Iranian Media

The Paradox of Modernity

Gholam Khiabany

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Preface

The post-revolutionary state in Iran has tried to amalgamate '*Sharia* with electricity' and modernity with what it considers as 'Islam'. While sympathetic to private capital, through quasi anti-capitalist politics, the state began to restrict market relations, confiscated major assets of sections of the Iranian bourgeoisie, and nationalized major aspects of Iran's industry, including its communications system. Since the end of war with Iraq and the start of the process of 'reconstruction', market-driven development and economic policies have been key aims of the state. This process has been anything but smooth. The state's policy has been contested by ongoing popular protest as a result of further fragmentation of the ruling elites and intensification of internal factionalism and disputes over the state's policies, their implications, and the very definition and nature of the Islamic state. This book is an attempt to partially redress the balance of the absence of a critical examination of the media in the region in general and Iran in particular. It examines key aspects of the contradictions and tensions in the Iranian media market, social stratification, and competing forms of 'Islamism'/nationalism by looking at the context of production and consumption of the media in Iran. It provides an overview of the expansion of the Iranian communication system, and by examining the role of the state in this process and the economic realities of the media in Iran, it challenges, on the one hand, the essentialist reading of the Iranian state and media and argues that the nature of Iranian media in general and the press in particular cannot be understood simply in terms of 'Islamic ideology' or the beloved dichotomy of modernization theory: modernity versus tradition. On the other hand it provides a critique of the one-dimensional liberal focus on the repressive role of the state and argues against the misguided view of political economy which sees the centrality of capital, class, and the state to media as irrelevant in the global South. It suggests that the understanding of the entanglement of change and continuity, expansion and control, and the continuing role of the Iranian state remain crucial factors and as central as they have been.

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A special debt of gratitude goes to my colleagues at the Department of Applied Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University. In particular I would like to thank Anna Gough-Yates for being a supportive Academic Leader. I am grateful to Bill Osgerby, Wendy Wheeler, and Paul Cobley, members of Research Capability Fund Committee, for their kind support and for funding some welcomed teaching relief in the last couple of years. Annabelle Sreberny and I wrote an earlier version of Chapter 8 which was published in Naomi Sakr (ed; 2005) *Women and Media in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris). I would like to express my thanks to her for permission to include this chapter as well as her exceptional intellectual and moral support. Her contribution, however, and as should be clear by a quick glance at the references, has been far greater. I thank her for this and for many hours of discussion about media, Iran, and life. Earlier versions of Chapters 5 and 7 appeared in Mehdi Semati (ed; 2008) *Uncovering Iran: Media, Culture, and Society* (New York: Routledge); and David Ward (ed; 2008) *Television and Public Policy: Change and Continuity in an Era of Liberalization* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates), respectively. I am grateful to I.B. Tauris and Routledge for permission to republish these chapters. I am also grateful to Natalie Foster and Max Novick of Routledge who saw the merit in my proposal and encouraged it. I would like to express my appreciation of Erica Wetter, research editor in Humanities at Routledge for her patience and support.

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Introduction

This is a study of the Iranian media, particularly the press, under the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is an attempt to partially redress the balance of the absence of a critical examination of the media in the region as whole and in Iran in particular. It is organized around a number of interrelated themes which account for an important aspect of formation, development/underdevelopment of the media in Iran, namely the interaction between revolution, state, religion, and economy. The main proposition of this study is that the nature of the Iranian media, especially that of the press, cannot be understood simply in terms of 'Islamic ideology' or the beloved dichotomy of modernization theory: modernity versus tradition. It questions the claims that the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the formation of the Islamic Republic represent a distinctly new epoch in Iran's history and that of the Iranian media. It argues that while there have been some changes, the realities of the Iranian media cannot be explained by a simple reference to Islamic essence and tradition. Furthermore, it argues that understanding of the entanglement of change and continuity, expansion, and control, and the continuing role of the Iranian state remain as crucial factors and as central as they have been. In particular these are some of the claims and issues that I intend to address:

CULTURAL ESSENTIALISM, VALUES, AND MEDIA

The media environment in the Middle East altogether, and in Iran in particular, has undoubtedly received little attention. While extremely important in disciplines such as International Relations, until recently the Middle East had rarely figured in scholarly works of mass communication. The same factors which made the Middle East the darling of International Relations have proved a major obstacle in critical thinking about mediated culture in the region: oil, strategic location (before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union), and of course, Islam. As Sreberny (2001) has argued, this is rather astonishing since the paradigm of 'communication and development' (Lerner, 1958) was baptized out of research conducted in the region.

The recent and much-needed writings on the subject of media culture in the region, however, carry the marks and the burden of 'history'. Islam remains the vital and in many cases essential ingredient (Eickelman & Anderson, 1999; Hafez, 2000, 2001; Bunt, 2000). Many commentators claim that Iran (and the region as a whole) is unique; that religion has remained a central and defining feature of the 'Islamic world'; that there is a unified history and identity of Islamic culture; that the study of this 'history' and 'culture' demonstrate, beyond doubt, the incompatibility of Islam and Muslims with modernity; and that for all these reasons the Muslim world remains an 'exceptional' case. Iran and the Iranian Revolution are usually presented as significant examples, and the transfer of power to a new ruling elite has been viewed as the revenge of 'tradition on modernity' (Mowlana & Wilson, 1990).

In such 'reasoning', shared by many in the region, 'culture' (Islam) is discussed to the point of stereotype. 'Islam', as broad, diverse, and historical as it is, constitutes a major explanatory variable. In this scenario, Islam is given an independent life, with its content regarded as uniform regardless of history, broader material and demographic changes, the nature of state and politics and location. How ironic, then, that something which causes so much change (Islam), should itself be, and conveniently so, unchanging. Cultural essentialism of various persuasions is incapable of answering whether it is the existence of strong cultural tradition which prevents economic growth and development, or rather the absence of the latter that blocks the adjustment of 'traditions' and 'values'. If the lack of Protestant Ethics is the main reason for the 'incompatibility' of Islam and modernity, then how can we explain the different economic fortunes of various countries in the region? Is it possible to blame Islam for the riches of Qatar and Kuwait, as well as for the misery of Afghanistan and Sudan? Could it be that it is not Islam which has influenced Iran or Afghanistan, but the other way around? Otherwise how can we explain the difference between the Islamic Republic and the Taliban? This is one of the key concerns of this dissertation and will be discussed in some details in the first chapter.

The above essentialist claims are part of a broader and wholehearted attack on truth, reason, and reality in social sciences. This so-called 'cultural turn' in social theory (Nash, 2001) and the crisis of 'critical project' (Sparks, 1997) is also visible in anti-modernist currents in media studies. Ironically, the 'deconstruction' of social sciences and the attempts at 'dewesternizing' development and media is taking place in the name of those in 'developing countries' that are engaged in bitter struggles against the despotism of some of *their own* 'social heritage, customs or tradition'. Nanda argues: 'While intellectual discourse has taken such a turn towards a "re-enchantment" and subordination of scientific reason to authority of traditions, it should come as no surprise that the religious revivalists have begun to dominate politics in many parts of the non-Western world' (1997:88). .

Interestingly enough, many of the attempts in 'formulating' new and anti-Eurocentric media theory have also taken place in the context of cultural differences, and in particular in that of the new 'orthodoxy' and hyperbole of the 'clash of civilizations'. Much of the current debate revolves around the 'West' and its 'others'. In the case of the Middle East, analysis of media in the region is conceptualized in terms of 'trying to dig into some of the roots of current cultural clashes between the Muslim world and the West' (Schlesinger & Mowlana, 1993:5). The assumption is that it is the sum total of cultural influences which operate to inhibit the development of particular modes of communication. One commentator in the case of 'Asia' expresses a similar sentiment: 'There is increasing awareness that a lack of understanding and acceptance of Asian values is an obstacle to closer relationship between Asia and the West. Gaining a better understanding of Asian values will contribute to deeper, more constructive and more beneficial relationship' (Servaes, 2000:53). Such examples illustrate how wider issues of power struggles and international divisions of labour are reduced to mere matters of 'cultural misunderstandings', and how the 'politics of recognition' has replaced the 'politics of redistribution' (Fraser, 1997). No doubt there is a clash, but it is questionable whether it is a cultural one. In a world stratified into rich and poor, haves and have nots, developed and underdeveloped, North and South, how could there not be a clash? But the 'clash of civilizations' thesis does nothing to highlight the brutal realities of this divide. Indeed, it is an attempt, whether intended or not, to obscure the realities of this polarized world. If 'a distribution conflict tends to become a conflict of identity' (Senghaas, 2001:76) it is only because other channels of struggle for a more dignified life are kept firmly shut.

The real issue is, of course, not a better understanding of other 'cultures', but rather about the 'deconstruction' of the concept of 'totality'. In media studies, as in other branches of the social sciences, the unified and contradictory notion of social totality is therefore replaced by a complex of 'new' agencies and notions. As such, commentators have suggested that we should take seriously certain Eastern approaches to communication which enable 'the reflective transformation of individual subjective interpretation into sacred institutional interpretation of experience' (Thomas, 1997:173). As a result of this 'cultural turn', communications have been increasingly conceptualized in terms of 'Asian', 'Islamic', 'Buddhist', and so on and so forth, with researchers eager to pay attention to *differences* between cultures and how and why different value systems in the East might and can be different from the 'Western' experience.

These new qualifiers are part of a trend that reflects the 'dismantling' of social totality, which has diverted the focus from the mode of production to the 'sacred institutional interpretation of experience'. As historical phenomena, mass media are part of the general development of modern societies and their place; role and function can only be understood and examined in this context. Forms of media do correspond to particular

modes of production, and any attempts for better understanding of 'relations of domination' should come to grips with the integration of media into the *totalities of production and social relations*. It was, and is, this understanding that aligned two modernist approaches against each other: Marxist and Liberal (or pluralist) theory of communication. (See for example Curran, 1991.) While these approaches were crystalized and debated within the context of the Cold War, they owed their existence to much wider economical and historical factors than simply the binary opposition of West and East. Other qualifiers, for example Feminist theory of the media, while injecting fresh ideas into the communications field by pointing out previously neglected areas of study, remained true to the original distinction between Marxist and Liberal media theories (van Zoonen, 1991).

With the collapse of the 'old east', the search for new approaches and theories that could articulate the new condition ('the end of history') and the diversity of the mode and realities of communication in the age of globalization was underway. Among the notable changes and concessions was the introduction of 'The Third Route' by Curran (1991). Other approaches or attempts in response to 'new conditions' went further by adding—unlike before—*essentialist* qualifiers that took *cultural differences* (values, attitudes, beliefs, rituals, and customs) as their starting point. *Islamic* is one such new qualifier, and one of its main advocates is Hamid Mowlana. His arguments, definitions, and evidence will be examined in some detail in the first two chapters. The significance of such claims, while immediately linked to Iran, are not, however, confined solely to that country, nor the region as a whole. Attempts to formulate a particular 'theory' for Iran or Islam are not unique. Neither is 'regional exceptionalism'. This is also crucial for the current debate about 'de-Westernizing' or internationalizing media theory. However, I believe it is crucial to look at the broader reasons for the impact of Mowlana's view and why his analysis of the nature of the media in 'Muslim society' has been taken so seriously. One cannot begin to understand and critique his approach without paying attention to the conditions that have facilitated the impact of his views. In this respect we can point to three main factors.

1) For more than three decades, Hamid Mowlana has researched and written extensively on international communication. He has worked with some of the most prominent and radical researchers in this field, and voiced concerns about the commercial nature of international communication and the dominance of United States and its negative impact around the world. He has held important positions among which was the role of President of IAMCR (now honorary President). In the words of Herbert Schiller (if we are to read praises on the back covers of academic books as more than mere marketing gimmicks), 'Hamid Mowlana for decades has been one of the foremost trackers and analyzers of global communication—their volume, character, and impact. No one is more qualified to

explain these increasingly important and central issues to a wide public'. Clearly he commands a great deal of respect among some of his peers.

2) Mowlana is not only a radical, but as it should be clear by his name, one of the *other*. Interestingly enough these two sides have been kept firmly apart. Never integrate to form a *radical other*. This is no more obvious than in his *Global Communication in Transition: The End of Diversity?* (1996).[1] Nevertheless, it is exactly this *otherness* which has contributed to the impact of Mowlana's idea of Islamic communication. With the growing concerns over 'Western bias' in media theory and its negative parochial impact (Downing, 1996; Sparks, 1998; McQuail, 2001, Curran& Park, 2000), it is understandable that communication scholars seek enlightenment from their specialist colleagues and scholars from different regions other than Western Europe and the United States. Mowlana is well positioned to do just that. He is from Iran, speak its language, and is familiar with some aspects of its culture as well as with other parts of the 'Islamic world.' He has access to fantastic and wide-ranging resources that for a number of reasons, including political and linguistic ones, are not available to other academics. This factor is well recognized by many. Mosco (1996:39) has expressed his gratitude to Mowlana for reminding him of a notable omission, that of development of social sciences in the Arab world and especially the work of Ibn Khaldun. Others (Nordenstreng, 1995) have found his model of Islamic ethics 'intriguing'. Other commentators, by referring to Mowlana's work, have pointed to the differences in understanding of media and media ethics in non-Western cultures.

> In Hamid Mowlana's essay, we find a novel and valuable critique of western concept of civil society. As early as the late nineteenth century, the distinction between state and civil society—which is resisted in Islamic society—was propagated in the Islamic world, particularly in the Middle East, by individuals who promoted modernization along the lines of Western institutions. In the Islamic world, which constitutes one fourth of the global population, the reductive concept of civil society and the modern nation-state were confronted with the Islamic notion of "ummah" (religo-political community), with its inseparable politics and its unity of spiritual and temporal powers. This resulted in a crisis of legitimacy that has continued to entangle the Islamic countries ever since. (Splichal et al., 1994:17)

Mowlana himself stretches this idea of 'otherness' even further. In an editorial written jointly with Schlesinger for a special edition of the journal *Media, Culture and Society*[2] on Islam and Communication, it is argued:

> In this issue, for increasingly obvious reasons, we have taken the risk of trying to dig into some of the roots of current cultural clashes between the Muslim world and the West. Thus, for the first time in a major,

> Western English-language media and cultural studies journal, we have attempted to put together a collection of analyses of communication and culture by Muslim Scholars and have also sought comments from a leading politician and a prominent religious leader. Our focus, naturally, is upon conceptions of communication as *they are theorized by Muslims*. (1993:5)

Linked to this is one of the key ideas in Mowlana's works, namely that we need to understand other cultures and systems of communications on their own terms: 'social behaviour and societal transformations in any system must, indeed, be understood and planned on their own terms' (1990:xiii). One need not be a specialist in order to see what is wrong with this dangerously illiberal idea of *they are not like us*.

First of all it is absurd to claim that European writers have not contributed, or indeed are incapable of contributing, to our knowledge about 'others'. Second, this is a call for abandoning all modes and tools of social enquiry in the name of 'cultural relativism'. In this view the normal tools of social science research cannot and should not be applied in such a context. As Mowlana himself has expressed: 'We are now witnessing an unprecedented phenomenon of societal transformation everywhere which can not be explained merely by orthodox political and economic theories of social change' (ibid.:xi). The so-called 'non-western' social sciences do apparently operate with different criteria, and the only way to assess them is not through employing 'western' conceptual categories or even in comparison with the 'Western' social science, but 'on their own terms'! Thirdly, it is very much open to debate to what extent it is really possible to try and 'understand' other models on *their own terms*. At the best of times such forms of 'understanding' are nothing but patronizing. In this form of 'cultural relativism', reality and truth correspond with a particular set of beliefs rather than with the material world that exists independently of our beliefs and values.

Finally, it is important to remember that the aforementioned edition of *Media, Culture and Society* brought together five contributions from scholars and politicians from two countries: Iran and Pakistan. Can this be representative of 'communication as . . . theorized by Muslims'? The absurdity of this claim will be more obvious if we make one simple substitution: Christianity for Islam. Surely no one could bring together five articles by contributors from Italy and Greece, or for that matter any two European countries, and pretend this is the conception of communication as *theorized by Europeans*, or even worse, *Christians*. Such people would, without doubt, be declared mad. Therefore, it is a perfectly legitimate question to ask: why is it possible to talk of 'Muslims' and the 'Islamic world' in such a way?

3) The answer to the preceding question is also the third reason for Mowlana's impact and the uncritical acceptance of his view by some

communication scholars. His *Reverse Orientalism* fits the European imagination of the mystic, exotic, and different Middle East. Throughout his works, as I try to demonstrate later, what we see is an attempt, with the aid of some pseudo-sociology, to establish a clear demarcation between the essence of Western culture and the essence of Islamic culture. Mowlana, with some justification, accuses the 'West' and 'Western scholars' and 'media' of lacking clear and detailed knowledge of the Middle East. By reducing its complex culture and history to a few familiar stereotypes, these scholars refuse to make sense of struggle, and of complex political and cultural events and movements, by simply stamping such processes with the label of 'Fundamentalism'. He is also justified in his complaint that much of the contribution of the 'Islamic world' in various branches of the sciences, humanities and in technological innovations is neglected.

Thus we have every right to expect a thorough examination and historical explanation of the media in the region. Instead what is offered is the same sense of uninterrupted history, unified history of Islamic culture and identity, and an undifferentiated 'Muslim' mass, with no distinct social locations and groupings and, certainly, no class, gender, ethnicity, regional, cultural, and lingual differences. Apparently *Muslim Society* never went through restructuring or changes. There have been some minor interruptions, of course, and some differences of opinion, but the 'real Islam' has always come through. Mowlana, again and again, aligns the Islamic Society Paradigm against the Information Society Paradigm and produces not only a unified history of a singular Islamic identity, but also that of a Western one. This is of course necessary. Writing on Islamic Studies and European Imagination, Al-Azmeh has stated,:

> To this schematization of the self corresponds the schematism of the other. Each of these schemata is a topic which is invariably called forth to schematize things that are observed Islamic. Thus there are "Islamic cities" unlike all other cities, "Islamic economies" to which economic reason is inapplicable, "Islamic polities" impenetrable to social sciences and political sense, "Islamic history" to which normal equipment of historical research is not applied. Facts are disassociated from their historical, social, cultural and other contexts, and reduced to this substantive Islamism of European Imagination. (1993:139)

Islamic communication as 'theorized' by Mowlana offers no real alternative to this 'savage essentialism'. By relegating politics and serious political questions into a realm of 'culture', by dehistoricising and decontextualizing 'culture', by elevating text (holy books) over context, and ideas and the social imaginary over material and social realities, such claims to 'difference' not only suppress the internal differences within such perceivedly singular 'cultures', but more significantly they overlook the real and more pressing 'differences' which need our urgent attention. It is then no surprise

that scholars affiliated with a notion of Islamic communication give very little analysis of the struggle for control over the interpretation of 'culture', or of communicative resources, or of the system of social stratification, or indeed of the fact that in Iran, as elsewhere, cultural and communication goods are available only at a price, and that access to them is 'regulated' and restricted by limits on the amount of disposable income. Such assertions of cultural differences, as the case of Iran demonstrates, also leave the door open for manipulation of political power and repressive measures used indiscriminately against Muslims and non-Muslims, secular or religious, natives or non-natives.

