratified and have always remained in the life-world. The mosque is located in the life-world because its structure is not bureaucratic. Sharing duties, distributing revenue sources, and allocating budget are not programmed or rationalized in mosques. Believers' mosque attendance is not for rational-strategic but spiritual aims. Their relations are primary and face-to-face, not based on rules. Passion, sympathy, and mutual understanding have located believers' acts in the sphere of communicative acts. With this description, it is clear that mosques do not undergo the process of secularization easily, and as long as they remain a part of people's everyday life, they continue to form a part of their way of life.

Attending, running, and cleaning mosques have always been based on voluntary acts. Up until recently, people had never been invited to the mosques by the government; for instance, they devote a day to cleaning them. System's interference during recent years, although improving the beauty, wealth, and orderliness of the mosques, damages their internal community and voluntary and local character. People abstain from mosques the moment they realize they are governed and influenced by power. In an environment in which power lingers, a type of strategic rationality with definite aims is observed. Should mosques become the colony of the system, the mosque attendance will have this-worldly benefits for people, and then they can legitimize both the system and the people attending by the encouragement of the system. This issue changes people's collective idea about mosque attendance: mosque becomes a place of strategic acts (utilitarian and opportunistic) rather than that of genuine spiritual acts (approaching God), hypocrisy creeps into the mosques and this undermines attendance.

When cultural reproduction in the life-world is disturbed due to system's interference, the first crisis will be the collapse of traditions. Traditions subside as a result of weakness in the process of socialization. In this context, the system of meaning is altered and the basis for the interpretation of religious acts will founder. Religiosity is fused with this-worldly desires. This amalgam ends up in a decline in the level of religiosity, and the secularization of everyday life ensues as people abstain from certain religious rules and beliefs.

The clergy: transition from life-world to the system level

Before the Islamic Revolution, the clergy were active in the life-world at the same level as were other citizens. They invited people to religious participation through dialogue, and reproduced religious and cultural elements actively. Therefore, the interaction between people and the clergy was evident. This relationship had the characteristics of the life-world; it was emotional, informal, friendly, indefinite, undefined, and unlimited. At the time, although the clergy were at the same level of people, they were revered, and religious knowledge was held in high esteem. People used to refer to the clergymen, who solved all kinds of their everyday personal, social, political, and religious problems. By and large, the ideal type of the clergy in people's minds was formed partly because of their position in the life-world.

However, after the Islamic Revolution a transformation caused the clergy's transition from the life-world to the system. They attained a systemic characteristic, which caused their roles and functions to be altered. In a sense, their involvement with the life-world of fellow citizens was altered. Residing at system level, the clergy changed their relations with people. These transformations made their ubiquitous presence in the life-world limited. This was the threshold of the clergy's secularization. They gradually started to lose their revered and sacred position. Subsequently, society's classification for the clergy changed. Their active participation at the system level caused the greatest transformation of people's attitudes toward the clergy. As a result, a secular, critical, rational, this-worldly, and desacralized impression of the clergy was formed.

Some religious elements remain at the level of the life-world and are still approved by the people. Some of these elements include the clergy's previous roles. However, roles accepted by the clergy at the system level are being secularized. In fact, the presence of the clergy in the systemic roles has conquered the previous traditional-religious ones. Clergymen are considered system agents and shoulder posts such as the minister, chairman, vice-president, representative, and adviser, positions that are all of a secular nature. The secular roles expose them to criticism and cause their sacredness to founder. In short, the clergy through this transition have lost their previous influence and credibility in the life-world.[2] Since they guarantee the legitimacy of the system, the system has been superficially sacralized. However, the public sphere is deprived of criticism and thinking due to the predominance of religious ideology. Once the critics of the system in the public sphere, the clergy have exited that sphere and this transition has put society in doubt in terms of criticism and thinking. It seems that the life-world, however, has given priority to thinking.

A decrease in the level of acceptance of religious authorities' orders (*Fatwa*) by people, especially on internal, political issues, stems from the transition of the clergy's position who have abandoned the life-world. Systemic orders issued recently – e.g., concerning elections – are different from those of the past. Recent decrees are backed by power and a strong political ideology. The media in numerous ways publicize these decrees. The union of these decrees and the support of power structures reduces their influence and might. In the past, *Fatwas* were not supported as much by power, the official media, and economic might. They were a part of people's everyday instructions of the life-world and people obeyed them instinctively. In accordance with the secularization of society and specially the systemization of religion, secular religious rules required systemic legitimacy in order to be enforceable.

Individuals' religiosity

In this section, we address individual motivations, beliefs, and acts. At this level we address the definition of secularization and religiosity as they apply to individuals. Our argument is that in the sphere of everyday life individuals remain religious even if in the systemic sphere their spiritual world is secularized. In a similar vein, individuals may aspire to gain autonomy in relation to religious institutions but they live in a world filled with religious symbols. As a whole, it may be said that individuals distinguish between strategic (rational and goal-oriented) and religious, and emotional acts. In this sense, they always remain religious in some parts of the spheres.

Formal ideology in the life-world socializes a specific type of religiosity compliant with itself. This type is recognized in Iran with definitive dress codes, tastes, language styles, and transparent beliefs. Systemic or organizational religiosity is a type in which individuals are guided in order to serve in the organization and in line with instrumental rationality. Because they think mainly of materialistic and socio-economic aims, they advance individual acts and motivations toward secularization. Since organizational religiosity has definite socio-economic consequences, it attracts a number of individuals with this-worldly aims.

Systematically, a religious individual is one who possesses the characteristics presented by formal organizations. Thus, there would be a type of reductionism in labeling individuals as religious. In Iran, many people not fitting formal definitions of religiosity were regarded as non-religious. Therefore, formal religious centers have improved the symbols of secularization at the individual level.