Such attempts are part of a much broader historical trend to Islamicize social sciences and sociology (Zaidi, 2006; Gole, 2000) and to effect a reconstruction of knowledge from a 'Muslim' perspective. That the Iranian Revolution, or political developments in the region, cannot be understood outside of the context of imperialism is an undeniable fact (Ali, 2006). But what is also beyond doubt is the fact that the claim of regional or religious 'exceptionalism' is only one part of a 'global cultural system that itself calls for the essentializing of local truths, which takes place first by Orientalist discourses and second by the 'going native' of the natives themselves' (Zaidi, 2006:79). The quest for 'authenticity', assertions of cultural difference and attempts to formulate a 'native' conception of knowledge, all of which tend to reduce all forms of 'cultures' and 'identities' into one 'singular' and inclusive 'culture' and 'identity', are a way of painfully trying to show how universal theories of culture and society do not fit these singular spaces/cultures. Such an interpretive or explanatory strategy is not the preserve of Islamists. This process of nativization, as Dirlik reminds us, 'reveals the impossibility of sustaining reified, holistic notions of traditions, which already have been transformed by modernity, and appear most prominently as sites of conflict between different social interests and different visions of the modern' (2003:286).

Effectively these 'revivals' have provided a non-Western alibi to legitimate modernization. But, as Dirlik (2002) has stated, the revival of 'tradition' is only one revival in the turbulent and contradictory developments of recent years. The other (and possibly more significant) has been the passionate enthusiasm for the technological products of the capitalist West, as well as a form of 'Orientalism' that blames all of the global South's problems on the persistence of 'tradition'.

THE STATE AND THE MEDIA: A 'BLIND SPOT'

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. Within media studies the continuing debate about the role/intervention of the state, especially around the fields of cultural

policy, political communication, censorship, and democratic processes, is an indication of the significance of the role of the state for cultural and symbolic production. 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 the increased 'undermining' of the role of the state.

In relation to the press, such a severe dichotomy of 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, and despite its rhetorical use over time to further the cause of a '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 legislations dealing with 'private' matters (custody, childcare, divorce, inheritance, etc.). In the case of the press (media) in particular, separation from the 'state' remains an *ideal* even in the most advanced capitalist societies, including the United States, Britain, Germany, and of course Italy, which currently represents a unique example, and possibly an *ideal* model, for many modern states of the close link between the state and the media.

The state has undoubtedly been one of the main blind spots of media theory. In much of the dominant thinking about the media and society in general, and the perceived role of the media as an agent of democratization, the state has mostly been seen as a problem and barrier, or irrelevant. In liberal conceptualizations of the media, the state and in particular any form of state intervention is usually counterpoised against 'civil society' and the free circulation of ideas. This has prevented serious engagement with the state. The classic example in this case is the understanding of the role of the media as merely a political one. The main 'textbook' which tried to articulate the different models of the media and their relationship with political power is rather well known: *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert et al., 1963). The aim of the book was to go beyond 'concrete conditions' and historical specificity to offer a 'timeless' and 'universal' framework to examine and understand the role, uses, and abuses of the media. The 'four theories' were 'authoritarian', 'libertarian', 'social responsibility' and the 'soviet communism'. This book was a very specific 'political project' but nevertheless became the standard 'textbook' in the field with the identified typologies quoted widely by other writers (Nerone, 1995; Sparks, 1998). Some commentators (Curran & Park, 2000) still wonder why this book was taken so seriously in the first place. One of the main problems with the *Four Theories of the Press* was not the rather obvious fact that it tried to articulate the conditions of the Cold War, nor its crude generalization of all 'theories', or even the very fact that they were mainly thinking and writing about 'two'

theories (Soviet versus Libertarian, read United States), but as Nerone et al. 1995:18) have argued, that it offered *one theory* with four examples. Siebert et al. tried to support that one theory (liberal theory of the press). It was the stick that was used to measure other examples. The U.S. press model (or to be precise what the authors perceived to be the U.S. model or, as they put it, *our* system), like the United States itself, became the centre of universe.

Despite its remarkable parochialism, the book has been used as an explanatory framework for 'comparative' analysis of media systems across the world. Many critics, despite expressing concerns and objections took the 'framework', and whilst only partially correcting it added to the 'theories' (McQuail, 1993). Nerone suggests that in *Four Theories* there is a very simple idea: either the press is free from the government or it is a branch of it. In this sense one of the key problems with this book was not the *four*, but the *theories*. And in these theories what was absent was any clear theoretical engagement with the question of the state and the fact that these communication systems (and not theories) did co-exist in the same country, including in the United States (Nerone, 2004). What's more, the book took for granted the western model of the media (or theory) and neglected the disparity in circulation of these theories between nations and countries. However, the key problem with the 'four theories', as Bourdon (2004:95) has argued, was that it originated in political philosophy and neglected economics. In this model 'freedom from state control is equated with freedom of enterprise, democracy with capitalism. It leaves no room for a free market/unfree media situation'.

Lack of clear engagement with the question of the state in subsequent analyses of international communication has prompted Alhassan to label the state as a 'blind spot' in the literature of international communication. He argues that a survey of the existing literature on 'development and communication shows an absence of a theory of the state' (2004:56). In his view, if modernization theory had a very limited sense of the state, then the tendency of the cultural imperialism school to regard the unequal distribution of resources and poverty within the broader global framework of imperialism has led to this 'theoretical blind spot' (57–60). The 'Modernization school', while paying attention to issues of 'economic development' and 'planning', failed to mention the nature of the 'planners' or the 'developers.' When they tried to engage with the 'local state' (as in the case of Lerner's discussion of the Middle East) their focus was on 'individual leaders and not the state as a machinery of power with distributive ability that responds to various forces that it represents' (ibid.). The liberal framework that sees the state as weak, authoritarian, and as a barrier to development was certainly the main factor in such neglects.

Undoubtedly, the emphasis of cultural imperialism on the power of capital and the process of commodification as the starting point for analysis of international communication was justified. Yet the state as

an instrument of the ruling class and an appropriator of existing social relations in many countries should not be ignored. The neglect of social dynamics that does shape the constitutive role of the state and the role of the local state at national and international levels can only weaken any serious analysis of the entire social totalities of capitalist societies. If modernization and cultural imperialism failed to pay sufficient attention to the state, then globalization theory has actively justified the irrelevance of the state in the 'global age'. The dominant approach in 'global media debate' has focused on new technologies, deterritorialization, and the decline of the nation-state, and on the power of cultural identity. The more critical version of this approach has never dismissed the power of capitalism's drive for profit and accumulation. However, it sees this as only one of the multiple forces that produces and shapes the current complex and new forms of modernity (Tomlinson, 2003).

However, many studies illustrate the continuing significance of states, either by demonstrating the role of national political forces, most notably that of the government, in shaping the media or, as is quite common in many debates about globalization, by taking a 'national' case as evidence (Herman & McChesney, 1997; Morris & Waisbord, 2001; Artz & Kamalipour, 2003; Oren & Petro 2004). The significance of the state in advancing the tenets of the market and of facilitating the globalization of free market capitalism demonstrates that the nation-state clearly still remains the primary actor in engineering political legitimacy. Artz suggests that as individual states re-regulate in favour of big business and set about removing the remaining barriers to international production, distribution and consumption, they are redefining their traditional roles (2003:4–6). It is exactly this re-configuration of state power and role that should be the focus of attention, not the decline of the nation-state, which is ironically celebrated alongside the rise of 'nationalism'.

In the 'age of globalization' the scale of state intervention has not only failed to diminish, but has grown rapidly. This reality can only be ignored if we accept the neo-liberal myth that 'deregulation' is not a form of state intervention. Exaggerated claims for globalization can only reach their conclusion by assuming the existence of a period in which individual national economies were under the control of individual nation-states. Furthermore, and as Downing points out, in stressing the decline of the nation-state, 'we homogenize ridiculously, implying the decline in German or Japanese or Canadian state autonomy vis-à-vis transnational corporations is mirrored by Mali's or Mauritania's'. He asserts that the 'rude good health of the global arms trade certainly indicates that the repressive function of state has lost little of its energy, since they are the prime buyers' (2003.287). As recent imperialist invasions in the Middle East demonstrate, the borders of Afghanistan and Iraq have been declared open, not in the name of a 'borderless world', but to expand and secure the borders of American capital and state even further.

Alhassan argues that in relation to Africa, the role of the state should be seen in the wider historical context of colonization, and argues that the structure of power in 'postcolonies' is shaped not by anticolonial revolutions, but by colonial ancestry. He sees 'development' as the invention of the colonial state to safeguard the continuous colonial relationship. However, under the programme of 'structural adjustment', the role of the post-colonial state has been redefined as it has 'abandoned the rhetoric of use value for the rhetoric of exchange value through its privatization policies. Thus economic fundamentalism has triumphed over the nationalist imperative in which modernization and development resonated with the humanist project of sharing the national cake based on collective need' (2004:.68).

There is certainly value in this kind of survey of existing literature and the very necessary call for a more sophisticated, comprehensive, and historical analysis of the state. However, and in relation to the formation and the role of the state in post-colonies, one must be aware of sweeping historical generalization based on a singular colonial/post-colonial axis. Decolonization was certainly an historical transformation, but we need to consider this particular distinction with many others, including the balance of forces and the particular interests of the ruling classes in each country, to gain a more coherent and comprehensive knowledge of the state. The slippery term of 'postcolonial' obscures not only the very complex nature of colonization and the very fact that many countries were colonized in different ways, but also prevents us from seeing similarities between countries that were colonized and those that were not, as well as the differences between those that were colonized (Ahmad, 1995). The clear differences between India and Pakistan, originally part of the same country before partition, or South Africa and Ghana, urges us not to see 'colonialism' and 'post-colonialism' as a transhistorical subject. What is needed is an historically specific and detailed focus on the formation, development, role, and nature of the state in the South. This is not to give way to the cult of 'heterogeneity' so beloved of 'post' theories. Not colonialism, but the history of capital and the integration of peripheries into the global capitalist system should be the basis for generalization. This is a point to which I will return shortly.

It is precisely for such reasons that this book explores and discusses the role of the state in contemporary Iran and the Iranian media in some detail, with the question of the state remaining a central theme in this discussion. The central Iranian state has played and continues to play a major role in defining national 'culture', promoting certain traditions and heritage and discarding or marginalizing other 'tradition' and trends. It is for this reason, and as will be discussed later, that even 'Islam' and 'Islamic culture' in Iran has come to be defined in a particular way and alongside the interests of the national state (see Chapters 1 and 2). Furthermore, the boundaries of the media, its goals and aims, its limits and content, is regulated and determined by national state and various state institutions. There are various forms of intervention in place, from the implementing of press

law, to guidelines on the structure and working of broadcasting, to a much better known form of state intervention which is censorship. In short the Iranian state, rather unexceptionally, continues to own, legislate, regulate, subsidize, and, of course, suppress the Iranian media. All these issues are addressed in many chapters, notably Chapters 1, 3, 4, and 5. But in much of the 'global South', the state does a little more than this which requires some explanation.

MEDIA, STATE, AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP

The exaggerated claim of the decline of nation-state and the actively continuous neglect of the role of the state by globalization theories lead us to another absent 'category' in much of the recent literature on globalization: class. The history of the state overlaps with the history of class and the role of the state as an instrument of the ruling class should not be ignored. The recent transformation in the role of the state and the revision in its duty as a 'distributor' of surplus value is an indication of the further shift of the balance of power between classes. We should not forget that neo-liberal policies across the globe coincided with anti-democratic labour laws and brutal assaults on organized working-class movements. Any theory of the state and any attempt at understanding the relationship between the state and communication needs to consider not only the expansion of global capitalism, but also the very particular interests of each national ruling class.

This is an important aspect and dimension of the state which is neglected. Much of the recent commentaries on the role of the state have not managed to move beyond the liberal dichotomy of state versus market (civil society) and the sole focus on the repressive role of the state. A recent ambitious attempt by Lee (2001) to 'rethink political economy' is a good example. In trying to advance our understanding of the peculiar context of media in developing countries he makes a distinction between what he calls 'economic' political economy (Marxist and 'top-down') and 'political' political economy (Liberal and 'bottom-up'), and comes to an astonishing conclusion that the 'economic' political economy'—focusing on capital—is useful for analyzing the media environment in advanced capitalist societies, while 'political' political economy (read liberal theory of the press)—focusing on the critique of the state—is a theory for analyzing authoritarian media. He is not a solitary voice, and his call is echoed by many in Iran, and elsewhere by those who still carry the torch of the Modernization school.

There are a number of problems with this sweeping generalization. Lee, himself, has been critical of Orientalism in media theory (2001a), and such a massive generalization is certainly at odds with his call for going beyond the Orientalist discourse. Is it possible to make certain historical generalizations on the basis of 'authoritarian states'? This is only the case if we

ignore their variety, the national interests of the ruling elites and the shape of media institutions and competing ideologies. What similarities exist between the authoritarian state of Libya and that of Singapore; Zimbabwe and China; or even the neighbouring countries Iran and Iraq? The category of 'authoritarian state' in this sense is as useful as 'Islamic', 'Third World', or 'postcolonial' in explaining all together what seems to be very different patterns of social relations, administrative structures, varied interests, different stages of socio-economic evolution, and finally different levels of integration in the world market.

To what extent, we might ask, and if we accept Lee's distinction, is political economy irrelevant in the 'Third World', and Liberal theory irrelevant in advanced capitalist societies? Take the example of the United States, undoubtedly the most advanced capitalist country. The fiasco of the 2000 Presidential 'election' and the subsequent developments (the ruling of the Supreme Court and the control of both houses by the Republicans) had turned the anti-absolutist idea of separation of powers into a farce. At a time in which even the liberalism of Liberal America has been tested to its limit after the tragedy of September 11, and in a period in which the much-celebrated First Amendment has been hijacked by corporate America, the gun lobby, and the Ku Klux Klan, who are keen to 'express' themselves even more, rarely in the past four decades has the United States been so desperate for a simple touch of 'Liberalism'. It is also worth remembering that under the modernizing and, without doubt, 'authoritarian' Turkish state, women got to vote in 1934, long before they did in France, Italy, and Switzerland (Keddi, 1997). It is impossible to make broad generalizations about social relations and the process of democratization in various national contexts. Unless, that is, we reduce the whole set of complex states into a unified 'authoritarian' category, produce a psychological definition of power, and measure 'authoritarian states ' in terms of their use of force.

Secondly, there is a rather 'mechanical' understanding of political and economic developments and the media. The 'complement' that Lee pays to political economy has a touch of 'unripe time' theory about it: political economy is far too advanced to be used for countries with an authoritarian state! There is no mention of internal conflicts within the state and its implication (as in the case of Iran), and no mention of the 'economic' interests of the state or states within the state. Once again we are presented with the dubious Jeffersonian choice of 'state without a press, or press without a state'. Even in the 19th century, Marx claimed that the freedom of the press consisted in its not being a business (Splichal, 2002; Williams, 1983).

Finally, the distinction that Lee makes can only be true if we accept the greatest 'liberal' myth: the separation of politics and economy. One of course cannot dismiss the possibility of historical generalization, but as Ahmad has suggested it can only be made 'on the basis of the insertion into the global capitalist system of societies that had many *other* similarities, despite the fact that one was colonized and the other not; the basis

for generalization in this instance would be the history not of colonialism but of capital itself' (1995:27). It is indeed this 'totalistic' aspect of the political economy which is so crucial in understanding the nature of media developments across the globe, something which Lee rejects on the basis of Schiller and Smythe expressing their support for the repressive Communist regimes. While calls for democracy remain a potent force in much of the global South, a singular and selective focus neglects not only privatization and liberalization of public resources and the commodification of public life, but also imperialist assaults and interventions which are crucial causes of underdevelopment.

It is of course possible to propose that in many countries the state has a relatively autonomous position, not least in the Middle East where the control of national oil as the major source of income puts the state into a driving position.[3] One can also point at the inflated size of the state relative to the size of 'civil society'. Yet one cannot claim, surely, that production and labour, including that of media, is not fundamentally commodified, and equally important, that it is through the agencies of the state that the interest of the bourgeoisie is articulated. One cannot stand for the developing countries to become 'fully developed' in order to apply political economy. The formation of modernity in different parts of the world has taken rather different routes, and in particular in the 'Third World' where, unlike Europe, capitalism did not take its 'natural course' (and never will) because of colonialism and the international division of labour.

Political economy is appropriately grounded in the historical process and armed with adequate tools to generate critical analysis of the development of the mass media in the 'Third World'. It is possible to begin to explain the formation of media and their operation in the South without reducing the debate into a David versus Goliath narrative, without reducing the opposition into 'tradition/authentic' versus 'United States/Europe', and without assuming that the choice is between Eurocentric modernization and reactionary traditionalism. Political economy has never claimed to have a complete and final knowledge, and it is not, by any means, a set of ahistorical and never-changing dogmas. Only through reworking of the key concepts, by going through political economy categories, by vigorously examining new developments and empirical evidence, and by looking beyond the immediate experiences and examples of Europe and the United States can we produce adequate explanations of the current developments and democratization movements across the globe.