Apart from the formal definition of religiosity, people live with religious symbols in the life-world. Many consider themselves as religious individuals even though they may not accept some religious rules, or formal religious organizations might not approve of their religiosity. Secularization analyses in Western societies were initially based on people's departure from ecclesiastical religion. Later, researchers realized that this departure does not entail religious decline among people but the emergence of a new type of religiosity necessitating the denial of links such as the Church (Bilton *et al.*, 1987). Thus, one should not assume that individuals' non-religiosity is tantamount to deviation from organizational and formal religiosity. This deviation in Iran is perceived as new forms of religiosity, i.e., formal religiosity declines, but in relation to the life-world religiosity is alive in various forms. Experimental studies in Iran also confirm that people tend to keep away from formal religiosity.[3] Therefore, they withstand the influence of formal patterns in the life-world. Individuals may not particularly favor religious institutions and formal structures of religiosity, and thus people are secularized on this level. People, for instance, may not refer to the clergy and formal organizations as they used to (Marjaie, 1999) or they may not be willing to pay Islamic taxes (*Khoms* and *Zakat*) to them, but they live in a world filled with religious symbols.

Iran is awash with sacred and religious symbols. Religious figures such as Imams are still revered and beloved institutions in people's eyes. Individuals continue to respect the sacred symbols, and religion is highly valued by many. Religious experiences are deemed precious and religious beliefs are still very important in their lives.[4] In the sphere of religious symbols it may be said that the Iranian life-world is religious and secularization is not at the same level as it is observed at the level of institutions. Therefore, Iranian society does not move toward a perfect and complete secularization. Institutionally, individuals declare independence from religion. Especially in the political domain, they do not rely on religious institutions for their social and political decisions and orientations (Marjaie, 2000). In these spheres individuals' acts are founded on their rational calculations: a type of qualified secularization at the individual level. However, Iranian society is not secular but largely religious at the level of symbols.

On the other hand, the system demands a type of rational, instrumental action. Individuals in the political and economic arenas act in line with rational calculations and individual benefits. Strategic action is to maximize profit in the economic arena and power in the political arena. Yet, religious action is a communicative act achieved through mutual and meaningful understanding, love, passion, and a sense of seeking truth in order to consolidate the religious community of individuals in public spheres such as mosques and gatherings.

We expect religious individuals not to seek out utilitarianism, individual benefits or power when acting religiously (e.g., contributing to charities, holding communal prayers, and conforming to religious norms) since they deal with God, not rulers. This connotes that individuals ought to differentiate principally between rational-instrumental and rational-value actions. At the strategic level, individuals' acts, although secularized completely, they do not necessarily entail non-religiosity: an investor acting rationally in his/her trade may donate money to charities and religious ceremonies simultaneously.

The volume of attendance at religious ceremonies and places must increase from the individuals' actions. Secularizing individuals in the private sphere through family, friends, and personal experiences identifies their orientation in the public sphere. However, the public sphere in Iran is oriented not in a bottom-up (private sphere) but in a top-down (system) fashion. Top-down interference in everyday life obscures the latent rationality residing in motivating individual and communal acts. When religious actions are rewarded by the system, motivations of such acts change from value to this-worldly, instrumental rationality. Some religious actions such as attending the Friday Prayer and communal prayers, when employed for office or university admission, cannot be labeled strategic or genuine religious acts, thus making the distinction between true believer and a rational, calculating one difficult. Therefore, socializing individuals in this manner, that is, directing them from communicative toward strategic action, is perceived as a secularizing process at the individual level – people become this-worldly more than ever. The religion itself – i.e., religious acts – becomes secular at the individual level and it will be deployed for this-worldly aims.

This disturbance causes the crisis of motivation and identity. Religious actors will have lower levels of motivation concerning religious and communal actions in centers under the management of the system. Therefore, there would be a decline in tendency toward religious group activities.[5] This tendency accelerates the process of the individuals' secularization and brings about a crisis of identity at the individual level. Confusion in detecting types of religious acts causes an identity crisis, the nature of religious life becomes prone to criticism, and the phenomenon of "hypocrisy" spreads to the individual level. A hypocrite is one who presents strategic actions under the guise of religious ones – hypocrisy comes into vogue because exhibiting religious actions includes this-worldly and political-economic benefits. The pollution of the context of the act due to hypocrisy diminishes the volume of religious acts and even symbols (clothes, beliefs, and attitudes) in society. Therefore, Iranian society is moving toward secularization if we consider secularization from this perspective.

Conclusion

Secularization in Iran is different from other societies, especially in the West. Secularization is accomplished in accordance with the structure of the life-world in every society. Although social complexity and modernity may create social and functional differentiations, they may not produce a similar form of secularization in all countries. Western societies with their Christian foundation have experienced a type of secularization that has never existed in Iran. Religious structures of Christianity, churches, are different from their counterparts, mosques, in Iran. The Church has been the center of power and decision-making of Christendom. The independence of power and economy, however, provided society with a type of secularization that is unique to the "Western" experience (to the extent that one can generalize that experience across the Northern Hemisphere). Iranian mosques have never entered the domain of bureaucracy the way churches did. For this reason the process of internal secularization of the mosques is basically meaningless in Iran. On the other hand, they have never undertaken economy or agriculture. Moreover, the separation of religion and state as a principle and an experience does not apply to Iran unproblematically. Overall, we cannot compare church with mosque secularization. However, Iranian society is experiencing secularization on its own terms and in forms that are unique to Iran.

How is "secularization" defined in Iran? It is not necessarily the death of religion. It does not mean that religious symbols, teachings, and institutions are becoming irrelevant. Even though the credibility of religious institutions has declined, they remain significant and powerful factors in Iran. We have not encountered the clash between humanistic and religious ideology that we find in Western societies. Religion is accepted by people as an instruction for everyday life. Conversely, religious instructions at the system level and in the public sphere of religion are broadly active. In Iran, secularization is tantamount to rationalization, specialization, structural-functional differentiation, bureaucracy, and autonomy of the social subsystems. Although we could observe secularization in the form of specialization and bureaucracy, it cannot be inferred that subsystems are differentiated significantly. We ought to admit that the subsystem of religion bans full autonomy and independence from the social system. After all, secularization is a process occurring eventually at the system level. However, it does not include the secularization of the life-world. Proxies suggested by the scholars shed light on the system rather than on the life-world. Iran is a religious society in the everyday life domain and systemic secularization is not equal with the decline of religious beliefs and consciousness, even though secularization of the system sphere is influential in the structure of the life-world.

System tends to dominate the life-world. The consequence of this supremacy is the secularization of everyday life through the expansion of instrumental rationality. Due to the presence of system in the life-world of Iranian society, secularization has accelerated. Another cause is the movement of some elements (e.g., the clergy, mosques, the Friday Prayer, some forms of religiosity, and *shar'ia*) from the life-world to the system. The organization and formalization of a number of everyday life elements has led to the secularization of those parts of religion that have moved to the system level. On the other hand, the system attempts to control the public spheres of religion via ideology, power, and the media in order to direct everyday life. Directing the life-world with the aim of providing a more religious society leads inadvertently to secularization, and causes unwillingness of the religious people to participate in communal acts, resulting in the desacralization of the clergy.

Secularization of society must be a bottom-up process if everyday life is to be socialized. Rational programming directed to increase the level of people's religiosity (by means of formal organizations) only leads to secularization. However, the true path is the relocation of religious elements from the system on the life-world. In Habermas's term, we have to turn the systematized elements into "communicative" ones, i.e., religious actions need to be saved from the realm of rationality and strategy and brought back to the speech act domain. These acts should not bear this-worldly, economic, or political consequences and the system cannot push everyday life toward organizing and formalizing *shar'ia* and rituals. The clergy must come back to the public sphere to reclaim their credibility. This sphere should be devoid of ideology, power, and wealth and continue to revise, criticize, and reproduce. Society needs to be free to make itself religious, and cultural reproduction, social consistency, and socialization must be achieved in *this world*. What is clear to us is the imperative to have a space for criticism in order to prevent the system from monopolizing all spheres of our existence.

Notes

1 *Editor's note:* While I have edited this chapter for style, organization, and language, I have tried to preserve the authors' voice.

2 In a survey, only 18.4 percent said that they listen to clergymen's speeches on TV or radio (Rajabzadeh, 1998). In another, their speeches achieved the rank of 28 out of 51 sources of religion (Marjaei, 1999).

3 A survey in Shiraz showed that the new type of religiosity with characteristics such as individual religious experiences, rejection of formal, traditional religiosity, religious pluralism, and collaboration of religious and scientific knowledge were most frequent (Parsa, 1998). Marjaie also asserts that new religious types are being formed among university students (Marjaie, 1999).

4 The level of people's religious beliefs, rituals, and emotions according to the studies performed in Iran is high (Marjaie, 1999, 2000; Serajzadeh, 1998; Taleban, 1998).

5 In a survey, although the level of respondents' religious beliefs was high, only 4.1 percent said they attended the communal prayers and 4.3 percent stated that they went to Friday Prayer (Serajzadeh, 1998).

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Part III

Epilogue

14 Epilogue

Whither Iran?

Majid Tehranian

Only a fool or a prophet can predict the future. The purpose of this chapter is therefore *not* to predict Iran's future. I will offer a few propositions on the patterns of the past and present in order to conclude with three possible scenarios of the futures. The "s" in futures is intentional. We could assign probability to each possible future. But history is full of surprises and unanticipated outcomes. Each proposition could be the subject of a book. The treatment here is thus suggestive rather than exhaustive. The compression of a complex and long history into a few suggestive propositions is not without problems. It hopefully gains some breadth of understanding at the expense of detail.

Iran's cultural genius is its ability to integrate an amalgam of cultural influences, including pre-Islamic and post-Islamic as well as pre-modern, modern, and postmodern

Situated in a central position in the Eurasian landmass, the Iranian plateau has historically served as an important corridor for major population movements, invasions, and cultural exchanges. During more than 2,500 years of history, the Iranian plateau came under the impact of Aryan, Greek, Arab, Mongol, Turkic, and Western invasions and influences. Iranian cultural identity is thus torn among conflicting worldviews. The genius of Iranian culture has been to synthesize such influences into a universal perspective as articulated by its great poets and philosophers. In the work of such poets as Ferdowsi, Rumi, Hafez, and Saadi and such philosophers as Avecina, Farabi, and Suhrewardi, we can witness great universalist imagination at work. Rumi, for instance, sings:

> What shall I say, O' Muslims, I know not myself
> I am neither a Christian, nor a Jew, nor a Zoroastrian, nor a Muslim
> Neither of the East, nor of the West, nor of the desert, nor of the sea
> Neither from the natural, nor of the whirling dome
> Neither of the earth, nor of the water, nor of the wind, nor of the fire
> Neither of the high, nor of the low, nor of a place, nor of a time
> Neither an Indian, nor Chinese, nor a Bulghar, nor a Saksin
> Neither of Iraq, nor of Khorasan

> Neither of this world, nor of the next, nor of paradise, nor of the hell
> Neither of Adam, nor of Eve
> My place is the placeless, my sign is the signless
> There is neither a body nor a soul
> For I am of the Beloved.