A democratic and emancipating theory of the media (and society), and by definition political economy, needs to focus its attention on media workers and citizens, and rely on their experiences, desires, and aspirations for freedom. The collapse of what has been dubbed the 'actually existing socialism' and the process of 'transition' in Eastern and Central Europe has proven beyond doubt that the ideas of 'equality' and 'freedom', which Lee lists as the key concern of political economy and liberalism respectively,

are not entirely two separate concepts. In order to prevent the entrapment of the magnificent energies produced by modernity, one has to go beyond capitalism, and by definition, liberalism.

States are seldom 'unique', abstract or unified. Undoubtedly many states (if not all) remain and are contradictory entities and sites of struggle for many competing interests. That, as we shall see, is true in the case of Iran too, where the state is the biggest media proprietor and is actively trying to juggle various interests within itself and the imperative of the market. The state is embracing private capital but weary of losing control, which despite its claims to bring about 'new order' is actively continuing with previous policies. Finally, we shall see how it has been driving forward while claiming to look back. Media ownership in Iran, therefore, remains as significant as it is in advanced capitalist societies. Examination of such tensions, contradictions, and institutional and economic interests is another significant concern of this dissertation. Chapters on underdevelopment of the Iranian press (3), press and civil society (5), as well as an analysis of developments in Internet and broadcasting (Chapters 6 and 7) examine various aspects of the contradictory role of the state.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE IRANIAN EXAMPLE

Iran, rather than being an exotic and marginalized case, provides a fascinating example and its experience is relevant for international communication. Its history clearly demonstrates the shortcomings of modernization theory as well as its supposed authentic alternative in the shape of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The magnificent uprising of 1979 was a clear illustration, if it ever was in doubt, that 'modernization' would not lead to a 'better life' for the majority and will not bridge the gap between the developed and the underdeveloped. But what of its so-called alternative? To what extent does the experience of Iran over the past two decades provide a framework and template as an 'alternative' route for developing countries? Does it provide ammunition to those who propose a non-socialist alternative to capitalism, or rather to the idea that anything but a radical transformation of the capitalist mode of production (what modernization aimed to bring about) will simply not do? Can we regard the Iranian Revolution of 1979 as the revenge of 'tradition' on 'modernity' and modernization?

The case of Iran is interesting not simply for its never-changing *essence* and its *unique* features. What makes Iran (and so many other countries) interesting is the impact of 'modernity'. Dahlgren (2000) has suggested that in contrast to the 'West', where 'politics' is in decline, in many other parts of the world it is creating a potential of liberation for many who live under state repression. The 'cultural vitality' in the 'Third World' is of course not limited to politics alone, and is reminiscent of more general trends in many other areas including media and art. This reversal of fortune, as Anderson

(1992) so succinctly points out in his illuminating critique of Berman's book (1983), is rather important since what once prevailed in the West now exists in the Third World in general. In contrast to the stuttering Western art and literature in the second part of 20th century, which has failed to produce works of the quality of previous eras, many of the great examples of modernist art that are mentioned by Berman do indeed come from the developing countries. It is the works of South American writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, those that generally appear under the obscure category of 'Commonwealth writers' such as Salman Rushdie, the films of the late Yulmiz Guney of Turkey or, more recently Iranian, Chinese, and Brazilian films, that have become the darlings of world cinema. Such works, as Anderson suggests, are not timeless expressions of an ever-expanding process of modernization, and in general the Third World 'furnishes no fountain of eternal youth to modernism' (ibid.:40). The sparkle in the eyes of a restless little Iranian boy, who for the first time in his life has encountered an escalator, might not last long. But for now, the 'Third World' carries the torch, and with it the passion, excitement, and exhilarating contradictions of modernity.

While in the 'West' people might have been 'amused to death' (Neil Postman) by technology and the media, many in the global South are finding technologies liberating and useful in challenging repression. If mobile phones are partly justified and sold to provide a safety net for young teenage girls to protect them from the dangers of the modern city, the same group in Iran crave them because it offers the 'excitement' and 'dangers' of modern city life, enabling them to talk to the boys across the tables of coffee shops and pizza parlours when physical contact in public is difficult. As many people in the 'West' try to run from hectic, crowded, and polluted cities and pay a fortune for 'especially' designed holidays in remote areas without electricity and television in the search for 'tranquility', more people in the developing world flood the ever-expanding big cities, fascinated by electricity and aeroplanes, mesmerized by Disney products[4], craving five-star hotel holidays in crowded metropolises. And finally, as many hard-earned civil and political rights have come under attack in the West in the past two decades, first in the name of individualism and as part of the general neo-liberal assault on the collective form, including the family, more recently in the name of the fight against terror, the struggle for democratization in Africa, Asia, and South America has taken a new momentum and has intensified like never before. Many hope, perhaps rightly, that the twin sister of modernity, revolution, will make—as it has done for the best part of 20th century—her much-needed appearance in the South. Such a reversal of fortune has even led a Greenpeace activist and a radical commentator to claim that the people might be poor in the Third World, but they are far happier.[5]

I have no intention of making big assumptions here, and I do realize that there is a degree of exaggeration in the above comparisons. One can of

course recognize that Berman's assumption about the 'experience of modernity', which he claims is 'shared by men and women all over the world', is not entirely accurate. In the real and material world there are clear disparities in 'sharing' the experience of modernity. Proletariats and bourgeoisies, women and men, black and white, and North and South do not 'share' the experience of modernity in the same way and with equal measure. What Lerner later described as the 'revolution of rising frustration' was indeed a reflection of unequal distribution of 'experience of modernity'. The 'hatred' for modernity in the Middle East, as Ayubi (1991) has suggested, was the proverbial case of sour grapes: it wasn't because the aeroplane had replaced the camel, but because they could not get on the aeroplane.

However, the increased marginalization of the pre-capitalist mode of production, feudal and patriarchal relations (see in particular the chapter on women's press), increased urbanization, literacy, and the rapid spread of technological and organizational changes, have all contributed to an eruption of new and dynamic energies and new forms of struggles. Sections of the Iranian ruling elites' have tried to accommodate changes which are not peculiar or particular to Iran by offering some form of re-evaluation and reassessment of the entanglement between 'Islam' and 'modernity', painfully trying to reconcile 'Islam' with 'democracy' and human rights (see Chapter 5 on debating civil society). In Iran, as in the rest of the South, capitalism is increasingly reshaping the state/society in its own image, and the values it has generated (the good/revolutionary as well as the bad/exploitative) are becoming more diffused. The same forces are also reshaping the media environment in the country like never before.

Iran provides a window to examine such very real and common global trends in the operation of global capital, the transformation of the state, the increased privatization of public resources, and the divide between the haves and have-nots. It is because of such contradictions and energies that in my approach and in my analysis I have favoured 'agency' and 'social relations' as the most important starting point in the analysis of the Iranian press. Much of the dominant official 'history' of Iranian society and media before 1979 revolved around the 'glorious' heritage of kings as the guardian of nation (*mellat*). That 'tradition' was replaced in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution, with yet another tradition that claimed that if there ever was a recognizable pattern in Iranian history it was the 'glorious' Islam and Islamic heritage safeguarded by its own 'imagined community' of *umma* (community of faithful). My intention is to locate these arguments in their wider historical context, explore and probe why and to what extent various ideologies (religious and political) have played their part, and to demonstrate why such 'traditions' do only tell part of the story. In so doing I do challenge the very basic assumption in both the modernization school and Islamism which frame the church–state conflict as a dichotomy between tradition and modernity, with religion usually falling into the former category. I also suggest that the Islamic Republic

of Iran, rather than embodying any 'distinctive' pattern of development, seems to be inevitably experiencing the same processes and forces that cracked open and challenged the monarchy. The history of the Iranian media in general, and the press in particular, is also the history of this process, challenges, and social forces.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

As I have already stated, three interrelated issues are significant in relation to the development and the state of media in Iran: religion, state, and economy. I aim to explore the entanglement between these elements (with some other subsidiary and relevant issues) in Iran since 1979. First it is important to examine ways of understanding Iran, its religion and state, and where the media fits in; and, second, to examine, case by case, the central issues and evidence that might arise out of our analysis and to assess the claims of the centrality of the 'culture' and 'uniqueness' of the Iranian media. What changes, for example, have taken place in Iran and its media since 1979? How can we explain them? How can we assess such changes and what can we conclude and learn about Iran and its media under the Islamic Republic of Iran?

Chapter 1 begins this process of examination and evaluation by reviewing the idea of 'Islamic exceptionalism' as an adequate model for analyzing the realities of Iran. It presents Islamic exceptionalist theories in their intellectual context, the background to the key and central arguments over the clash of 'modernity' and 'tradition' is outlined, and then after looking at the diversity of experience and practices of 'Islam', it moves to a detailed examination of the disintegration of the Iranian state in 1979 and the formation of the Republic. In countries where the state is considered as the source of all evil and is ultimately the decisive point of concentration for all power (including symbolic power), no analysis of the media is complete without a critical engagement with the structure of the state and how it lends support for appropriating various political and economic interests. The case of Iran represents a fascinating example since from the start the Islamic Republic of Iran began to establish itself by relying on conflicting class interests and two opposing models of polity: a republic of equal citizens and a theocratic regime based on the rule of supreme jurist (*velayat-e faghih*). It highlights the limitations, contradictions, and dilemmas of the Iranian state.

Chapter 2 deals with a more specific question of the possibility of an 'Islamic' theory of communication. It prepares the ground for a critique of a 'particular' theory of communication, by reviewing recent calls for internationalizing media theory and the poor record of cultural studies in engagement with religion. It then outlines what is usually meant by 'Islamic communication' and proceeds by offering critical examination of a number of texts, in particular Mowlana's works, that have proposed

the possibilities of a particular and singular 'Islamic' perspective on communication and its fundamental differences with what has been perceived as a singular 'Western' theory of communication. Since the whole concerns of this thesis revolve around the media environment in Iran, this chapter therefore examines the idea of Islamic communication theory with specific reference to the broader realities of the Iranian experience.

Having examined the shortcomings of 'Islamic exceptionalism' and 'Islamic' communication theory, I then examine the realities of the Iranian press. Chapter 3 presents an historical account and analysis of the development of the Iranian press. I do suggest that empirical evidence demonstrates the dynamics of dependent development, and the harsh political and economic realities of Iran are among the most important determining factors that have contributed to the development of the Iranian press. The first section of the chapter reviews the expansion of the press in Iran since 1979 and outlines the key demographic changes in Iran which have contributed to the expansion of and increased demand for cultural commodities. It reviews the limitations of this development and access to media in comparison with other countries in the region. The second section of the chapter assesses the importance of media ownership, key players in the press market, and the significant role that the Iranian state plays in the market. The key concern of this chapter is to move beyond the singular focus of liberal theory of the media on the repressive role of the state in developing countries.

Chapter 4 continues with the focus on the state, but this time by examining the measures to curb and control the press. It deals with the relationship between press and politics, their roles in advancing ideas of democratic systems and values, and suggests the history of the Iranian press cannot be separated from the broader history of struggle for power in Iran. It examines in particular different key stages of the struggle for power in Iran from 1906 to present day and demonstrates that one stubborn 'tradition' that has remain alive and visible thoroughout Iranian history is despotism. There are more elements of continuity than change, and the fate of the press and the fate of social movements in Iran have risen and fallen in tandem.

Chapter 5 analyzes the debate about civil society, the role of contemporary intellectuals and the nature of the struggle around a free press that has been publicly raging inside the Islamic Republic since 1997. The chapter begins by examining the notion of civil society. It looks at the background to this debate in Iran and the factors contributing to its centrality in the political debates of 1990s. It then examines various definitions and approaches, debating the notion and various responses to such debates inside the Islamic Republic. By analyzing the background and the context of the emerging reform movement it begins to examine the relationship between media and state and suggests that the new political space that emerged after 1997 was inextricably linked with the state and, as the continuing struggle over the press demonstrates, the arena of competition among various social, economic, and regional interests.

Chapter 6 engages with the dilemmas and contradictions of the Islamic state and its manifestation in cultural policies as related to the press and the Internet. The first section of the chapter examines the place of the media in general and the press in particular in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. It reviews various press laws, definitions and limits of the press, and various agencies involved in regulating the press market. The second section of the chapter examines the state's attempt to regulate and control the Internet, and how new technologies are posing same of the same old problems, by highlighting the contradictory nature of the state, factionalism, and existing interests in the state and society.

Chapter 7 highlights existing similar dilemmas and contradictions in the case of broadcasting. It begins by examining the introduction and development of television in Iran from that of a private enterprise to a tool in the hand of state as an agent of 'modernization', control, and national 'unity' under monarchy. It then looks at the struggle for control of broadcasting under the Islamic Republic in different post-revolutionary stages. A central concern of this chapter is to assess the significance of changes in state policy and in particular dialectical tension between the 'logic of capital' and the 'logic of territory' in the last decade, in which the Iranian state has actively sought to expand and privatize the broadcasting networks but has remained fearful of private capital and private television channels.

No critical discussion of any kind in the region can avoid the significance of gender. Chapter 8 challenges both Islamist and Orientialist approaches, which coincide in seeing Islam as the driving force of history in so-called Muslim society and hence as the determining factor in the role women are allowed to play in public life. It examines the dynamic relationship between women's presence in politics and the workforce and their changing expectations. It explores how Iranian women have used the press to question gender constructions and gender relations and to call for radical rethinking of law, policy, and the Constitution. Setting women's decisive role in the post-1997 reform movement in context, it considers the wider impact of the women's press and female journalists, and their resilience in the face of successive clampdowns on their media. It provides a detailed case study which highlights the key arguments of previous chapters.

1 Religion, State, and Culture
Beyond Islamic Exceptionalism

> It is merely in the night of our ignorance that all alien shapes take on the same hue.
>
> Perry Anderson

INTRODUCTION

In the current political climate, it is hard to mention religion (or, to be more precise, Islam) without bringing to mind the new orthodoxy of the 'clash of civilizations' which is trying to explain much of the world's political turmoil in terms of a clash between the West (secular modernity) and Islam (religious tradition). In trying to probe the reasons for the stubbornness of 'tradition' in many parts of the world, most notably in the Middle East, the reasons for the 'backwardness of Islamic civilization', and to explain (to use the title of one of Bernard Lewis's recent books, 2002) 'What went wrong?' earlier in the region's history, Islam is treated as a coherent, self-sealed and self-explanatory culture, and as the main obstacle in front of Islamic countries seeking full membership in the exclusive club of 'modernity'. Increasingly and in the aftermath of the tragedy of September 11 the question of religion is seen as a decidedly 'Islamic' question; and culture (reduced to Islam) is viewed as the primary factor behind social existence and political action. Lewis and co. and their enthusiastic followers are not alone in this overtly exaggerated assumption of cultural essentialism. This ends up in defining societies in terms of some deeply embedded cultural ethos, and lining up a rational Occidental culture against a rigid, stagnant Oriental culture and religion. The response in the 'Islamic world' to this vision of historical development has been twofold. Many share the basic assumption of Lewis and others and have begun the process of 'self-examination', mapping the religious/cultural traits as the key reason for failure in their engagement with modernity (Matin-Asgari, 2004). Others, while challenging the Eurocentrism of 'Islamic Studies' and pointing out the neglect in recording the contribution of 'Islamic Civilization' in science and economy, do share the basic assumption of 'uniqueness' of 'Islamic' culture and civilization. Hamid Mowlana belongs to this latter camp.

This chapter examines Mowlana's view in the context of the evolution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the dynamics of the relationship between the Iranian state, economy, and society. It argues against the 're-enchanted'

conceptualization of Iranian society. The first section of this chapter examines Mowlana's claim of the passing of modernity and the key reasons for 'Islamic exceptionalism'; it then moves on to critique the idea of a 'singular' coherent and never-changing Islam with particular reference to Iran. The final section of this chapter provides detailed examination of the Iranian Revolution and the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and its contradictory nature and dilemmas. It suggests, contrary to Mowlana's claim, that it was not an Islamic aspiration or ideology which radicalized the revolutionary process, but instead that the Iranian Revolution was a product of the contradictions of combined and uneven capitalist development which the Islamic state has failed to address. It further illustrates that despite rhetorical differences, the anti-modernist reading of the Iranian Revolution, state, and society, is not only inaccurate and cannot represent the true picture of realities of capitalist development in Iran, but also owes a lot more to modernization theory and cultural essentialism than it cares to admit.

THE PASSING OF MODERNITY?

The central arguments in Mowlana's writing are on distinct and major differences between Islamic culture and polity and that of variant modern political systems and approaches. Mowlana (1990, 1996) informs us that the concept of the nation-state is alien and diametrically opposed to the fundamental principles and teaching of Islam. In contrast to the nation-state, which is a political state, the Islamic state is a 'God fearing' state, founded on *Quran*, the *Sunnah* (tradition), and the *Shari'a* (Islamic law). In this system there is no separation between public and private, religion and politics, spiritual, and temporal powers. Unlike the state-nation model, in the Islamic state, sovereignty belongs not to the people but rests with God. Islamic community also differs from the Western notion of community. Here Islamic community, *umma* (community of the faithful) is formed on the basis of their beliefs in unity of god, universe, and nature. In such a community, race, nationality, and ethnicity have no relevance. If this is the case, as Mowlana assures us that it is, little wonder that modernity came into conflict with Islam with its faith in Allah, the ultimate source of all meaning and existence. The failure of modernity in Muslim countries indicates the triumph of Islam.

> The "Passing of traditional society" and the "modernization of the Middle East", which Daniel Lerner had predicted two decades earlier, turned out to be the Islamic revolution, which set the seal on *Iran's historic referendum designed finally to rest the Western paradigm*, and with it, its main agent, the Pahlavi dynasty, which had ruled Iran for over a century. In short, The Iranian case provided empirical evidence of the demise of the model of "modernization" through industrialization; however, its

> most profound impact is the impetus it has given to a number of indigenous developmental strategies and policies not only in Iran but in the Islamic world as a whole. (1990:28, my italics)

According to Mowlana, modernization and modernity have not led to an erosion of Islamic essence. The *historic referendum* in Iran is provided as a clear example. Modernity and its associated elements—nation-state, industrialization, secularization, and nationalism—is incompatible with Islam. This is one of those hallowed clichés that obscures our understanding of the structure of the state and of religious institutions in pre-modern Middle East. The idea of the unity between state and Islam and a unified Islamic state has existed for many centuries, but only as 'ideal', and as Lapidus (1987) suggests, most Muslim societies do not conform to this. From the very beginning the separation of state and religious institutions became the norm. In the pre-modern Middle East two alternative concepts of Islamic Society emerged: the Caliphate that integrated the state and the community, and the Sultanate, which ruled over the quasi-independent religious associations. In both cases, however, the very concept of an Islamic state 'was ambiguous because pre-modern state inherited and maintained a cultural identity, a social organization, political institutions and a system of economy defined in non-Islamic terms' (ibid.:93).

In the modern Middle East the response to European penetration varied and depended on the different historical routes that each Muslim state had taken. In Turkey, where there existed a very strong tradition of state domination over religious communities, the modernizers led the way almost unopposed. In Iran where the Safavid dynasty (1500–1722) made *Shi'a* the official religion, and after the suppression of other branches of Islam gave the country a homogeneity unknown in other 'Muslim' countries, *ulema* played a major role in resisting foreign domination. The *ulema* that were used to give legitimacy to the state began to call for their independence by the end of the Safavid dynasty and for the first time claimed that they were the true leaders of the community. And it was their historical coalition with the Iranian merchants, whose interests had been damaged by limited modernization, that proved so crucial in making the *ulema* a decisive political force.

Mowlana's works are mainly based on a very selective reading of Iranian 'history', as well as on examples and arguments of a few selected Iranian writers. Other names, such as Ibn Khaldun, are thrown in to give them more legitimacy.[1] Given the fact that Iran in many ways is a rather different country from other 'Muslim countries' and that there is an undoubted diversity amongst the Islamic world, Mowlana's works suffer from exaggerated generalization and, therefore, neglect awkward elements, which do not fit in. This element of generalization is striking even for Mowlana. Consider the differences in two of Mowlana's works. In *The Passing of Modernity* (1990) and in the spirit of the Islamic Republic of Iran's main

slogan, 'Neither East, nor West' (*na sharghi, na gharbi*),[2] Mowlana engages with both Marxist and Liberal models of society. Indeed there is a long overview and critique of both models and incompatibility of these to that of Islam, which offers an alternative vision. This book was published in 1990, and one can assume that most of it was perhaps written before the wave of democratic revolutions in East and Central Europe. Only three years later the picture was simpler, and the battle was only between the paradigms of the Islamic and the Information Society (Mowlana, 1993). As should be clear, events and developments of these three years had a profound effect on Mowlana's writings, yet we are led to believe that the essence of Islam, Islamic culture, as well as Iranian society have remained the same for well over a century.

There is a view shared by many, Muslims and others, that in countries where Muslims form the majority, Islam is incompatible with modern culture and, even more, with modernization. With the creation of the Islamic Republic in Iran and the spread of Islamism as a dynamic mass movement in some Muslim countries this view has apparently gained the reputation of being irrefutable. The events of the past two decades have revived the idea of Islamic 'exceptionalism' and have prompted local apologists of 'cultural authenticity', orientalists as well as 'third worldists', to reject European models of polity. As should be clear, one factor that gives this view its apparent immutable quality is the breadth and variety of the people holding it. Approached from different methodological routes and pursuing different aims, they range from racist groups in the West and the most rabid imperialist circles to some of the most radical political and intellectual circles in Muslim countries (Al-Azmeh, 1993; Zubaida, 1993). The reasons for the existence of 'Islamic exceptionalism', whether 'cultural' (Islam) or socio-economic factors, need to be explained, and so do the reasons for regular references to 'Islam' in a political sense. How 'unique' is the Islamic 'tradition'? And to what extent is such a tradition the only major obstacle to genuine democratization of the 'region'?

If the Middle East is exceptional, then the key question is how, and relative to what? (Waterbury, 1994) The socio-economic profiles of many Middle Eastern countries do not differ from many non-Islamic developing countries in Asia or Latin America. They have gone through similar economic and political crises, are subject to the same 'structural adjustment', civil wars, transformations of 'values', and so on. The 'ambivalent bourgeoisie' (Waterbury, 1994; Katouzian, 1998) and the existence of a weak bourgeoisie is again not unique to this region. What is not so peculiar either is the size of the state in the economy and how a big proportion of the middle classes in the region are heavily dependent upon the state. The 'arbitrary' nature of the state in Iran, however, as Katouzian (1998) suggests, is not unique in 'Islamic' lands and can be seen for example throughout pre-Islamic Iran. The debate about the size of the state to 'civil society' ignores the 'exceptions' in exceptionalism, namely some democratic experiments in

the region, as well as the fact that in many countries of the region, the state has been the engine behind modernization and privatization. The history of the development of the last three decades in the region (as well as many other countries in the world) illustrates this trend.

Waterbury (1994) identifies other major reasons for this regional exceptionalism: Islam, patriarchy and oil. The gender politics is significant, and I will return to it in a separate chapter. The oil however is not simply important because of 'external' factors and pressures, but in terms of taxation and representation. The argument usually runs like this: there can be no representation without taxation, and no accountability if citizens are not directly financing the state. It is a fact that many of the states in the region do control massive natural resources and therefore rely less on tax revenue. But as Waterbury (1994) and Luciani (1994) have shown, the Middle East is not undertaxed by any means, certainly not when compared with other developing regions. According to Waterbury, between 1975 and 1985 tax revenue as a proportion of GNP in the Middle East was twice as much as in Latin America. In 1990 the tax revenue as a percentage of total revenue in Algeria was 46.9, in Egypt 53.6, in Tunisia 76.5, in Syria 74.2, and in Iran 74.2 (Luciani, 1994:139). It is also worth remembering that heavy taxation in many East Asian countries seldom made the states in this region more accountable and less authoritarian. In fact the Middle East cannot claim to have a monopoly over the idea of 'regional exceptionalism'.

We are, therefore, left with the 'cultural' (Islamic) definition of exceptionalism. The assumption again is on the fundamental differences between the 'West' and 'Islam'. The 'West' for a number of reasons has come to be identified with a set of principles that according to Islamic advocates in politics should be rejected by all Muslims. These include:

> first the ideas of people's sovereign will (contrary to God's sovereignty); second, parliaments 'legislating without reference to Allah' (contrary to the completeness and perfection of *shari'a*, the Quranic Law); third, the equality of believers and non-believers on behalf of tolerance (thus ignoring the search for the good, and war against evil); fourth, equality between men and women, leading to integration of Arab society and its penetration by the western virus; fifth, political pluralism, putting on an equal footing the true 'party of God' (the only occurrence, incidentally, where the term 'party' may legitimately be used) and the parties emanating from state-engineered political 'participation'; and finally, an objectionable concept of majority rule based on the false idea that issues of right and justice can be quantified and that greater numbers of votes can be translated into moral position. (Lena, 1994:55)

Such arguments over a divide in values and principles is based on assumptions of a unified and ahistorical 'West' as well as 'East'. The 'differences' between West and East and its consequences for liberty, human

rights, and democracy, as well as for the media, loses its significance if we remember that

> European values, in so far as they refer unreservedly to all humans and are thus mass oriented, have only relatively recently been accepted in the Western world as a matter of course. In this respect, Europeans today think and feel differently from their predecessors in Europe's long 'pre-history'. It should especially be remembered that the practical application of these values, in such institutional mechanism as form the basis of the democratic and social constitutional state, has been only very recent. 'European values' thus exist thanks to a modern and highly extraordinary set of circumstances. (Senghaas, 2001:7)

Such values are of general relevance and are therefore universal. As Senghaas maintains, this is not true because they are 'from' Europe and the superiority of Western civilization, but simply because all societies in the process of modernization are confronted with them. Iran provides a fascinating testing ground for such assumptions, and I will return to these shortly. However, it is important to examine the theoretical shortcomings of Islamic exceptionalism. The general or methodological problem with Islamic exceptionalism is that, directly or by implication, it gives an unnecessarily important role to the agency of thought in social change. Those who subscribe to the idea of the incompatibility of Islam and modernity, consciously or otherwise, ignore or undervalue many important factors, and neglect the facts that religions are modified in different settings and that religions do not exist in a vacuum.

Many holders of these views in the West, including the 'modernization school', looking for a strong theoretical base for their arguments, often resort to the views of Max Weber (1958) on the role of Protestantism in the formation of capitalism and the economic traditionalism of Asiatic religions. Yet this view is untenable even with the aid of Max Weber (Turner, 1974). Notwithstanding current interpretations, Max Weber never said that throughout history, and everywhere, people's beliefs, and especially their religious beliefs, have a determining role in social change.[3] As Zubaida has argued Weber's thesis has led to a controversy 'often stated in terms of the relative primacy of causation of 'ideological' and 'material' factors. A frequent conclusion is that the two 'interact' or that there is an elective affinity between ideas and social groups. But the nature of this interaction is seldom stated' (1972:309). Zubaida suggests that this conclusion misses the point and accuses vulgarizers and imitators of ignoring the subtleties of his works and the qualifications of the Protestant Ethics thesis. The recent examples, including the emergence of many political parties in a number of European countries with direct links to the Roman Catholic Church, notably in the case of Poland and *Solidarity,* surely indicate that the struggle for a 'modern' polity is not the preserve of Protestantism.

Religious developments, like all other developments in the realm of 'culture', are not independent entities but are variables dependent on wider economic and political changes and transformation. This is not to dismiss religions as passive systems, without internal dynamics, or for that matter conflicts, but to stress on other related and determining factors. In every religion there exists not only a belief system that appears beyond question, but also a *social group with a vested interest* in defending it. But it is the systems of production and domination, as Zubaida stresses,

> which provide the dynamic of change in motivation patterns and in religious and ideological systems. People's motivations change when the pattern of constraint and incentives change, and their subsequently changed experience of this world leads to need for rationalising and explaining these changes and thus to new modifications and elaborations in their systems of meaning. It is by leaving these patterns of constraints and incentives out of the analysis that we arrive at static formulations of ideologically structured motives.' (ibid.:312)

To be sure, throughout history traditions have been 're-invented' in the most selective manner, and the realm of 'holy' approached and defined with specific political 'expediency'. In this process the past is only revived and reinvented to subvert the present. Controlling the 'past' in this sense is the key to controlling the present as well as the future. This is especially true in the case of the 'Islamic State' as proposed, theorized, and defended by Mowlana. In the case of Mowlana what we have is the amalgamation of politics and religion in a pre-enlightenment sense: all that is sacred becomes political and all that is political, sacred!

Modernization requires that ever-wider, but not necessarily all, spheres of life are secularized[4] and made available for debate and questioning. Whatever is sacred comes under threat. For this reason a conflict between modernization and religion seems natural and unavoidable. However, the choice perhaps needs not be as extreme and painful as separating Siamese twins and sacrificing one to save the other, as offered in the writing of Mowlana (the passing of modernity) and Lerner (the passing of traditional society).

One of the commonest, and apparently irrefutable, arguments used by the proponents of the thesis that Islam and modernity are incompatible is to point to the periodic appearance of religious fundamentalism in Islam. The unique spread of the Islamist movements in the recent past has encouraged an extraordinary and unprecedented expression of essentialist thinking on Islam. In the current climate, Islam has come to be identified with fundamentalism at the level of the general public. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mowlana relies so heavily on the most recent Iranian writers. Other names, including Ibn Khaldun[5], are thrown in occasionally, without thorough examination of their works, and especially without the

context in which these works were produced. Surely the least we could do is to consider the historicity of the works of such writers, their involvement with politics and political factions, and the very fact that as has been pointed out by Al-Azmeh (1982), Ibn Khaldun was writing at the time in which Maghreb was in a unique political crisis, and he was entangled and involved in war between rival dynasties. This is true of other sources, such as the writing of Shariati, Muthahari and Khomeini, to which Mowlana looks for inspiration.

A SINGULAR 'MUSLIM SOCIETY'?

When comparing Islam with other religions and 'cultures', we must make it precisely clear what we speak of, and what comparisons we make. The meaning of 'Islam' even when used to denote the *religion* of Islam is too general and imprecise to be useful in an analytical argument. Ahmad points to the diversities of histories and politics when he argues that

> The ecumenical popular Islam of Indonesia; the varieties of the lived Muslim subcultures in secular, multi-religious India; the vagaries of the 'Muslim nationalism' which provided the ideological justification for the creation of Pakistan; the incoherence of the linguistic nationalism of the East Pakistanis, which led to the creation of Bangladesh as a secular nation—all these indicate how misleading it is to ascribe to some inherent Islamic-ness of the polity or the culture as such. To refer to all these people as 'Islamic' is to occlude the specificity and novelty of Islamism in general, to posit hyper-Islamicity of Muslim peoples, and to succumb to the idea, propagated by the religious right as well as the Orientalists, that religion is the constitutive element of a culture, and hence also of its social existence and political destiny. (2008:2)

Detached from the broader realities of material and historical conditions, culture is reduced to religion, and religion is reduced to a book which is itself badly understood, and Islam is presented as an 'exceptional' case. Even if the term Islam is limited to the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna* we are still far from a reliable concept for analytical purposes. Modern Islamists refer to the same anthology and come away with quite different, and even conflicting, deductions. One cannot deny, of course, that there is such thing as the 'religion of Islam', but to use it as a generic term in an analytical argument leads only into a tunnel of ambiguities. As has been pointed out by Al-Azmeh (1993:1), 'there are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain it.' Mowlana's problem is that in order to reach the conclusion he desires he needs a definition of the 'religion of Islam', which is much more diffuse. Mowlana is by no means the only one to

talk of a singular 'Muslim society'.[6] One factor which has provided ammunition for such claims is the reality that in most countries with a Muslim population, Islamic voices put forward their own version of politics, culture, and society, and strongly contest other models. Islam, therefore, appears to have a unity, and Muslims a shared aim. The claim to universal *umma* thus seems justified. Mowlana himself writes of such a universal community and culture, in which race, ethnicity, and class make no difference. This model easily crumbles before various religious structures, organizations, traditions, and schools, and not only in different societies, but even within one society. Let us examine two rather crucial issues: first the diversity within Islam, and second, the diversity of histories, cultures, level of development, languages, and socio-economic realities in countries that are usually presented under the unifying label of Islamic.

One of the key neglected areas in discussion of the 'religion of Islam' is the diversity of Islam notably in the historic division between *Shi'a, Sunni,* and *Sufism*, as well as between various schools, branches, and various interpretations of Islamic traditions and histories. Such divisions are not peculiar to Islam. They do exist in all religions, and their importance cannot and should not be overlooked. They are one of the sources of rivalry between and within the nation-state. In the modern context, and especially in the case of political Islam, however, the conclusions that they draw from the holy book and tradition can be rather different. Mowlana only acknowledges the main branches. The differences are addressed in a few pages of *Global Communication in Transition* (1996:153–158) under the heading of 'Islamic reform movements'.

In general he is of course right in stating that 'all Islamic schools of thought are united on the fundamental principles of faith and the sources, which are *Q'uran,* the *shari'ah* (traditional and canonical law), and the *hadith* (the recorded saying of the prophet and the Imams)' (1996:155). The similarities, Richard notes (1995), are more important. Yet differences cannot be overlooked, especially at the time in which a number of states in the region claim to be Islamic. Believing in Twelve Imams creates headaches for *Shi'a ulama*. It is not only the *Q'uran* and the *hadith* that need interpretation, but the saying of Twelve Imams and their interpretation of the sources. Sunnis regard the idea of 'Occultation' (the return of twelfth Imam, *Mehdi*) as heresy. There are also differences over the role and state of women as well as that of temporary marriage, which is denounced by Sunnis as legalized prostitution.[7]

Mowlana repeatedly argues that these differences should not matter, that what bring Muslims together is their faith, and for that reason, Islamic community is unlike any other community. Equality among all faithful, in an Islamic state, which is again unlike any other state and especially unlike modern European states, should come as naturally as breathing.

> Although the official religion of Iran is Islam and the *Twelver J'fari* school of *Shi'a* thought, other Islamic schools of thought, including the *Hanafi*, *Shafi'i*, *Maliki*, and *Yazdi* schools, are to be accorded full respect, and their followers are free to act in accordance with their own jurisprudence in performing their religious devotions. (Mowlana, 1996:175)

The preceding quote, which is hidden as part of one of the footnotes, is not created by Mowlana, but is part of Article 12 of the Islamic Republic's Constitution. It does not require a great analytical skill to see and understand the difference between being 'accorded full respect' and 'equal rights' in a community. In this sense other branches of Islam, both within Shi'a and Sunnis, generally have the same rights as other recognized non-Islamic religions in the Iranian Constitution. Mowlana's idea of *Ummah* and 'Islamic exceptionalism', therefore, crumbles before the realities of the Iranian case. I will return to the Iranian case shortly.

Commentators, including Mowlana, constantly refer to the Muslim world and Islamic culture. Are there such things? There are an estimated 1.2 billion Muslims in the world. Roughly a quarter of people living on our planet are Muslim. The Organization of Islamic Countries has 55 member states, and within these states there are a variety of languages, histories, and cultural practices. The ten countries with the largest Muslim population are Indonesia (170 million), Pakistan (136 million), Bangladesh (106 million), India (103 million), Turkey (62 million), Iran (60 million), Egypt (53 million), Nigeria (47 million), and China (37 million). Even if we take these countries as an example, and exclude the rest, which if included would undoubtedly bring more examples of the diversity of politics, cultures, economic development, and histories, it is difficult to conclude that they are all similar simply because of their Islamic essence. No one can claim that the 'Christian world' does not share a universe of discourses and 'common heritage'. However, it would be impossible to argue that the Christian entities have taken the same form and have the same political and social significance in various parts of the Christian world and throughout history. To state the undeniably obvious point that 'Bantu messianism and revolutionary Nicaraguan Jesuitism are both Christians' (Al-Azmeh, 1993:139) does not tell us anything about concrete situations and the context of these movements. One cannot deny the labels 'Christian World' or 'Islamic World', but it would be absurd to argue that the 'content' of these labels have remained the same throughout history and in different socio-economic conditions.

Two examples further illustrate the point that I have tried to make. The first example is the wedding ceremony in the Middle East. As Zubaida's brilliant analysis demonstrates (1993:108–116), wedding ceremonies are one example of shared elements of Middle Eastern cultures that cannot be simply reduced to religion and religious values. The religious elements in

wedding ceremonies in the modern Middle East have been confined to the contract ceremony, but the actual rituals and celebrations have been subject to changes including in population, housing conditions, and so on. The celebration is usually a private matter, and the entertainment is very much European style. 'In this respect, the Westernization of culture is not simply an attitude of mind, but a process which has 'material' underpinning, in economic, social and spatial processes' (ibid.:115).