Iran's geo-historical position has also created a melting-pot of ethnicities, languages, cultures, and religions unified by a common historical memory and identity. In the mid-twentieth century, no more than 50 percent of the population was Persian speaking. Mass media, education, and literacy have strengthened the position of Persian as a lingua franca. But cultural pluralism is at the core of Iran's national identity. The thirteenth-century Persian poet Saadi perhaps summarized the core of Iranian identity and morality most succinctly and pragmatically:

> Asayesh do guity, tafsir in do harf ast, baa doostan morrovat, ba doshmanan modara.
>
> [The ease of life in the two worlds can be summed up in two words: chivalry with friends and tolerance with enemies.]

When Cyrus the Great established the Persian Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE), he introduced three lasting principles into the history of the multinational imperial systems of the ancient world. First, in contrast to previous empires, his policy was one of tolerance. In a declaration carved in a clay cylinder in cuneiform, discovered in 1879 by Hormoz Rasam in Babol and now in The British Museum, he stated:

> When my soldiers in great numbers peacefully entered Babylon … I did not allow anyone to terrorize the people … I kept in view the needs of people and all its sanctuaries to promote their well-being … freed all the slaves. I put an end to their misfortune and slavery.

As recorded in The Old Testament (Ezra 1:1–2:70), Cyrus freed the Jewish slaves and allowed them to return to Jerusalem to build their temple. In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing. This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

> The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you – may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.

Second, Cyrus and his successors developed a "federal" system of governance in which the *satrapies* enjoyed autonomy but were kept under the close watch of the imperial center.

Third, decentralization was made possible by the invention of one of the first postal systems in history. The empire kept fresh horses ready at designated intervals to carry the messages from the *satrapies* to the center and back by fresh horsemen in a relay marathon. That is the origin of the expression "Pony Express."

Because of their practical value, all subsequent multinational empires adopted a similar system of command, control, and communication. At various levels of success, the Seleucid, Parthian, Sassanid, Abbasid, Saljuq, Ottoman, and Safavid empires successfully focused on exacting obedience and taxes rather than on the imposition of any particular religion or language. The latter two empires propagated Sunni and Shi'a Islam as their ideologies, but they had tolerance for religious diversity through the *millet system* of religious autonomy for Christian and Jews.

There were notable exceptions to this general rule when, for instance, the Sassanid King Anushiravan persecuted the Mazdakites or when some dynasties forced Islam on their subject peoples. But the continued success of multinational empires was often contingent on the observation of the Achaemenid threefold imperial rules. Under the absolutist monarchical rule, of course, there was little political tolerance. Cultural tolerance was a pragmatic nod to the reality of a heterogeneous population. Even after the Arab conquest of Iran in the seventh century, Islam was not generally imposed. Conversion to Islam would have meant exemption from *Jazyeh*, the poll tax on non-Muslims. Conversion to Islam thus took place gradually. The Quranic injunction that "there is no compulsion in religion" provided a basis for continued cultural pluralism and a system that gave religious minorities a level of cultural autonomy.

By the time the Safavids came to power in the sixteenth century, most Iranians were Sunni Muslim, Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, or Buddhist. In order to spread Shi'ism, the Safavids had to bring proselytizers mainly from Lebanon. Since such Shi'a clerics were Arabic speaking, their Persian writings were infused with Arabic words. Under the Safavids, Iranian political and economic fortunes generally improved, but Persian literature went through a period of decline. The Safavid state policy of propagating Shi'a Islam stemmed from the need to provide an ideological defense against the Ottomans who were championing Sunni Islam in their West Asian, North African, and North African territories. That policy, however, did not prevent Shah Abbas I (1557–1629) from bringing a large number of Christian Armenians to his capital, Isfahan, in order to give them sanctuary and autonomy in a city of their own, Julfa. Cultural pluralism as an imperial policy thus continued to be an implicit policy under the Zand and Qajar dynasties in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. The Constitution of 1905 to 1909 provided for representation in the Majlis for several religious minorities, including Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians. However, the Bahaiis were persecuted and all religious minorities were excluded from important state positions. Given their messianic origins, the Bahaiis were considered a rival to the dominant Shi'a clergy.

Western imperialism in Iran during the nineteenth to twentieth centuries produced a crisis of national identity focused on two rival ideologies. Each ideology constructed a different imaginary of power and purity harking back to the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic historical memories and mythologies

Russia and Britain penetrated Iran during the nineteenth century. An anti-imperialist movement drew support from patriotic but contradictory elements. Some notable state officials such as the Qajar Prime Minister Amir Kabir attempted reforms aimed a strengthening Iran's position. But a second stratum of the elite formed the leading edge against Western imperialism and for liberal constitutionalism. The revolutionary elite included contradictory elements consisting of the Shi'a clerics, Bazaar merchants, liberal intellectuals, and some tribal chiefs. With the support of the British, the Constitutional revolutionaries brought about a change of regime from monarchical absolutism to constitutional government (1905–1909). However, the tensions between the Shi'a clerics and the secular intellectuals were not resolved. Article 9 of the new Constitution gave the clerics a veto power over all legislation. However, a stipulated committee of five *mujtahids* was never formed. The committee was to review the Islamic legitimacy of parliamentary legislation.

Under the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979), a vigorous policy of modernization and secularization significantly reduced the power of the clerics. Educational, legal, and charitable foundations (*waqf*) were largely taken away from clerical control and put into the hands of a secular state. In keeping with the secular nationalist ideology of the Pahlavi regime, religious minorities such as the Zoroastrian, Bahaii, Jewish, and Christian groups were more empowered. As an offshoot of Shi'a messianism, the Bahaii access to government posts particularly irked the clerics. During the twentieth century, therefore, Iran became deeply divided among the monarchist, liberal nationalist, socialist, communist, and religious factions. With the destruction of the liberal nationalist, socialist, and communist parties, the Pahlavi regime left only one last sanctuary for the opposition, namely the mosque. In the meantime, under Ayatollah Boroujerdi's quiet leadership during the 1940s and 1950s, a state within a state was created based on Shi'a clerical institutions and networks. The Shi'a quasi-state was centered in Qum where it developed an autonomous system of religious taxation (*khoms* and *zakat*), religious schooling from elementary to higher education, dispensation of justice by the Shari'a, missionary work abroad, and domestic educational, social, and political operations.

The rival secular and religious communities gave rise to two ideologies that diverged increasingly during the twentieth century. The secular and authoritarian nationalist ideology of the Pahlavi monarchy relied increasingly on pre-Islamic myths and historical memories. Purification of the Persian language, return to the Achaemenid architectural style, celebration of the 2,500th anniversary of the Persian Empire, and the change of calendar from Islamic to Shahanshahi were the most significant elements of such an ideology. By contrast, the radical clergy harked back increasingly to the historical Shi'a myths and memories of martyrdom, messianism, and a pristine Islam capable of restoring national power and establishing social justice.

The discovery of oil in 1901 added economic importance to the strategic value of Iran, but it also entailed four major consequences: foreign intervention, a rentier state, militarization, and dualistic development

In this respect, Iran differed little from the other major petroleum-exporting countries such as Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirate, Qatar, and Indonesia. Oil revenues represented increasing windfall savings in hard international currencies put directly into the hands of the state.

First of all, the existence of vast oil and gas resources encouraged Great Power active intervention in Iranian domestic affairs. Britain and Russia had engaged in power plays even before the discovery of oil. With the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and effective Soviet withdrawal from the scene, Britain assumed the dominant position. The occupation of Iran during World War II by the British, Soviet, and U.S. forces turned the country into a major staging ground in the Cold War rivalries. In 1946, under Western pressures, the Soviet forces were obliged to leave the provinces of Azarbaijan and Kurdistan where two puppet Soviet regimes had been established. In the meantime, a liberal nationalist movement under the leadership of Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq was challenging both the Soviet and British power positions in Iran. By nationalizing the oil industry throughout the country, Prime Minister Mosaddeq (1951–1953) seized the existing Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's operations in the South and denied the Soviet claims in the North. Under the Democratic Administration of President Truman, the U.S. was rather sympathetic to Dr. Mosaddeq. But a change of administration from Democratic to Republican in 1952 turned the U.S. policies against Mosaddeq. A CIA-sponsored *coup d'état* on August 19, 1953 removed Dr. Mosaddeq and brought back Mohammad Reza Shah to power. A new oil agreement under the aegis of a consortium, composed of British, American, Dutch, and French companies, kept the appearance of nationalization without its substance. Thereafter, by supporting the monarchical regime, the United States effectively replaced the British and Russian powers in Iran.

Second, increasing oil revenues under the consortium regime enabled the monarchical state to assume a dominant position vis-à-vis its middle-class opposition. As in other major oil-exporting countries, the petrolic state became a rentier state. With substantial oil revenues in its coffers, the state could pursue a policy of "no taxation, no participation," refusing to make concessions to democratic pressures for civil rights. It could also pursue co-optation policies by buying off the opposition's actual and potential ranks.

Third, oil revenues empowered the state to engage in ostentatious domestic and foreign power plays. By purchasing the latest weapons systems from the West, the monarchical state could repress domestic opposition as well as aspire to a regional power position. This happened particularly after the Nixon Administration came to power. In the aftermath of the War in Vietnam, the new Nixon doctrine looked for regional proxies in the Persian Gulf region. In 1971, the British military withdrew from East of Suez. The United States filled the resulting power vacuum by granting Iran and Saudi Arabia proxy powers to police the Persian Gulf. By granting the Shah a blank check on the purchase of all arms except nuclear weapons, the United States relied increasingly on him to police the region. The suppression of the Dhoffar Rebellion in Oman by the Iranian armed forces was the result of one such arrangement. The 1975 Algiers Accord between the Shah and Saddam Hussein to resolve Iran–Iraq border disputes was another.

Fourth, and most important of all, oil revenues promoted dualistic economic, social, and cultural development in Iran. Access to those revenues through state coffers generated a new class of *nouveau-riche* entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, and professionals who ostentatiously displayed their secular lifestyles. The introduction of television brought such displays of conspicuous consumption directly into the homes of the more religious segments of the population. During the 1970s, pretentious celebrations added insult to injury. These included the 2,500th anniversary of the Persian Empire, the 50th anniversary of the Pahlavi monarchy, the change of calendar from Islamic to Shahanshahi, as well as festivals displaying the new secular culture with abandon. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 ultimately represented the triumph of an oral culture of the religious networks against a mediated, modern culture imposed from above. It also brought to power a second stratum of the Iranian elite that had been challenging the absolutist Qajar and dictatorial Pahlavi monarchies at the beginning and middle parts of the twentieth century.

Factors that led to the Revolution of 1979 may be summarized as follows: the growing wealth and income gaps exacerbated by the dramatic rise of oil revenues in the 1970s, the emergence of an urban lumpen proletariat deeply steeped in Shi'a religious beliefs, the repression of the democratic opposition, the absence of alternative channels of dissent, the rise of an Iranian student movement abroad that effectively delegitimated the Shah's dictatorship, the emergence of guerrilla bands under the Mujahedin and Fadaiyan leadership, Khomeini's forceful leadership in unifying the opposition toward the overthrow of monarchy and establishment of an Islamic republic, the Carter Administration's vacillations, and Franco-British sympathies for the revolutionary movement.