The second example comes from the work of anthropologist Gustav Thaiss. In an article entitled 'Contested meanings and the politics of authenticity: The "Hosay" in Trinidad' (1994) he examines how one of the Shi'a rituals—commemorating the third Imam in Shi'a, who was killed in the battle of Karbala in 680AD, is enacted in Trinidad. He shows how what is usually a grieving ceremony in some other countries, amongst them Iran, has been transformed into a carnival of fun. The name of the ceremony has changed from Hussein to Hosay, and the black flags (a symbol of death) of Shi'a Muslims are overwhelmed by a wave of exotic Caribbean flags. Hosay is another day in Trinidad's carnival calendar and bears little resemblance to the one that is enacted in Iran.[8]

A closer examination of the disintegration of the Pahlavi regime, the Iranian Revolution, and the formation of the new state after 1979 paves the way for a more detailed critique of Islamic exceptionalism which sees Islam as a more or less coherent culture and civilization. Iran is the only country to have witnessed an Islamic Revolution, and a country where the clergy hold the reins of power and have tried to redefine and reconstruct all aspects of social life along the Islamic 'line'. Obviously the temptation to generalize the Iranian experience should be resisted. Yet it provides an example to assess the non-socialist 'alternative' to modernization and capitalism. It is worth remembering, indeed crucial, that the Iranian Revolution of 1979 is the only contemporary post-war revolution that was not dependent on Soviet Union support, nor in any way did it support Soviet causes. In that respect there is little to dispute the *shargi* (Eastern) part in *Na shargi, Na gharbi, Joumhori-e Islami* ('Neither East, Nor West, Islamic Republic'). If it can be shown that the Islamic Republic has managed to create a viable alternative to the capitalist West based on *Shari'a* , then Islamic exceptionalism as advocated by Mowlana and others and their counterparts in the West can be taken as accurate. The remaining sections of this chapter, therefore, examine the role of the state and class in the Iranian Revolution; provide a review of the formation of the Islamic Republic, its Constitution, and political structure; and assess the changes and continuities in Iran since 1979.

STATE, CLASS, AND THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

No analysis of the nature of the Iranian Revolution can avoid critical engagement with the nature of class formation and the rise and crisis of

the state in Iran. But the 'trans-class' and 'religious' nature of the Iranian Revolution has been the main source of confusion over the precise nature of class formation and of the regime which replaced the monarchy. For some the Iranian Revolution was simply yet another 'revolt against Das Kapital' (Halliday, 1988). Zubaida argues: 'There are no shortage of academic writers on Iran with Marxist commitments, but to my knowledge they have confined themselves for the most part to programmatic statements about the desirability of class analysis, and then proceeded with accounts and analysis which use "class" in a descriptive sense rather than rigorous Marxist concept' (1993:68). In the past a wide range of explanations have been offered as to why the Revolution of 1979 took place and significantly why it became an 'Islamic' one. Many, including Zubaida, have argued that there were other variables, besides means of production that divided the population. While many, including Chehabi (1990:20) argue that the divide occurred not around the organization of production, but over rapid cultural Westernization and over the issues at the heart of modernization theory: modernity versus tradition.

Two well-known books and widely recognized contributions to this debate are Amir Arjomand's *The Turban for the Crown* (1988) and Abrahamian's *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (1982). The essence of the former's analysis is that 'rapid social change' and the state's failure to complement economic reform with political ones, as well as a lack of engagement with the concerns of the middle class, was the major cause of the 1979 Revolution and the demise of the Pahlavi. The failure was to integrate the newly emerged and socially mobile elements of society into the major political system and decision-making processes. In Arjomand's view, 'rapid social change' and the mass migration from country to towns and the 'dislocation' of big sections of the Iranian population cut them off from the ties of kinship, which made life possible and introduced them to new communities where the external signs were strange to them. The impact of the urbanization of the migrants and the realization of the cities made this group 'disinherited of the Islamic revolutionary ideology' (1988:107). In his attempt to apply the Weberian model to Iran, Arjomand makes a sweeping generalization about the impact of Islamic 'ethos' on Iranian society and revolution.

However, all societies going through modernization do indeed face such dilemmas and discontent. Therefore such analysis cannot provide any purchase on why Iran experienced a revolutionary situation and others did not. Furthermore, major dissatisfactions and discontent are not by themselves enough to cause revolution, and certainly it is not always the case that the most dissatisfied are usually the ones who rebel against the state. It is perhaps no accident that the significant role of the Iranian workers and especially the role that the strike of the oil workers played in bringing down the Shah have been neglected by Arjomand.

Abrahamian's analysis, by contrast, while taking a more materialist explanation of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, illustrates the point raised

by Zubaida. Examining the wider historical context of social developments in Iran between the Constitutional Revolution (1906) and 1979, Abrahamian suggests that the uneven development of Iran was the major cause of the Revolution. Dismissing the two popular ideas of overdevelopment (rapid social change) and underdevelopment (too little social change), he brings into focus the relationship between state and class and suggests that the state failure to create a link between itself and new classes or even the failure to preserve its ties with old classes (landowners), made the state unrepresentative, with a huge and increasing gap between the state and civil society, thus paving the way for revolution (1982:427). Abrahamian's analysis of class formation in Iran remains deliberately vague, and terms such as 'means of administration' and 'common attitudes' are listed alongside 'means of production' as independent variables and defining criteria of class. This as Zubaida suggests produces a good analytical social history, but hardly a Marxist analysis of class in Iran. In addition, and even by this standard, one might ask again why a revolutionary situation arose in Iran and not in other countries in the South, which were going through the same process of 'uneven development'? What other factors, beside the gap between the state and civil society might explain the root cause of the 1979 Revolution?

The most significant aspect of an ideal capitalist development in any country is the ability of the national bourgeoisie to exercise its hegemony by ridding the society of other modes of production. Harvey suggests that 'The preferred condition for capitalist activity is a bourgeois state in which market institutions and rules of contract (including those of labour) are legally guaranteed, and where frameworks of regulation are constructed to contain class conflicts and to arbitrate between the claims of different factions of capital' (2003:91). This is of course the 'preferred' condition. However, as is the case with many examples of dependent development, the Iranian bourgeoisie, because of its historic weakness, was forced to rely on the state. In this respect it is crucial to understand the relationship between the state and class, since the existence of one has always implied the existence of the other. This relationship of the two, however, is more peculiar in the case of developing countries. Wood suggests:

> that modern revolutions have tended to occur where the capitalist mode of production has been less developed; where it has coexisted with older forms of production, notably peasant production; where 'extra-economic' compulsion has played a greater role in the organization of production and the extraction of surplus labour; and where the state has acted not only as a support for appropriating classes but as something like a pre-capitalist appropriator in its own right—in short, where economic struggle has been inseparable from political conflict and where the state, as a more visibly centralized and universal class enemy, has served as a focus for mass struggle. (1995:46)

The relationship between the Iranian state and classes and the dominance of 'older forms of production' prior to 1979 is a case in point. The integration of Iran into global capitalism did bring about capitalist production but without its advantages. By 1976 and despite massive investment and rapid industrialization, small and inefficient units of production still dominated the industrial output. Only 6,000 units out of 250,000 industrial establishments employed ten or more workers (Holliday, 1980:148). Similar patterns were evident in agricultural production. This remains the case more than a quarter of century after the Revolution.

Yet the rise of the new middle classes also had very little impact on traditional *bazaaris* that organized most funds and communications during the Revolution. Abrahamian (1982:433) suggests that bazaar encompassed a tight network of three groups: about half a million traders, owners, and shopkeepers; some entrepreneurs with investment outside the bazaar; and finally the 90,000 or so clergymen with well-established and historical familial and financial links with the traditional petty bourgeoisie. According to Abrahamian, the bazaar managed to preserve its dominance in the country's retail as well as wholesale trade and handcraft production. Ironically, the 'progress' and 'prosperity' of 1960 had allowed this class to expand its base. However, it is wrong to see the bazaar as a unified and homogenous 'class'. Within this significant 'social space', and as Zubaida rightly points out, there are a whole spectrum of classes, including the wholesale merchants with a great deal of interest in domestic and international trade, as well as retailers, craftsmen, peddlers, porters, and food vendors (Zubaida, 1993:74). The bazaar bourgeoisie, however, asserts Zubaida, did not share the same platform and political position with other sectors of their own class. Zubaida suggests that a similar problem exists in terms of the definition of clergy as a 'class', since historically it has been a strongly differentiated group in terms of property and income (ibid.:71). In purely economic terms the real difference between this section of the Iranian bourgeoisie and others close to the court was not in size, but location of capital and investment. In response to clear advantages that the Shah accorded to modern industrialists, the bazaar bourgeoisie set up their own institutions and networks, banks, and credit system. Regular harassments by the state, especially prior to revolution when the Shah began to blame the bazaar for inflation and the rapid rise of prices of essential goods, made the bazaar into an even more distinct social and political space.

The land reform of the 1960s, which was part of the Shah's plan to push modernization and to facilitate and transfer economic surplus from agriculture to industry, had also backfired (Karshenas, 1990). Undoubtedly it undermined the social position of the landowners and managed as a result to bring yet another class into conflict with the state. However, this form of reform and championing of the peasant cause, launched in order to disarm nationalists and clergy (who often owned agricultural properties) and to

create a unified nation, in reality worsened the distribution of both land and income. Peasants began to move to the cities and in search of a new life and jobs settled in the shantytowns, more impoverished than before. By the mid 1970s even the industrial capitalists, who had enjoyed a great deal from their ultimate 'patron', now actively sought an independent political base and began to call for limitations to the Shah's power.

The most significant class in the broad alliance that put an end to the Pahlavi dynasty was the working class. Under the Shah's plan for the modernization of Iran, the working class had grown significantly, reaching well over four million, and well over 50 per cent of the economically active population (Bayat, 1987). This class that had to carry Iran to a new height, however, had already been alienated. It wasn't just the fact that the Shah failed to include the working class in the political system; the regime had actively been crushing their organizations, unions, and press since 1953. Workers arrived at the scene rather late, but it was their presence and their general strikes that clearly indicated the end for the monarchy. Lacking any pre-existing unions, workers began to organize *Showra* (council) and demand control of factories and industrial areas.

The survival, indeed the dominance, of petty production and the dominance of the traditional petty bourgeoisie, brought disparity in access to resources as well as to political processes, and made the Shah into a universal enemy of many competing classes. It was not a quest for 'tradition' or 'return' to the past or the impact of Islamic ideology which brought about the disintegration of the Pahlavi state in 1979. International changes and pressures from the Carter administration with its post-Vietnam policy of promoting 'democracy' and 'human rights' (which the Iranians sarcastically dubbed Jimicracy) further undermined the Pahalvi state and took away the last straw of hope. It is exactly this combination, especially of competing class forces and the broad coalition, that is usually mistaken as a form of 'ideological conversion' of the masses to 'Islamic' ideology. Undoubtedly the clergy played a significant role, but it is a mistake to assume that there was only one 'Islam', one 'Shi'a' and one revolutionary ideology. Khomeini and his followers more than anything else used the language of class, talked of disparity, poverty, the gap between rich and poor, the unequal distribution of resources, and the domination of Iran by imperial powers including United States. This was a modern revolution, with modern tools and modern aspirations. Radical requests and call for social justice, combined with a fear of counter-revolution, were the main reasons for radicalization of the masses and the Revolution. Khomeini's populism (and not fundamentalism) reflected this trend, rather than the other way around. Once in power and after the victory of counter-revolution, and only then, the plan for 'Islamization' of Iran began to unfold.

The post-revolutionary Iranian state has tried, since its inception, to combine capitalism with a peculiar and contested version of Islam. Employing the language of class and anti-imperialism politics, the state,

while recognizing the sacredness of private property, began to restrict market relations, nationalized the major industries, and brought them under the control of state or quasi-state institutions. But the contradiction between the imperative of capital and the inadequacy of the so-called Islamic law, intensive forms of political and cultural contestation and ongoing protests by the majority, including regular protests by workers, students, and women, have forced the Iranian state and the ruling clergy to retreat, adopt, and improvise.

Despite early indications of commitment to a more equal distribution of resources and the championing of the cause of the *mostazafin* (dispossessed), the story of the Islamic state since 1979, and increasingly since the end of war with Iraq, has been nothing but a market-driven development and a further integration of Iran into the global capitalist system under an authoritarian state. This became obvious, as Abrahamian notes, when the term *mostazafin* was extended to include commercial farmers and wealthy businessmen who had supported the Revolution (1989:75). Massive crisis after crisis and disputes over the nature, definition, and the direction of the state has marked the entire history of the post-revolutionary state in Iran. Competing social forces combined to bring about the end of monarchy, economic crisis, and the broader international context have brought with them not the decline of nation-state as advocated by globalization theories, but a formation of a state with a contradictory role. The product of such existing forces and agencies is the formation of a strong state, which is torn, to use Harvey's terms (2003), between the 'logic of capital' and the 'logic of territory'. The inseparability of economic struggle from political conflict, as discussed earlier, has its own very logical consequences. For a while and in the context of the Iranian state, Khomeini, as the spiritual leader and high ranking and influential member of the clergy, could act as a center pole of the new state and successfully negotiate between and on behalf of varied interests and logics. Various factions have existed within the state, all with specific economic, political, and cultural agendas with their views expressed through 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 Traditional Right (*Rast-e Sonati*) and, at the heart of it, *Motalefeh* (The Islamic Coalitionary Society), which is dominated by the *Bazaaris*. The key person within this faction is Asgharoladi, who has held various posts, including Minister of Commerce, deputy speaker of the *Majlis,* and was a presidential candidate. He is a member of the supervisory council of the Relief Aid Committee and the 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 was for a long time Director General of the Oppressed Foundation (Mohammadi, 2003). This tendency holds extreme religious, cultural, and business views,

and their views are published in the daily *Resalat* (Prophetic Mission) and monthly *Shoma* (You).

The second tendency, the Modern Right, are well placed on the right of the economic spectrum, but differ from the traditional right in their cultural outlook and favour a more pragmatic approach to cultural matters. The figurehead of this tendency 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 is currently head of the Expediency Council. This tendency has gathered in and around a group called the Executives of Reconstruction of Iran, and their views are expressed in *Hamshahri* (Fellow countryman) and *Iran* (published by Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency).

The third current, labelled the Traditional Left, share the political conservatism of the traditional right and are in favour of the total Islamization of public and private life in Iran, 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: *Kayhan* (Galaxy) and *Enghelab-e Eslami* (Islamic Revolution).

The final current, the Modern Left, is a broad spectrum of activists who were marginalized after Khomeini's death. Like the traditional left they favour substantial state intervention in the economy, but they are the group who have responded to popular pressure from below for the liberalization of the cultural sphere. Members of the Association of Militant Clergy and another influential group called 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 which emerged in the second decade of the Islamic Republic, including the now defunct *Kian*, *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 surrogates. Their existence and survival all depends on financial resources, loyal agents, and various familial, political, and economic networks.

Khomeini's unique influence among the social base of the Islamic movement, his strong position among the clerical apparatus in Iran, and his skill in using Bonapartist methods of rule made him into a charismatic leader whose only legal expression could be the *valye faghih*—a spiritual leader with total control over both civil and political society. If the 1979 Revolution gave birth to a Bonapartist state, and an administration in permanent crisis, the command and control of this government

was only possible at the hands of one particular leadership apparatus and one unique leader: the leadership apparatus of the *velayate faghih* and Khomeini's personal leadership. This allowed the new state to impose its rule on all classes, while ultimately protecting the interests of private capital. Much like Bonaparte, and as Marx recounts in the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (1977:323), Khomeini wanted to 'appear as the patriarchal benefactor of all classes. But he cannot give to one class without taking from another'.

Moreover, when under pressure of crushing contradictions, the Islamic Republic was forced to redefine the power of the leadership apparatus and saw the increasing concentration of power at the hands of the leader as its way out of the crisis; it was always Khomeini, until his death deprived the regime of this strategy, which made this development possible. It needed a leader with the specific qualities of Khomeini to safeguard the unity of the deep-rooted contradictions in the ruling order. He did so by restructuring political authority and concentrating the levers of power more and more in his own hands. In this process Khomeini transformed the original (already considerable) powers of the *velayate faghih* into the *absolute spiritual leader* where even *shari'a* considerations took second place to the needs of the state.

Khomeini transformed the political order into one where the spiritual leader was not only the main pillar of power, the unmistakable source of all political decisions, and the final arbitrator of all factional disputes, but when it came to a confrontation between the system of government and the clerical apparatus, or between the *shar'ia* laws and the needs of a modern capitalist state, he could suspend the laws of *shari'a*. He could, and did, raise the commandments of the spiritual leader and the leadership apparatus above all other commandments. There can be little doubt that without such steps the reproduction of Islamic government would not have been made possible; just as without a person of Khomeini's stature such developments would have been difficult to realize. The clergy has never been a homogenous social layer. The division in ranks and status mirrors the division in Iranian society. However, the existence of such varied interests, despite regular intervention by Khomeini, has left deep and visible marks on the structure and constitutions of the regime, as a closer examination of the existing political structure shows.

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC CONSTITUTION: PATERNALISM PLUS FRATERNALISM

As suggested by Wells (2003) two forms of rule have predominated at the macro political level throughout history. These two *ideal* models, paternalism and fraternalism, each have their own characteristics, and each system has some common features in their various forms. Such

polar models, however, are inadequate to explain the Iranian example, and possibly other examples. This model suggests a static separation and autonomy between different forms of polity, one defined by commonality such as personalization, proximity, informality, balanced conflict, and glorification of power; while its opposite, fraternalism, is defined in terms of impersonalization, institutionalization of power, formality, consensuality, and glorification of cooperation (ibid.:218–219). This is quite simply the reworking of tradition versus modernity. In reality, however, many if not all forms of rule are mixed models, combining with a varying degree of success different elements of each model. The Iranian case yet again provides convincing evidence against modernization theory and its supposed alternative, Islamism.

Since 1979, the political system in Iran has combined elements of Islamic political tradition, Iranian nationalism, and welfare provision with modern state structure. Various articles of the Constitution[9] stress that the role of the state is to provide a fair and just economic system, eradicating poverty, and providing health care, jobs, housing, and food. According to Article 3, it is the duty of the state to ensure social and economic development and safeguard the dignity of the human being. Women's rights and their contribution to the Islamic Revolution are acknowledged and recognized in Article 21. Articles 15, 16, 17, and 18 confirm the Iranianness of the Republic by specifying the language, history, and Iranian flag; and defending the 'borders' of the country is listed as the duty of the state.[10] And all this, despite the so-called commitments of the Islamic Republic to a wider Muslim world and the unified universal *umma*.[11] The Third Worldism of the ruling elite (evident in the slogan of neither East nor West) is confirmed by Article 3.5, which rejects all forms of domination of Iran by foreign forces. Exploitation of labour and reaping the benefit of others' labour is forbidden. However, under a just Muslim rule private investment and property is safeguarded. In this context no class struggle is necessary as under this system all humans are equal, and there will be no classes. An Islamic state will be a *Towhidi* class-less entity. The elements of third world nationalism are unmistakably present in the Constitution.

However, the Constitution as Schirazi (1998) notes is a contradictory and compromised legislation which combines some democratic principles with theocratic arguments and institutions. It is important to note that the Constitution is ambivalent about the source of legitimacy and sovereignty. On the one hand the Constitution recognizes the people and their right to choose who will govern them by direct vote, including members of parliament (*Majlis*) as well as the President. However, on the other hand it subordinates the people's will to the clerical establishment via institutions of *velayat-e fagih* (rule of supreme jurist) and *Shura-ye Negahban* (The Guardian Council). The latter body is a powerful second chamber that has to approve all bills passed by the parliament and ensures that they conform to the Constitution and *Shari'a*. The Guardians Council is in effect

an upper house of parliament with the power to vote out the lower house's resolutions. It is assigned to check the laws passed by the *Majlis,* compare them with the provisions of the Islamic canon and the Constitution, and ratify them, or return them to the House for amendedment. According to Article 93 the parliament is meaningless without the Guardian Council and as such has no power 'except for the purpose of approving the credentials of its members and the election of the six jurists on the Guardian Council.' Sovereignty according to the Constitution belongs to God, and it is this aspect which makes the position of Supreme Leader tenable. However, the Supreme Leader owes his position not just to his own qualities and piety, but also to the recognition of the majority of the people (Martin, 2003).

The idea of *velayat-e fagih* was presented as the intermediary between the true Islamic polity (to be established upon resurrection of Mehdi) and *Umma*. This, however, and for the first time, concentrated power and the legitimacy of guidance (*marja'iyat*) in the hands of a single person (Khomeini) who had all the necessary religious qualifications as well as the backing and popular votes of the revolutionary *Umma*. This 'Vaticanization' of *Shi'a* structure was against the historical pluralism based on availability of a number of clergymen as *marja-e taghlid* (sources of emulation), who the members of the Islamic community as *moghalid* (emulator) could freely choose. It came as no surprise that many *marja-e taghlid* (Grand Ayatollahs) in one way or another distanced themselves from the concept (Behrooz, 1996; Roy, 1999).

The tension and conflicts in the dual polity of the Islamic Republic, as well as its crisis, can be seen in the role of the President. What is interesting is the very fact that in contrast to the 'selected' Supreme Leader, the President is an 'elected' national figure. If the *velayat'e fagih* essentially represents the 'Islamic' part of Iran's mixed political system, the President is the manifestation of the *republic* in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The changes and transformation in the Islamic state and the shift from a 'religious state' to 'state's religion' can also be seen in the evolution of the role of President since 1979. If Khatami's landslide victories in 1997 and 2001 have been regarded as a 'turning point' and a 'historical' development, it is partly because 'the presidency more reliably reflects the mood of the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian elites, and those permitted to participate in the political process than does any other institution' (Milani, 1993:83).

Although there were some abstract ideas within Shi'a tradition regarding the shape and the nature of the Islamic state, Shi'a ideology was far too primitive and pre-modern to offer a sophisticated model of the state which would match the socio-economic realities of modern Iran. First of all, prior to the 1979 Revolution, all forms of government in *Shi'a* tradition were regarded as illegitimate. The ruling elite had to sell the idea of the possibilities of the Islamic state in the absence of Mehdi. Secondly, the *ulema,* throughout the history of modern Iran since the Constitutional Revolution (1906), had always been against the idea of a presidency. Republicanism

nevertheless became the only viable option for the *ulema* to reject any possible compromise with the Shah. Trying to come up with a formula, which could accommodate both Islam and the Republic, was not an easy task. There were no historical models as such. As Rafsanjani stated rather succinctly, 'where in Islamic history do you find parliaments, Presidents, Prime Ministers? In fact 80% of what we now do has no precedent in Islamic history' (cited in ibid.:87).

The model, therefore, was borrowed and not from 'Islamic history'. The actual 'fourth power' (*velayat'e fagih*) that was created by the 1979 Constitution had the power to undermine the other three. A large number of institutions and agencies are under the control of the Supreme Leader and are not accountable to any branch of the state. Among such institutions are Panzdah Khordad Foundation (*Bonyad-e Panzdah Khordad*); Martyr Foundation (*Bonyad-e Shahid*); Housing Foundation (*Bonyad-e Maskan*); Literacy Movement (*Nehzat-e Savad-Amoozi*); Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution (*Shoraye Aali Enqelab-e Farhangi*); Islamic Propaganda Organization (*Sazeman-e Tablighat-e Islami*); Land Allocation Committees (*Hay'athaye Vagozari Zamin*); Foundation of the Oppressed (*bonyad-e Mostaz'afan*).

The Supreme Leader also appoints the head of the judiciary, the clergy members of the powerful second chamber, the Guardian Council, commanders of all armed forces, as well as the leaders of two of the most important communication channels in Iran: Friday Prayer Imams and the Director General of the state-controlled radio and television network. In addition he also confirms the President's election.

Although he may delegate them to his representatives, the powers and duties of the leader, according to Article 110 of the Constitution, have been set as follows:

- Deciding the overall policies of the country after consultation with the Council for Determination of Exigencies—the leader has the final say;
- Ordering referenda;
- Declaring war and peace and ordering mobilization of forces;
- Resolving disputes between the heads of the three branches of the state and regulating the relationship between them;
- Signing the decree endorsing the President on his election;
- Dismissing the President in the national interest, should a ruling of the Supreme Court find him in breach of his duties, or a vote of Majlis disqualify him;
- Pardoning prisoners or commuting their sentences at the recommendation of the head of the judiciary;
- Solving those problems, which cannot be solved by ordinary means, through the Council for Determination of Exigencies.

As for the 'elected' bodies in the Islamic Republic, it is important to stress that elections, including presidential ones, are fundamentally undemo-

cratic, tightly controlled processes. The law deprives many citizens, such as women, religious minorities (including non-*Shi'ite* Muslims), and political opponents of the religious state, from standing for President. This is enforced in practice by the unlimited power of the Council of Guardians. This Council has consistently rejected anyone it considers unsuitable for the ruling circles.

Those sections of the state that are up for periodic elections, including the Presidency, are in general of secondary importance in the power structure. The system revolves round an unelected central core, headed by a Supreme Leader, *velayat'e fagih*, with unlimited powers. It is here that all major decisions are made, especially so after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and his replacement with Ayatollah Khamenei. The Presidency and the Administration have ultimately an executive responsibility. Yet because of the faction-ridden nature of the ruling elites, the individual in charge of the executive becomes important since this appointment could affect the distribution of public resources and to some extent the ability of the entire state structure to function. Hence control of elected organs, and the Presidency in particular, are also hotly contested, and subject to intense bargaining among the various factions.

The most important function of elections in the Islamic Republic rests precisely here: namely the redistribution of power among the various ruling factions. This contest is particularly acute at times when the internal crisis of the regime is intensified and when the normal bargaining processes are unable to reach a 'consensus'. 'Elections' in such conditions become a mechanism for the re-allocation of power, where factions test their respective power against electoral legitimacy. The significance of recent elections, the landslide victories of Khatami in 1997 and 2001, and the surprise victory of Ahmadinejad in 2005, derives from this reality.

The tension and conflicts in the dual polity of the Islamic Republic more or less worked as long as Khomeini was alive. As a leader of revolution and a high-ranking Ayatollah and a charismatic leader of the Republic, he bridged the gap between these two sides of the state: Islamism and Republicanism. But since the late 1980s the tension began to surface as the struggle to establish and consolidate the Islamic state and the realities of modern Iran began to surface and put on display the very contradiction at the heart of the constitutions. The end of the bloody, expensive, and long war with Iraq in 1988 and Khomeini's death in the following year robbed the state of its charismatic umpire and brought a shift in the power structure.

Just before his death Khomeini issued a decree for the amendment of the Constitution. The 'Politics' and 'Islam' in 'Political Islam' were about to separate. Article 5 of the 1979 Constitution stressed that in the absence of the true leader of the Islamic state (the twelfth Imam) a just *fagih* who also had adequate knowledge of conditions of his time (and not only *figh*) should carry the role of leadership of the *umma*.[12] In the absence of a *marja* the requirement of the leadership shifted from a religious to a political

one. The 1989 amendments to the Islamic Republic's Constitution were in effect the clearest evidence of the end of double legitimacy (religious as well as popular) in the Islamic state. The choice of a middle-rank clergy, Ali Kahamanei, as the new leader was a political one. Khomeini, in his decree and order to the Assembly for Reconsideration of the Constitution, also hinted at the need to centralize the executive. The office of Prime Minister was to go, and the President was to be in charge of all executive affairs including the selection of ministers. This was a direct response to the 'economic' needs of war-ravaged Iran, and it paved the way for a 'better balanced' structure of the state, putting different factions in place in the absence of Khomeini.

In his decree, Khomeini added *Absolute* to the Rule of Jurist (*velayat-e fagih*), and argued that the authority of the state and *maslahat-e nezam* (expediency of the system) was above religious law. This indicated, in Khomeini's doctrine of government, the final move in shifting the role of Islam as an essential element of the 'religious state' (*dolat-e mazhabi*) to the 'state's religion' (*dine dolati*) (Ganji, 1998). In short and as Oliver Roy has observed:

> in a religious revolution, such as the Iranian Islamic Revolution, the status and role of religion is nevertheless defined by political institutions, not religious ones. Politics rule over religion. The crisis of the religious legitimacy is leading to the supremacy of politics, and subsequently to a *de facto* secularization. There is a growing tendency, not only among democrats and liberals, but also traditional clerics, to separate religion and politics, this time in order to save Islam from politics, and not, as was the case in most of the processes of secularisation in Western Europe, to save politics from religion. (1999:202)

With Ali Khamenei as the new leader and Ali Akbar Rafsanjani as President, a second decade of the Republic began as the period of 'reconstruction' or the Second Republic. But as a result of the renewed centralization of power, brought about by the revision of the Constitution, the tension between different factions of the state increased even further. The 'left', which had enjoyed Khomeini's support, dominated *majlis* and the cabinet, and made a huge contribution to war efforts, were gradually marginalized. They returned with a big bang in 1997 with the election of Khatami and, this time known as 'reformist', began to dominate *majlis* too. I will return to the reform movement in Chapters 4 and 5. Here I want to examine in some detail a few examples of the contradiction which I have mentioned and the dilemma of the Islamic Republic's response. Oliver Roy, paraphrasing a well-known definition of socialism, has famously defined Islamism as 'Shari'a plus electricity' (1996). It has been a common practice to explain the tension within the Islamic state in religious terms and as a matter of 'interpretation' of the *shari'a* (Kadivar, 2003). However, I think a more

insightful and fruitful approach is to examine the broader material conditions which have brought about different interpretation. As I have already suggested ideas, including religious ones, do not grow on trees and are a direct result of different responses to actually existing material conditions. What we have witnessed in Iran is the incompatibility of these two elements of 'Islamism'. *Shari'a* faced with the problems of modern times has been at the receiving end of some nasty 'shocks'. The solution to these problems has been rapid 'statization' of Islam and 'Iranianization' of the 'transnational' *Shi'a*. Let me elaborate further.

'MODERNITY' STRIKES BACK

The establishment of the Islamic Republic, however, has not changed the course of history and further integration of Iran into the global capitalist system. Two crucial factors, external pressures due to its geo-political significance and social and economic constraints have made sure of this. The Islamic Republic therefore is nothing but the avatar of the central Iranian state. The more the ruling elite have moved forward, the more they have exposed their inability to block the deeper processes of modernity. 'In its way, the republic has taken the project of the Pahlavis, and set about constructing a modern state by merely changing the principle of its legitimacy' (Bayart, 1994:286). The Islamic Republic has been profoundly a modernizing state. Some examples will illustrate this.

1. To avoid land distribution, the Shah's so-called White Revolution of the 1960s put an end to the alliance of the clergy and the monarchy, which had been forged after the war in the face of the potential nightmare of political power by the Left. Almost the entire Shi'a clergy went into open opposition with the state, with Khomeini at its head. Principally land reform and giving voting rights to women provoked them. Fifteen years later women played a crucial role in broadening and making unbeatable the revolution that brought Khomeini to power. Khomeini's main assault columns in the same revolution were the urban and rural destitute. Ignoring them meant calling the support bases of the revolution to a duel. Faced with this contradiction the clergy quietly shelved some of its previous slogans and, for instance, accepted the right of women to vote.[13]
2. Moreover, having opposed, and on gaining power scrapped, the Shah's Family Protection law of 1966 (minor reforms for women well within the framework of *shari'a* laws), they sheepishly reinstated it after a decade of popular protest by women—if in a more conservative form. Family planning was initially regarded as a Western concept and a practice alien to Islam, but faced with the problem of massive population growth rate and the modern problems of providing jobs, housing, and education,

it was restored by the regime as an official policy. Initially Khomeini denounced abortion as un-Islamic, but after the war the regime made yet another u-turn and all methods of contraception and sterilization were promoted by the media and officials. As a result of a massive campaign in 1990–1991, the use of the pill increased by 6 per cent, condoms by 141 per cent, and coil by 37 per cent. In 1992 the daily *Kayhan* reported that 330 hospitals around the country were distributing different forms of contraception for free (Poya, 1999:100). The position of the Iranian government in the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo, in September 1994, was far more radical than the Vatican's, which in 'holy' alliance with some Islamists aimed to prevent the inclusion of contraception and abortion as reproductive rights in the final document of the conference. This was not due to some simple religious 'difference'—there is none in this respect—but simply because of the *material realities* of Iranian society.

3. The Islamic regime faced the same dilemma in another crucial area in modern Iran: taxation. Initially the modern taxation system was seen as against the *shari'a,* and there was a claim that through such religious taxes as *khoms* (fifth) and *zakkat* they could arrive at a just society and a strong Islamic government. These claims too were quietly shelved when faced with running a modern state. After Khomeini gained power, he saw the rules relating to *khoms* and *zakat* as being so out of their time that he called those who defended their use *ignorant* and out of touch with the needs of modern society. 'The share of the *imam* is only enough to run the seminaries . . . where are we going to get the share of the *imam* and the *sadat* [direct descendants of Mohammad—to whom *zakat* belongs] to run a government? We could not run all these people who are stuck to the government and cost money' (cited in Ganji, 1998:209).
4. The religious bans on music, the game of chess, and eating of scale-less fish were also toned down after pressure from below. In January 1989, during Friday prayers in Tehran, Rafsanjani, a former President and speaker of the Islamic Parliament, hailed these moves and 'referred to Khomeini as a progressive leader of pure Islam, *Islam-e-nab*, who had broken with certain dogmatic Islamic notions in allowing chess and music once again, and proclaimed that these were great steps for progressive Islam against the more traditionalist clerics' (cited in Sreberney-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994:181).
5. The most disputed example of such retraction was on the labour code. For years the explicit contradiction between normally accepted labour laws in modern capitalist societies and the concepts and principles of Islamic *shari'a* meant that attempts to come up with a code was stuck in a blind circle. Khomeini and his circle feared that this festering dispute would provoke widespread labour unrest, especially in the heat of the Iran–Iraq war. He therefore pronounced a *fatwa*

authorizing the ratification of the Labour Code by the *Majlis* (Parliament) in 1987. He bypassed its incompatibility with the principles of Islamic *feqh* by subsuming these under the umbrella of the 'expedience of the system'. In reply to criticism by some of his followers and more conservative members of the clergy, including the current Supreme Leader, he argued that 'government which is a branch of the absolute rule of Allah's prophet . . . is one of Islam's primary commandments (*ahkam*) and has priority over all subordinate commandments including prayers, fasting, the *haj* [pilgrimage to Mecca] . . . Government can stop any undertaking, whether devotional or non-devotional whose conduct is against the interests of Islam, for as long as it remains such' (cited in Ganji, 1998:30). The very invention of the concept of the 'expediency of the system' (*maslahat-e nezam*), placing it on par with 'primary commandments' (or even above the latter so as to defend them) and the creation of an Expediency Council to preside over the *Majlis* and the Council of Guardians means that under pressure of the modern world and in many arenas of modern life *shari'a* is unenforceable. It became even more obvious that the ideology of the new state was too vague when it came to the realities of a modern society. Khomeini's doctoring of the government is examined in detail by Zubaida, and as he has stated *shari'a*, and the doctoring of 'commanding to the right and prohibiting from the wrong' (*amr bi al-m'ruf wa nahy'an al munkar*), which Mowlana presents as one of the key elements of ethical boundaries of Islam and Islamic communication, has been confined to the private sphere (Zubaida, 1993; see Chapter 1).

6. The Islamist slogan in Iran, *Na shargi, Na gharbi, Joumhori-e Islami* ('Neither East, Nor West, Islamic Republic'), meant that the new ruling elites were locating themselves in a non-aligned camp. But they also divided this third camp into an Islamic and an un-Islamic one. Claims of universal Islam were further complemented by a direct and indirect call for establishing 'Islamic International'. The 'Islam first' policy, much like other earlier policies, was shelved as the ruling elite recognized that the policy of isolation and de-linkage was not an option. Despite providing support for some Islamic movements and other 'Third World' causes, Iran remained a member of all social, economic, and diplomatic bodies and treaties that the previous regime had joined, and it continued to join newly formed international organizations. The policy of 'self-reliance' (*khod kafai*) was made redundant as Iran continued its reliance on exchange and trade with the West and the East that the Islamic Revolution had come to replace. Ehteshami's detailed analysis (1995) shows that even in the 1980s Iran remained among the top OECD markets in the region, and there was little implication from the 'Islamic International' slogan, as the main trading partner remained more or less

the same. Turkey remains the only Muslim country that appears on the list of the Islamic Republic's main trading partners. Diplomatic relations with many of the 'Muslim' countries were non-existent for a number of reasons (Egypt for providing refuge to the Shah, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries for supporting Iraq and in general for being far too cagey about the Islamic Republic's ambition to 'export' revolution). The case of another Muslim neighbour, Iraq, needs no further explanation. The Islamic Republic's contribution to the Palestinian cause was also disastrous, as the insistence of continuing a bloody war with Iraq overshadowed the plight of the Palestinians for more than eight years.