The historical cycles of centralization and fragmentation in Iran have repeated themselves in the twentieth century in six phases, including (a) democratization and fragmentation (1905–1921, 1941–1953, 1979–1980 and 1989–present), and (b) modernization and centralization (1921–1941 and 1953–1979)

The Constitutional Revolution of 1905 to 1909 renewed an old cycle in Iranian political life. The cycles of centralization and fragmentation represented what the fifteenth-century historian Ibn Khaldun had recognized as a pattern in Islamic history. The perennial struggle between the nomadic and sedentary populations in Eurasia often led to periodic, nomadic invasions of sedentary societies in Europe, China, Iran, and India. The most well known of such invasions often led to the rise of new dynasties, their subsequent sedentarization, and eventual fall in the face of new nomadic invasions. Until the Pahlavi dynasty, which was based on a modern army, all past dynasties in Iran can be traced back to nomadic power. Aryan, Greek, Arab, and Turkik nomadic invasions formed the Achaemenid, Seleucid (Macedonian), Parthian, Sassanid, Ummayed, Abbasid, Samanid, Saljuq, Ghaznavid, Safavid, Afshar, Zand, and Qajar dynasties. All such dynasties modeled themselves on the multinational imperial system of the Achaemenids. They often assumed some of the same decentralized, tolerant, and exploitative monarchical prerogatives and privileges.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, modernization introduced new challenges in state and nation building. These challenges fundamentally differed from the past. But the historical cycles of centralization and fragmentation imposed themselves upon the new challenges. Thus, from 1905 to 1921 during which the new constitutional regime was struggling to introduce a new parliamentary political culture, democratization was accompanied with fragmentation. Continued British and Russian influence, tribal power on the Iranian borders, and World War I interventions by competing British, Ottoman, and German powers, all combined to challenge Iran's territorial integrity. Following the end of the war, in 1918, the British proposed an Anglo–Iranian Treaty that would have reduced the country to the level of a Protectorate similar to that of Egypt's. The treaty was roundly defeated by a nationalist Majlis. The British now supported the rise to power of a new man on horseback, Reza Khan. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the White Russian officers left their positions in the Iranian Cossack Brigade. This created a vacuum for the talented Iranian officers to fill. As a tall and imposing young officer, Colonel Reza Khan caught the British attention. In 1921, he was encouraged to take over power in a *coup d'état*. Reza Khan was initially welcomed by most patriotic elements, which saw in him a national savior. However, his initial plan for a republican form of government modeled after Ataturk's achievement in Turkey was opposed by the Shi'a clerics. In 1925, his change of dynasty from Qajar to Pahlavi succeeded. To convince the clerics of his piety, Reza Khan along with his major military officers walked barefoot to the shrine in Shah Abdolazim. The next 15 years of Reza Shah's rule proved, however, his zeal for secular modernization and personal aggrandizement.

Reza Shah's dictatorship came to an abrupt end in 1941 by the entry of the Allied forces, his forced abdication and exile, and his replacement by his 18-year-old son, Mohammad Reza Shah. From 1941 to 1953, Iran witnessed a period of democratization and fragmentation typified by the rise of numerous political parties, labor unions, voluntary associations, and newspapers. It also renewed tribal power, launched an oil nationalization movement, and intensified Great Power rivalries. The period ended with the CIA-sponsored coup of 1953. The coup temporarily pushed back the middle-class aspirations to power in favor of continued monarchical dictatorship. In the meantime, oil revenues enabled the Pahlavi monarchy to continue with its vigorous modernization, centralization, and militarization programs. Through a White Revolution launched in 1962, the monarchical regime attempted to build its own base of middle-class social power. However, the pro-monarchy parties that were formed (Iran Novin, Mardom, and Rastakhiz) all failed to have mass following, autonomy, and power. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Hoveyda, the Iran Novin Party came closest to representing an office-holders' party. It won an experimental free election in Sari. But in 1975, the Shah dismissed all political parties and established a one-party system under Rastakhiz. The continuity of the regime thus depended increasingly on the health and ability of a single individual. With the administration of Jimmy Carter calling for human rights reforms, reduced oil revenues, and the Shah's declining health and decisiveness, the monarchical regime was on the verge of collapse in 1978.

The rise to power of Ayatollah Khomeini was not a historical accident. Above all, it was a return to the cyclical patterns of the past. It inaugurated another period of democratization and fragmentation. However, Khomeini's forceful personality and insistence on ending monarchy and establishing an Islamic Republic narrowed the democratic choices. For a short while, liberal nationalists such as Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan and President Abdol-Hossin Bani-Sadr put up a weak resistance against Ayatollah Khomeini, but the latter's charisma and willpower overwhelmed them. The Islamic Republication Constitution of 1979, passed in a referendum, concentrated most power in the hands of a chief of state known as *valiye faqih*. As vicar of God on earth and the first occupant of that post, Khomeini could exercise dictatorial powers by his control of the armed forces, mass media, and about 40 percent of national assets confiscated and put under charitable foundations. During the first revolutionary year (1979), dual sovereignty continued to operate through a government headed by Prime Minister Bazargan, and the revolutionary committees (*komite-haye enqelab*) under Khomeini. The takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran on November 2, 1979 gave Khomeini the opportunity to mobilize the anti-imperialist sentiments against the "compromising" liberals. In the next 444 days of the Hostage Crisis, the clerics effectively divested the government of any remaining vestiges of secular power. The historical memory of a CIA coup in 1953 returning the Shah was frequently invoked to justify the hostage-taking.