7. The opening of the Tehran stock market, the official policy of encouraging foreign investment[14], inviting rich exiled Iranian bourgeoisies back, and Iran's continuous dependence on the industrialized West is anything but 'alternative' to capitalism. In this respect the Islamic Revolution was not the 'seal on Iran's historic referendum designed finally to resist the Western paradigm', nor was it the revenge of *Shi'a* tradition on a 'modernization' project and its 'main agent, the Pahlavi dynasty'. It was a spectacular failure, and as such it was not a classic social revolution as it left the existing social relations and mode of production intact. It remained a 'passive revolution', a revolution without revolution.

The latter point becomes even more obvious if we look at the Islamic Republic's increased embrace of private capital. The strategy of the Islamic Republic was from the very start based on overcoming the domestic difficulties and, especially since the end of war with Iraq, on being reinstated in its former position in the international division of labour. The re-Islamization strategy and the reversal of the trends of 'nationalization of Islam' with 'Islamization of the nation' in domestic and international context, however, for practical and ideological reasons have failed in spectacular fashion. The contradictions in the Islamic regime's policies clearly put an end to Islamist assumptions about the existence of a coherent and comprehensive Islamic thought on all contemporary matters. Many of the views and policies advocated by the Shi'a clergy in Iran before and after revolutions were prompted by immediate and often changing real circumstances. In this respect, and as Abrahamian argues, 'Khomeini was no more a political philosopher than Molière's bourgeois gentilhomme was a literary deconstructionist' (1993: 39). However, and as Abrahamian convincingly demonstrates, while Khomeini shifted ground on many issues and made a number of u-turns, he remained positively firm on the question of 'private property'. From early on he was adamant that private property was a gift from God and that respect for private property was more important than 'respect for the dead'. After the revolution he made this point again and again and called for authorities to respect people's 'moveable and immovable possessions'.

It is no secret that the Iranian economy is highly dependent on oil revenues. It is estimated that between 85 to 95 per cent of the annual exchange earnings depends on oil (Behdad, 2000), and it provides up to 70 per cent of the state's general budget (Karbasian, 2000). No doubt any serious decline in oil prices brings with it a serious threat to the economy. On the other hand a lack of investment, the decline of the oil revenue in the late 1970s and much of the 1980s, the disastrous war with Iraq, and political instability all made major contributions to the decline of Iranian economy.

The state's inability to improve or facilitate the production process has paved the way for the expansion of petty commodity production. Behdad argues that between 1976 and 1986 the number of small enterprises had increased by 100 per cent, and they made up about 97 per cent of all manufacturing establishments. That has meant that in this period the medium-size companies were squeezed by a mass of small companies on the one side, and massive state-owned corporations on the other. In the first decade of the Islamic Republic per capita income of Iranians dropped by 50 per cent (Karbasian, 2000), and urban unemployment increased from 4.4 to 18.9 per cent. One other important factor was the decline of investment of the private sector in the economy. This has been attributed to the towering figure of the state and state-run companies; constitutional constraints (especially Article 44 of the Constitution that called for massive nationalization of all large-scale industries and specified a number of industries, including telecommunication and broadcasting; and Article 49 that paved the way for confiscation of thousands of private companies and their transfer to newly formed foundations—*bonyads*); and 'unsympathetic' labour law and lack of political stability (Karbasian, 2000; Khajehpour, 2000).

However, privatization (including that of the communications industry) has been one of the key aspects of the recent economic plans. This was the clear policy of 'reconstruction' which made the living conditions for the majority worse than before. Yet and despite continuing difficulties arising from liberalization, the same set of arguments and measures were perused even further by the reformist President and one of the main objectives of the Third Five Year Plan (2000–2005) revolved around liberalization, which includes further privatization, attracting more foreign investments and the reduction of government size (Behdad, 2000; Khajephour, 2000). In tandem with the commitment to 'civil society' the government published a list of 538 state-owned companies (out of 724) in 1999 as the prime target for privatization (Khajephour, 2000). Behdad (2000) has suggested that such plans, as well as the commitment to the breaking of monopolies which included telecommunication, has been halted because it would have necessitated the IRI's unequivocal negation of its revolutionary claims and would have implied the formal abandonment of its remaining popular base. Nevertheless the state has managed to show a good degree of commitment to making necessary changes to accommodate private capital and encourage foreign investment. In 2004 the disputed Article 44 of the Constitution,

which limited private ownership and had put radio and television, the post, telegraph, and telephone services under the 'state sector', was finally revised by the Expediency Council. In the same month the same body ruled that up to 65 per cent shares of major Iranian banks, minor in some exceptions, could be given to the private sector.[15] One of the greatest 'achievements' of the reformist-dominated six *Majlis* (2000–2004) was indeed to speed up the process of privatization. According to *Iran International*[16], privatization of the economy is the only matter of the state which has not been the subject of dispute between different factions of the regime. The six *Majlis* banned establishment of any new state-run companies and began legislating the transfer of many state-run companies to the private sector. Revision of Article 44 of the Constitution by the Expediency Council has removed the last 'legal' barriers in front of privatization of the major industries in Iran; including the post and communications.

In an attempt to reassure the private sector, the government has promised that the aim of the privatization is not to create a new revenue channel to fill the gaps in the national budget, rather the aim is to change the nature of the Iranian economy 'from small institutions to larger institutes and economic units'.[17] In this process the share of the state-run companies will be sold to the private sector, which includes foreign investors as well as rich expatriates, and the generated income will be used to further the development of the 'real private sector'. Hassan Khosropour, the director of privatization affairs, has suggested that in this process the state wants to 'institutionalize share holding culture among members of the society'.[18] Despite continuing problems and limits, the recognition of private property has been on the increase and the private sector has gained increasing status in the Iranian economy.

The significance of the communication industries is not lost on private capital. Increasingly, and especially since the end of war with Iraq and the beginning of 'reconstruction', the implementation of IMF policies and expansion and marketization of communication have been the order of the day. Reform and construction is explicitly equated, to some extent, with marketization and privatization of the communication industry. The reason is not hard to find.

The number of publications, including dailies, has increased rapidly, despite the harsh economic realities of Iran and political and legal barriers. The number of national television channels has increased from two to six. During Khatami's presidency alone, from 1997 to 2003, the number of telephone lines increased by 127 per cent; the figures for rural areas have witnessed a similarly sharp increase by 144 per cent. Access to mobile phones has seen one of the sharpest increases: from 135,219 in 1997 to 2.5 million in 2003, indicating an increase of 1,748 per cent (TCI, 2003). The number of Internet users also shows similar expansion and increase: from 2,000 in 1996 to 1,326,000 in 2002 (Abili, 2002; Musavi Shafaee, 2003) and to 7.5 million in 2005. According to some sources,[19] while Iran is still

lagging behind richer countries in the region, it has registered the biggest increase in Internet usage in the region, of 2,900 per cent between 2000 and 2005. Expansion of media channels and the desire for access to an informal channel of communication and cultural engagement also shows itself in the astonishing rise and popularity of weblogs which have become another site of struggle. It should be obvious that in recent years Iran's communication industry has emerged as one of the fastest growing economic sectors, and in this process, as I will discuss in more detail, the state has emerged as the dominant media capitalist. Privatization of the communication industry has been one of the key aspects of the recent economic plan.

No doubt all these retreats have made Islamic rule more palatable, yet being a reaction to the pressures of contemporary society and life, they upset the ideological cohesion of the state. More than two decades as a religious state has made demand for the separation of religion and state popular in Iran. During the Iranian Revolution, mosques were a very significant public space for debates and mobilization of large numbers of Iranians. But after 30 years of the Islamic state, mosque attendance rate in Iran is the lowest in the region. Politicization of religion in Iran under the Islamic Republic has led to disenchantment with religion (see Tezcur, Azadramaki, & Bahar, 2006). Furthermore, as the military threat against Iran has increased since the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, further militarization of Iran has led to further marginalization of the clergy. Three candidates in the 2005 presidential election were former commanders of the Revolutionary Guards (Almadari, 2005). If secularism shows such a crushing power in this country, then we have to accept that in the Islamic world, too, there are no unbridgeable barriers to modernity. Modernity cannot be simply reduced to a mere matter of 'attitude'. Iran after all has a President ('alien to Islam'), has a national flag, national anthem, national football team, and then there is the separation of the three powers (President, head of judiciary, and legislative powers), and its members of parliament have to be Iranian citizens. Add to these, labour laws, press laws, universal suffrage, elections held every four years for various posts, a parliament, local councils, and the presidency. The Iranian regime is of course unique in the way I described earlier, as it has a set of traditional institutions alongside modern forms of state. No one can deny that, but surely only an idealist or someone with a vested interest can put forward any argument which overlooks all these factors.

What we can gather from the preceding examples and facts is not the 'passing' of modernity, but the assured march of 'modernity'. What exists in Iran is a nation-state and a community that is very clearly a national one. *Umma* of course is still used in some circles as a preferred way of addressing the 'people'. However, what was initially used as a line of defence against foreign and alien forces has not in any way replaced the nation. *Umma*, as opposed to the notion of *imagined community* (Anderson, 1991), has

been offered as *the only way* to imagine community. It is this straightjacket of 'identity' that Iranian people find suffocating and the state difficult to impose. *Islamic Exceptionalism* as theory has no basis.

In taking issue with the intellectual tradition of the Orientalists, Aziz Al-Azmeh suggests that their 'Islamic studies is thus a cluster of pseudo-causal chains. These chains are meant eventually to be reducible to the irreducible essence of Islam, which really performs an explanatory function very much akin to that of Phlogistin in 18th-century chemistry.' He calls the creature they paint *homo islamicus* 'structured by the three meta-historical notions . . . unreason, despotism and backwardness' that is the exact 'inversion of the three cardinal notions through which the bourgeois-capitalist epoch conceives itself: reason, freedom and perfectibility' (1993:137–139). Mowlana's analysis is the latest and most telling of the 'Islamic Studies' that Al-Azmeh has in mind.

CONCLUSION

The 'reappearance' of the sacred has prompted a number of scholars to question the conventional sociological wisdom that 'Athens has nothing to do with Jerusalem' (Keenan, 2003:19). Does the return or the 'revenge' of the sacred indicate the passing of the world that sociology wanted to probe and understand? If so, what fate awaits 'that' sociology? The bad press that 'secularism' has received in the past two decades only makes sense if we accept at face value that the process of disenchantment was unproblematic from the outset. The separation of state and religion was never complete and final, certainly not in the Middle East, and not even in Europe. The return of theology to sociology should not be mistaken with the 'return' of religion, for the 'return' assumes it had 'gone' away in the first place. De Vries rightly suggests that the process of 'the "deprivatisation of modern religion" means "that religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them' (2001:16–17). The failure of 'modernity' to deliver many of its promises for the majority and the crisis of the political project has once again put 'traditional' forces on the map. There is nothing new in that since the notion of politics (state) historically has relied in one way or another on the sanction of a dominant religion. In the absence of a strong and viable progressive alternative, the 'heart of heartless world' speaks the language of the 'masses' and gives them the certainty and spiritual 'redemption' that no one else can deliver. This function of religion, at least in the Middle East, is rarely made redundant.

While and without any doubt revolutionary ideologies including Islamism did contribute to the Iranian Revolution, none of them, and certainly not Islamism explain either the activities of revolutionaries or the outcome of revolution. In Iran, Islam was neither the reason for revolution or the

force behind radicalization of the movement. As I have argued, the ideological/cultural explanation of revolution in Iran, and the transfer of power to Khomeini and his followers not only confuses the tactical coalition that brought an end to the monarchy with 'revenge of tradition', it also fails to differentiate the diverse religious aspirations and perspectives amongst Islamists in Iran, which have crippled the Islamic Republic for over a quarter of century. Iran never experienced and never had a unified clerical Islamic culture. If anything diversity of the political forces, actors, and classes proves beyond doubt that the essentialist, monolith, and unified concept of Islamic discourse is misleading and misguided. Furthermore, the creation of the Islamic Republic should not be seen as the 'passing of modernity' but rather as a new effort to come to terms with the challenge of modernization in Iran. The Revolution was undoubtedly a response against the Western-centric project of modernization. Neither the economic reality of Iran, nor the structure and nature of the current state provides any evidence that any of the issues highlighted by revolution or aspirations and demands of the majority of the Iranians have been addressed.

2 Is There an Islamic Communication Theory?

> A theory whose relevance or validity is limited to certain people, or pertinent only under certain social circumstances is not yet a theory; at best it is a loose hypothesis workable for a limited area. If we could claim to have communication theories that are more pertinent to Japan, Korea and Taiwan than they are to other societies, then, by the same token, we could have theories more pertinent to Tokyo, Seoul, Taipei than they are to other societies, and moreover, more pertinent to specific communities in Tokyo, Seoul and Taipei.
>
> Wang and Shen

INTRODUCTION

There are increasing concerns over 'Western' bias in media theory and the reaction against the lack of understanding of other cultures, values, belief systems, and communication models. Engagement with and the critique of various layers of 'Western bias' in media theory has become a significant concern of much of the recent literature. This is particularly true since Downing (1996) raised the alarm on how little is known about the different models of media and how our knowledge of the field was essentially based on experience and examples from the West, mainly the United States. This concern has paved the way for some important and much- needed comparative analysis. However, since 'culture' has become an essential part and category in trying to explain the post-1989 world, not surprisingly in all areas of the social sciences, including media studies, a new wave of essentialist thinking has emerged. Many, while trying to take issue with Eurocentrism, operate within an Orientalist worldview. It would be a grave mistake to treat this 'reaction' and 'awareness' as a singular, homogenous current. There exist a variety of different projects—undoubtedly all of them political—with different aims and concerns. One such political reaction, mirroring the official views and policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is the so-called Islamic theory of communication that is offered by Hamid Mowlana. As I have already argued, and for specific reasons, his views and conceptualization of an 'authentic' *Islamic Culture,* what he has called

the Islamic Communication Paradigm, has attracted considerable attention and proved to be rather influential. The aim of this chapter is to explore the central thesis, the limits and the implications of Islamic Exceptionalism, as related to media culture in the region. I will try to do this by placing Islamic exceptionalism in dialectical tension with the Eurocentrism of the modernization school and by demonstrating how the current debates again revolve around the 'West' and its 'Others'. I intend to do this by critical examination of a number of texts, in particular Mowlana's works, that have proposed the possibilities of a particular and singular 'Islamic' perspective on communication and its fundamental differences with what has been perceived as the singular 'Western' theory of communication. The first section of this chapter briefly outlines what is meant by the term 'Islamic Communication Theory'. As the above quote by Wang and Shen (2000:17) suggests, theories are by definition universal, since they are the outcome and inevitable generalization of some facts. Furthermore, while theories are general and abstract, nevertheless they 'should also be required to illuminate, and be tested with reference to the social realities they purport to discuss' (Sparks, 1997:x). On this basis this chapter then proceeds to examine if advocates of 'Islamic' communication theory provide any illuminating facts and empirical evidence that might support some of their claims about the uniqueness of communicative experience in 'Muslim societies'. Since the whole concern of this book revolves around the Iranian media environment, this chapter examines the idea of Islamic communication theory with specific reference to the broader realities of the Iranian experience.

'ISLAMIC COMMUNICATION'. WHAT'S IN THE NAME?

The neglect of the 'theological' in sociology (Keenan, 2003) spilled over to many of its branches, including communication. Cultural Studies, despite its fascination with the 'other', 'marginalized', and 'deviancy', does not have a particularly good record of critical engagement with either religion, or what Jeremy Stolow calls 'the myth of modern media as agents of secularization' (2005:122). Graham Murdock in his analysis of what he refers to as 'the re-enchantment of the world' (1997) has blamed Cultural Studies' characterization of religion as 'residual' for paying so little attention to this aspect of social life. Such neglect, he suggests, happened despite the fact that one of Cultural Studies' founding texts, *The Uses of Literacy* (Hoggart, 1957), provided evidence of the potential for religion in working-class life. It was again neglected in the next decade or so despite the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies focus on *rituals*. Murdock argues that Williams showed no hesitation in including religion among the 'residues' of previous social formation: 'and because the supporters of the new field had nominated *contemporary* culture as their defining project, "residual" practices held few attractions. Interest focused instead on the "emergent"

cultures forming around youth, gender, and ethnicity' (Murdock, 1997:89). Williams (1977) of course could not anticipate the return of residual as 'emergent' (all over the globe), and much less its collapse into 'dominant' (Iran). Nevertheless, he distinguished insistently between the 'alternative' and the 'oppositional' in the 'emergent', as well as the possibility of emergent or residual making their way into dominant.

In Iran, the evidence of 'traditional' networks and their strengths is clear and overwhelming. In 1970, the Islamic network consisted of

> ninety thousand clergymen, composed of fifty *Ayatollah*, five thousands *Hojjat-alIslam*, thirteen thousand theology students, and a number of low ranking *mullah*, traditional *maktab* teachers, *madareseh* lecturers, prayer leaders, and procession organizers. . . . the religious establishment maintained the only autonomous national network, comprising 5,600 town mosques (9,015 in toto), a considerable amount of *waqf* (endowed property), a number of meeting halls called *hosseinieh*, and six major seminaries (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994:81)

In general the 'mosque' was the only platform that was open to 'civil society'.