The short-lived period of democratization in 1979 to 1980 came to an abrupt end by the Iraqi invasion of Iran on August 2, 1980. A global historical pattern was repeating itself. The conservative Arab regimes around Iran as well as the Great Powers (U.S. and U.S.S.R.) had been deeply alarmed by the Islamic Revolution in Iran that threatened to spread into Southwest and Central Asia. Just as in the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the neighboring conservative states conspired to invade and nip the Revolution in the bud. With the support of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and possible collusion of the United States, Saddam Hussein of Iraq invaded Iran. Similar to all past revolutions, a foreign invasion turned a chaotic political situation into a mobilized patriotic effort to defend the motherland against its enemies.

The Iran–Iraq war dragged on for eight years during which the Shi'a clerical power was consolidated, and the Liberal, Mujahedin, Fadaiyan, and communist rivals were eliminated. Both Iran and Iraq suffered heavy casualties. The two states were also further centralized under war conditions. Iraq was financially supported by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to the tune of some $60 billion while receiving arms from France, the United States, and Russia. Around 1986, the numerical superiority of Iran and the revolutionary zeal of its fighters somewhat turned the tide in its favor. But the extension of the war into the Persian Gulf by a so-called "tanker war" brought the United States seventh fleet into action. Lest the war expand into a regional conflict, the United States and Soviet Union decided in 1988 to force a cease-fire agreement on the two belligerents. The end of the war in 1988 roughly coincided with two other significant events, Khomeini's death and the end of the Cold War in 1989.

The end of the Iran–Iraq War and Khomeini's death brought about another period of democratization and fragmentation to Iran. An economic liberalization program under President Hashemi-Rafsanjani (1989–1997) expanded profit opportunities for a new class of entrepreneurs while widening the income and wealth gaps. Under President Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005), a political liberalization program unleashed the forces for human rights and democratic participation. A new generation of youth born during and after the Revolution with access to increasing educational and global communication networks (Internet, satellite broadcasting, travel) was now demanding rights that the conservative clerical leadership was not willing to grant. The domestic rivalries between the conservative and reformist clerical factions were also exacerbated by regional tensions.

The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinjead to presidency opened up a new era. As an ex-mayor of Tehran and a former member of the Revolutionary Guards, Ahmadinejad represented a shift to a new generation and the military. His promises of militancy against domestic corruption and foreign domination harked back to the earlier impulses of the Revolution. His pursuit of nuclear technology defied the U.S.-led prohibition. Counting on Russian and Chinese support, Iran was being drawn into a Eurasian alliance against The Euro-American domination. The conclusion of a $100 billion oil exploration agreement with China, and the reliance on Russia for nuclear know-how are signs of future trends.

Following the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, the Middle East region had gained a prominence in world politics. The subsequent U.S. invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, combined with talk of regime change in Iran, created a tense atmosphere. The escalation of rhetoric by both the America and Iranian regimes seemingly left little room for compromise. Yet, both regimes were in need of a comprehensive resolution of their outstanding differences. Which option will prevail?

The U.S. had followed a policy of dual containment against Iran and Iraq during the 1990s. It had also passively assisted the rise of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (1995). To build pipeline routes for the transport of Caspian oil, bypassing Iran, made the Pakistani support of the Taliban acceptable to the U.S. But the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States changed all of that. In a speech to the U.S. Congress in 2002, President Bush identified Iran as part of an "Axis of Evil" along with Iraq and North Korea. The new Bush doctrine reserved for the U.S. the right of pre-emptive strikes on any country that it perceived to be supporting terrorism.

In the current decade (2000–2009), the theocratic regime of Iran is facing serious internal and external problems consisting of the challenges of (a) dual sovereignty, (b) gender inequality, (c) political paralysis, (d) economic stagnation, and (e) international isolation

The Islamic regime in Iran is difficult to classify by conventional political terms. It is revolutionary and progressive as well as reactionary and conservative. It is both theocratic and democratic. Depending on one's interpretation of Islam, it is both Islamic and counter-Islamic. It is fairly evident, however, that its continuity depends on resolving some serious internal and external contradictions and challenges.

First and foremost among such challenges is the constitutional problem of dual sovereignty. The Islamic Constitution grants sovereignty both to *velayat-i-faqih* and the people. So long as Ayatollah Khomeini was alive, his charismatic power and forceful personally could settle the ensuing conflicts between the secular and clerical sources of sovereignty. However, ever since his death in 1989, the regime has had to resort to a complex variety of measures to bypass the ensuing contradictions. The choice of Khamenei, a second-rank cleric as the successor to Khomeini, has not been particularly helpful.

As the chief of state and titular head of the clerical ranks, Ayatollah Khamenei has the necessary instruments of power in his hands. These include the armed forces, the mass media, the semi-official newspapers, and the vast economic and political assets of the charitable foundations. Lack of strong legitimacy in a decentralized Shi'a system of *mujtahids* has opened him up to challenges from within the religious ranks. The most irksome of such challenges has come from Ayatollah Montazeri, who was the heir apparent to Khomeini in the 1980s before he fell out of favor.

In the absence of a central authority to resolve the conflicts between an elected Majlis and an appointed Council of Guardians, the regime has had to create another layer of bureaucracy known as the Council of Expediency to resolve the differences. Headed by the former President Rafsanjani, the new Council has softened some of the differences between the liberals and conservatives at the cost of loss of legitimacy. The conflicts between a popularly elected President (Khatami followed by Ahmadinjed), the conflict will continue. Failing to achieve most of his liberal objectives, President Khatami lost his popularity among his most ardent supporters, i.e. youth and women. The Council of Guardians persistently vetoed the liberal legislation by a Majlis controlled by Khatami's supporters.

A second complex issue facing the Islamic regime consists of the position of women in society. Having started with a separate but equal doctrine, the regime has had to open up opportunities to women while curtailing their freedom of movement. The unanticipated consequence of this policy has been a surge of women's position in society along with a rise of their frustrations. The literacy rate for women between the ages of 15 and 24 has risen to 90 percent. More than 50 percent of students in the institutions of higher learning are women. Women can vote and be elected. But the economy has not created enough jobs and the restrictive codes of veiling and movement for women prevent this educated cadre from being satisfactorily placed. In 1999, about 10 percent of women were part of the labor force as compared to 13 percent in 1972. Senior government posts go to men, and women tend to avoid male-dominated workplaces under which they are handicapped by the religious restrictions imposed on them.

The regime's paralysis in gender relations has its counterpart in an institutional paralysis among different government organs. During Khatami's presidency (1997–1005), the Majlis was dominated by the reformers while the Council of Guardians and judiciary were the domain of the conservatives. The consequent paralysis in the Islamic regime has affected its domestic and foreign policies. In its domestic policies, the foundations continue to stay outside of government control and accountability. In its foreign policies, relations with Europe and the United States, nuclear policies, and regional issues have been hostage to swings between anti-imperialist slogans and political realities.

In economic policy, despite its oil revenues, Iran has not been able to take off into self-sustained growth. A population explosion during the 1980s, encouraged by the lowering of marriage age for girls to nine and boys to 15, has created horrendous problems in urbanization, employment, and social services. The trichotomous structure of the Iranian economy consisting of a state, market, and foundation sector has rendered fiscal and monetary policy relatively ineffective.

Finally, the relative isolation of Iran from the international community has taken its toll on the place of the country in the world economy and polity. Although the regime has managed to maintain precarious relations with Europe, Russia, China, and Japan, its containment by the United States has had deleterious effects on foreign trade and investment.

In the light of the above, we may forecast four possible future scenarios for Iran: (a) a continuity of the present paralysis, (b) a democratic evolution from theocracy to democracy, (c) an internal revolution to change to a monarchical, totalitarian, or democratic regime, and (d) a United States invasion and occupation to change the regime

In the short term, the likeliest scenario is a continuation of the present precarious balance between the conservatives and liberals and a consequent "muddling through" of domestic and foreign policies. Judging from other social revolutions in history, it takes at least a generation or two (30 to 60 years) before any fundamental changes are introduced. However, the pace of history has been accelerating. Global communication networks, the vulnerability of Iran in a volatile region, and mounting pressures from a young and restless population may shorten those years. There are 64,000 blogs written in Iran as compared to 50 in Iraq. According to data from the World Bank (2001), Iran has more personal computers per 1,000 persons than other countries in the region. Estimates of online users range from four to seven million and growing. With two-thirds of the population under the age of 30, the impact of the Internet on the future cannot be easily dismissed (Alavi, 2005, pp. 4–5).

Second, the best case scenario for Iran is an evolution from its theocratic to a democratic regime. In 1997, President Khatami voiced high hopes for such an outcome. However, his achievement in liberalizing the political environment without any constitutional changes and his consequent loss of popularity do not augur well. Without a constitutional change in which the ceremonial functions of the chief of state are clearly separated from the effective powers of the head of government, the existing contradictions of dual sovereignty will be exacerbated. The shift to populism and militarism by Ahmadinejad does not promise much for this scenario.

Third, the scenario of an internal revolution to overthrow the regime is not currently popular in Iran. Having experienced a bloody revolution, a devastating war, and persistent regional instability, the Iranian people do not seem prepared to launch yet another revolutionary movement. This does not preclude continuing hit-and-run encounters between demonstrators and the armed forces. But it is significant that the student opposition of the past few years has not been joined by other sectors of the population. Nor has the student opposition gone beyond its limited objectives. Courageous dissenters such as Akbar Ganji have asked for a change of regime to a secular republic. Philosophers such as AbdulKarim Soroush have advocated a separation of mosque and state, but no revolutionary movement has come out of such calls. The main form of resistance in Iran continues to be in keeping with the past, i.e., passive non-cooperation and mounting cynicism. If, however, the regime faces a serious internal threat to its survival, a rightist or leftist coup by the armed forces (e.g., the Revolutionary Guards) is not inconceivable.

Fourth, the scenario of a U.S. invasion and occupation of Iran seemed to be on the agenda of the Bush Administration before the war in Iraq. The mixed results of the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq and their mounting human and material costs have inevitably dampened the enthusiasm in Washington for another imperial operation. As in the past, however, foreign influence and intervention will play a role in the future of Iran.

Whatever happens, Iran will continue to survive as an important historical entity to play its role in the community of nations

Similar to such other ancient historical entities as China, Egypt, and India, Iran has proved its geopolitical durability throughout history. Its art and culture, its literature and philosophy, and its magnificent cuisine have enriched the rest of the world. Globalization forces during the past 2,500 years have brought Iran into the vortex of contradictory political, economic, and cultural forces. From 500 BCE to 1700 CE, Iran served as a major corridor for material and cultural exchanges along the Silk, Spice, and Incense Roads. In a second round of globalization (1500–1945) during the European discovery of the ocean routes and colonization of Asian, African, and Latin American territories, Iran lost much of its intermediary role. Iran's consequent economic decline and political impotence opened up the country to increasing Western penetration. The resurgence of Iran during the twentieth century as a major oil exporter aspiring to national independence, democracy, and modernity is an unfinished journey. However, in an increasingly interdependent world, to strike a balance between national independence of international responsibility, majority rule and minority rights, and cultural tradition and modernity is challenging all countries and nations. In the case of Iran, a diasporic nation of over two million Iranians scattered around the world may contribute to its progress. A general shift of power from Europe and North American to Eurasia is also a factor to consider.

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