At the same time the most powerful communication weapon of the Monarchy was National Iranian Radio and Television (NIRT). It employed 7,000 people, and its radio facilities included 64 radio transmitters in 31 cities that covered most of the urban population (Tehranian, 1977:259). As Tehranian's study indicates, the *ulema* were against broadcasting, and some even told him that they rarely listened to the radio and never watched television. Many of those interviewed by Tehranian about the role of broadcasting in Iran identified themselves as Muslim and nationalist. But

> the youth group appears to be far more attracted towards a fundamentalist Islamic position (62%) than the communication elite (30%) or professional broadcasters (30%). This may be accounted for by the fact that this generation of university students came mainly from towns and villages and more traditional religious families. (ibid.:274)

The 'oppositional' culture clearly not only had the necessary networks, cadres, and financial muscle to maintain its independence, but also the added advantage of speaking the language of many of the people. The big media that had come to change Iranian culture and 'attitudes' and show the 'clue to a better life', at the end of the day, lost out to 'small' media which were rooted in deeply embedded and familiar messages. The political condition and deep crisis which prevented the Monarchy from ruling in the manner they had previously brought into the public domain those who for such a long time 'believed' but not necessarily 'belonged'. 'The socially atomized individuals as participants in the electronic church', as Tomaselli and Shepperson argue in their study of televangelists, 'is thus organically reconnected

into spiritual centre of authority that stands above the alienation of everyday life—but not necessarily material life' (1997:212).

The link between religion, culture, and media has always been one of the most fascinating aspects of the dynamics of modernity, and the recent bourgeoning literature in this area is evidence not of a 'return' of sacred into sociology, but rather sociology's return to one of its original subjects of inquiry. There are many aspects to be explored, and among them is the possibility of a 'unique' religious theory of the media. Can there be such a particular media theory? Is there a religious theory of communication? And how does it differ from a non-religious one?

In the first place it is important to point out what is meant by 'Islamic Communication'. It cannot simply refer to media that are owned by people who are Muslims, nor refer to media that are designed for consumption by Muslims. In regard to the first definition, there are many media that are owned or partly owned by individual Muslims. Saudi investors and Princes, for example, have come to realize the importance of the media as an excellent means for financial diversification and their holdings include shares in Disneyland Paris, Berlusconi's Media set, Arab Radio and Television (ART), and in the pay television company Orbit, which was founded in collaboration with the BBC (Ghaffari-Farhangi, 1999). The suppression of certain content (such as violent scenes, or those of a sexual nature), and anything that does not correspond to what is perceived as 'Islamic' culture (ibid.: 271) by various broadcasting channels owned by Muslim investors, does not in itself make them 'Islamic', in the same way that the banning of certain content by China does not make their media 'Confucian'. Although undoubtedly authoritarian practices are increasingly justified in the name of 'peculiar cultural features', exceptionalist theories are about more than simple acts of censorship, and many of the advocates of 'Islamic communication' are critical of authoritarian practices in the Middle East.

Of the latter definition, again, there is a wide range of media consumed by Muslims. Consumption of a news channel or music channel by Muslims does not make the channel 'Islamic'. What advocates of 'Islamic communication' do offer (despite some clear differences in their emphasis and 'identity') is the binaristic division of the world into two rather neat categories of the god-fearing Islam and the secular west. Mowlana (1990,1993, 1994,1996), Pasha (1993), Sardar (1993), Ahmed (1992), Ayish (2003), and others have tried to free 'communication theory', which they argue so far has been captive to Western conceptual orientations and concerns, and elaborate an Islamic perspective on communication.

Many of these debates, of course, are linked to modes of knowing and knowledge production in 'Islam', and how it tries to grapple with the effects of an alien Western modernity. Among the many writers who have tried to highlight the 'civilization' oppositionalities are writers from Iran and Pakistan, including Akbar Ahmed, Ziauddin Sardar, and Hamid Mowlana. My main focus will be on Mowlana, although some references will be made to

others so as to show the differences as well as the similarities underlining their arguments.

In a number of studies (1979, 1989, 1993, 1 996, 1997) Mowlana has outlined what he regards as an Islamic response to the Western model of communication, which is more in tune with the cultural values and history of the Islamic world. Central in his analysis is the notion of *Tablig* (propagation). He warns us that *Tablig* should not be confused with the Western concept of propaganda. *Tablig* throughout the history of Islam has 'provided, for a vast number of people from diverse races, languages, and histories, a common forum for participation in a shared culture' (1996:119) which is Islam. *Tablig*, Mowlana notes, has four main principles: *Tawhid* (monotheism), Doctrine of responsibility, guidance, and action (*amr bi al-m'ruf wa nahy'an al munkar*), the idea of Islamic community (*ummah*), and finally the principle of *Taqwa* (piety). As Tomlinson observed:

> Communication as 'propagation', whatever its virtues within a religious culture, seems clearly to subordinate all the secular principles of unencumbered open communication in a free public sphere to a 'higher' religious purpose. This as Mowlana expresses it, is the duty to promote the 'unity, coherence and harmony' (p.119) of the *Ummah* in the 'peaceful submission to the Will of Allah' (p.122). (1998:242–243)

I will come back to this point later. We have already examined certain aspects of the debate regarding the Islamic State as well as community (*ummah*). The issue here is not simply some dispute over definitions of these principles, although they have become the subject of massive rifts and struggle among the Islamic ruling elites since 1979, and especially after Khomeini's death (Ehteshami, 1995; Brumberg, 2001). There is little point in engaging in a discussion over the definition of such 'terms'. My question initially is over whether such abstract concepts tell us anything at all about the dynamic media culture in Iran, or any other Islamic countries, and more importantly whether such analysis really does challenge the binary structures that Mowlana pretends to challenge.

The principles that are mentioned by Mowlana are by no means exclusive to Islam. They are narratives common to all religions. For centuries such issues and narratives have inspired composers, novelists, painters, poets, and various artists. Many of us have studied them at school, have gone to sleep listening to our parents reciting the great stories of the holy books, and certainly have seen the epic Hollywood movies and television serials based on them. Do they fascinate us? Undoubtedly. Do they tell us anything about the conditions that sustain the religious institutions, or about socio-economic developments and communication modes in a society? The answer must be no.

No one can really explain the colonization of what is usually referred to as the 'Third World', and European attempts and 'adventures' in bringing 'ungodly savages' in far-away lands in line with the civilized Christian world

by simply looking at the general narrative and the Christian idea of being 'nice to one another'. There is a widely held view that Buddhism is by far the most peaceful and passive of all religions. This might be the case. However, to what extent can such a claim provide any purchase on the bloody conflict in Sri Lanka? Similarly, there exists within Jewish moral narratives notions such as *Tzedek* (justice) and *Rachmaunt* (compassion). Do they tell us anything about the policy of Israeli's government towards the Palestinians? Or, for that matter, anything that has happened in the land holy to all Abrahamic faiths in the last few decades?

Furthermore, even among Muslim scholars, these issues and struggles over the definitions and meanings of such 'codes' and their applications in society are by no means settled. Islamization, like any other 'ization' is linked to the crucial question of *agency*. In this sense, Mowlana's view is quite different from other commentators on the subject of Islam and communication. Take the example of three non-Iranian contributors to the aforementioned edition of *Media, Culture and Society*. Akbar Ahmed (1994; Schelsinger, 1993) sees the relationship between Islam and communication and what he refers to as *return to tradition*, in the context of post-modernity. Mowlana (1990), on the other hand, argues that the passing of modernity should not be confused with post-modernism. Syed Pasha (1993), while agreeing with Mowlana on the importance of knowledge (*ilm*) in Islam, points to the fundamental role of an *open conception of knowledge* and stresses the centrality of the various forms of communication in the Islamic world.

Similarly, and on the basis that the *Qur'an* was sent for all the faithful and talks directly to them, Sardar has argued for a more open interpretation of the holy text. He suggests that computing technology can affect a potential revolution in the interpretation of Islamic culture. According to him, the new technology, by making classical sources easily accessible

> will demystify their nature and enable non-theologians to check the validity of what they are being told by the *ulama* [religious leaders] in the name of Islam. It will also reveal the contradictions and banalities that have been given the stamp of authenticity by the *ulama* and enable and equip ordinary, educated and concerned Muslims to take part in religious discussions of national importance. (1993:56)

The banning of print at the behest of the *ulama*, he says, was in effect an illegitimate monopolization of authorized knowledge, one with disastrous long-term consequences for Islamic culture. Leaving aside the apparent technological determinism, what one cannot miss is the impact of European experience: it is hoped that the CD can do for Islamic reformists what print did for Protestantism.

This is not the place to engage effectively with such analysis and claims. The main point is to show that Mowlana's reading of the relationship

between Islam and communication is a rather rigid version and attempts to formulate and explain the 'Islamic Communication'.[1] This 'scriptualism' has also gathered a new momentum and can be seen in much of the literature produced by Islamic reformists and notably in the writings of Abdulkarim Souroush (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 1999; Schrazi, 1998; Rahnema & Behdad, 1996).

Mowlana, Sardar, and company are as at fault as some of their Western counterparts for reproducing the old dichotomies between the West and Islam in terms of the incompatibility of rival conceptions of knowledge. Hundreds of years of histories, domination, colonial expansionism, and the relentless march of capitalism are reduced to the Western experience, with the same degree of rationality that Islam is equated with Fundamentalism. Such 'ways of seeing' of course make for an easy read and instant understanding, but never useful as social scientific explorations. If the 'Orient' has been constructed as 'essentially' other to the west, in Islamism's narrative, the trends have been reversed. Islamism in this respect 'challenges' orientalism by mirroring it, and in this process reproduces what it supposes /promises to dismantle. In reality the choice for 'Muslims' is reduced to a familiar either/or: either a completely alien Westernized 'other' or that of a true Muslim in touch with his traditional religion and 'culture'. This dichotomy, as Ur-Rehman has suggested in his illuminating critique of Ziauddin Sardar is problematic for many reasons:

> First, it does not take into account many instances where Muslim identity itself is indeterminate: for example, this view glosses over the countless debates in different Muslim countries regarding the Islamicity of various sects within Islam—one can cite the case of Pakistan's Nobel Laureate physicist Abdus Salam who lived in exile till his death because his sect had been declared un-Islamic in Pakistan . . . second, this epistemically violent division of the Muslim self as 'either 'Occidentalised therefore not a true Muslim' or 'Muslim therefore not completely Occidentalised' can buttress the brutalisation of Muslim polities because many of the *ulema*, not all, believe that Islamic punishment for apostasy is death, hence the famous *fatwa* against Rushdie. Third, . . . this binaristic compartmentalization of Muslim subjectivity into two formation preserves the division between the East and the West that itself was, largely, created by Orientalist scholars to make the orient an object of study, hence Edward Said's observation that, for the West [*sic*], orientalism maintained 'the difference between the familiar and the strange. (2002:69)

The key element of essentalist thinking is reductionism: that is, the reduction of all other identities such as class, gender, ethnicity, regional, and political allegiances to one inclusive identity. Within this narrative there is only one way, a singular way, of 'imagining community'. It is precisely the

question of defining this perceived 'singular' definition of identity which is crucial: what criteria is used to define Muslims and Islam? Operating on the assumption of a monolithic Islamic totality suppresses the internal diversity, division, and political, social, cultural, and ideological rifts in a religion that encompasses one billion people from North Africa to Indonesia as well as a variety of minority communities (increasingly under attack) throughout the Western world. Only a purely 'textualist' approach can ignore such diversities, real practices, and the refashioning of Islam(ism) as a response to neo-colonial dynamics in the Middle East. It is such narrow ways of seeing that prompts Pasha to argue: 'According to Muslim cultural theory, the mass media must keep the following principles in mind in the performance of their entertainment, socialization and system service roles: first God's boundaries' (1993:75). But who determines what is 'forbidden', 'obscene', 'indecent', or 'shameful'? How do we know, and who has the interpretive authority to define what is shameful and obscene, and on what basis and criteria? Only an abstract understanding or religious worldview detached from history and politics can brush aside such significant questions.

In the Islamist narrative, 'the West' is reduced to the imperialist other, while Islam is celebrated as an alternative. The repressive homogenous West is strongly critiqued while Islam is idealized. The 'radical' critique of the imperialist West serves to attract the support of many radical Western academics, while the idealization of 'Islam' is to either gather support for a non-secular 'alternative' or to gloss over the brutalities in Muslim countries. In both respects, the extension of a single 'Islamic' umbrella over heterogeneous and complex collections of histories and practices is a highly political one. In this act what is lost is the 'dialectic of Enlightenment' and critical engagement with the 're-enchantment' of the world. Rejecting the 'discourse' of the centrality of the West will not in itself abolish any 'centre' at all. Islamism's so-called rejection of the West reinstates Western centrality. Benhabib rightly suggests that such interpretation of cultures 'as hermetic, sealed, internally self-consistent wholes is untenable and reflects the reductionist sociology of knowledge' (2002:36).

'ETHNOCENTRISM' OF ANOTHER KIND: SINGULAR ISLAM, IRAN, AND MEDIA?

We need to examine exactly which parts of 'Western' form and theories of knowledge are being challenged, and what we mean by Western bias and why? Is universalism necessarily Eurocentric? This is necessary as, in my view, it is still possible both through comparative analysis and a more focused analysis of 'Eastern knowledge' to offer a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism.

As McQuail has stated media theory did originate from what he calls the 'general body of social sciences'. These disciplines were influenced by wider

economic, social, and cultural contexts of the West and were concerned with making sense of, understanding, and engaging with issues and problems of what seemed to be a very specific geographical space at a very specific time. This obviously had very little to do with media since the original theoretical framework and methods of analysis were written, argued, and developed long before the development of modern mass communications. Media studies and theory inherited this problem.

McQuail, like a number of other media scholars concerned with the 'Western bias' of media theory, starts by brief examination of different stages of thinking about international communication: modernization, cultural dependency, and globalization. However, he goes further by stating that in order to move away from 'ethnocentrism', we need to ask a number of critical questions:

> Firstly, it is useful to inquire a bit more deeply into the *sources* of 'Western bias'. Secondly, we should look at different *forms and levels of its expression* (not just at what is meant by the idea, but at what point it is manifested). Thirdly, we need to consider some possible *solutions* to what has to be recognized as a problem for any serious claim to media theorizing. (2000:6)

In his article all these issues, however, remain only as a set of guiding questions. McQuail does not really engage effectively with any of these questions, except the general comment that the root of the problem lies in the ethnocentrism of the social sciences and the fact that most of what we know about media and media theory is written by 'Western' academics. A more comprehensive and detailed examination of Eurocentrism is offered by Immanuel Wallerstein (1997). In *Eurocentrism and its Avatars: The Dilemmas of Social Science*, he argues that social science as a discipline emerged in response to a European problem, at the time when Europe was the dominant force in the world. 'It was virtually inevitable that its choice of subject matter, its theorizing, its methodology, and its epistemology all reflected the constraints of the crucible within which it was born.' Social science in his view needs to deal with Eurocentric heritage, which has distorted its analysis and its capacity to deal with the contemporary world. But in doing so, he maintains that since Eurocentrism is a hydra-headed monster, we have to define what exactly constitutes Eurocentrism. The five heads of the monster of Eurocentrism and its expression in social science are identified as such: social science historiography, the parochial nature of its universalism, its assumption about (Western) civilization, its Orientalism, and its attempt to impose the theory of progress.

The key argument within this narrative has been how all those social changes, achievements, and 'miracles' did happen and, above all, how they could only happen in Europe. It was European culture, attitudes, the way of life, and history which made the transition into the new phase of civilization, that is, modernity, possible. In this scenario, only Europe

could really deal with the scientific and moral dilemmas of the 'Siamese Twins' nature of the modern–traditional dichotomy. Explanation as to why Europe and not other parts of the world, and why this occurred at a certain moment in history, is where the Eurocentrism of the social sciences has explicitly expressed itself. Some 'alternative' historiography, including arguments in favour of so-called 'Asian values' or 'Islamic values' have done little to address the balance, and indeed have produced the same narrative, albeit with different accents.

In short Eurocentrism projects a rather linear historical trajectory; it attributes to the 'West' an inherent progress towards democracy and democratic institutions (fascism was of course an unwelcome blip), and it celebrates the European democratic tradition while obscuring its shortcomings as well as its efforts to undermine democratic movements abroad. It tries to minimize the Western oppressive impact on developing countries by pointing at ahistorical 'internal' Oriental faults, and finally, while it appropriates cultural and material productions of non-Europeans, it denies them their achievements and their appropriation of Western cultural and material productions (Stam et al., 1995:99). The 'West' has shown a spectacular failure to 'imagine' its other and its culture, but Islamists show similar ignorance. There is a lack of imagination about aliens and *kharejis* (foreigners). In both cases the alien forms are so un-alien and so familiar. If there is no inborn tendency among Europeans to be 'progressive' and 'modern', there is equally no tendency in them to commit genocide. Equally, the long-term effect of the Western dominance and colonization is not to turn the 'indigenous' people of the 'East' into essentially nobles or victims. The Islamists quite simply have turned Eurocentrism upside down. Eurocentrism is not a European epidemic, as a closer examination of Mowlana's conceptualization of 'Islamic Communication' demonstrates.

Mowlana suggests that 'the word communication, in its Latin usage does not exist in Islamic literature, and when it is used and translated in its contemporary context in Middle Eastern countries, the term takes a more technical rather than social connotation' (1996:149): a classic Orientalist position, which explains 'Muslim society' in terms of *absences*. One can think of a number of words—thousands of them indeed—that did not exist in any cultures. Think of all new vocabularies associated with new technologies. Words are there for a special purposes and usages, not just for the sake of themselves. They are the products of societal needs and transformations, and it is in that context that they begin to make sense. There exist within many Islamic countries a number of words that perhaps according to Mowlana are un-Islamic: republic comes to mind! Ahistorical and general terms such as 'Islamic Literature' or 'Middle Eastern countries' undoubtedly do pave the way for sweeping historical generalization, which obscures many particular, peculiar, and contradictory trends in the region. This is of course part of an attempt to force home the idea of *Islamic Exceptionalism* as well as the distinction between *Islamic essence* and *Western essence*.

It is in this spirit that Mowlana proposes the two broad understandings and models of communications and conveniently lines two *ideologies* against each other: the information society paradigm versus the Islamic community paradigm. The dispute as he states is not only about two visions of communication, but also two visions of society. He asks:

> Should the Information Society Paradigm dominate the epistemological, theoretical, and practical aspects of Islamic Community Paradigm, or should the latter control and direct the former. In short, which paradigm must be the basis of process of social, political, economic and cultural change? (1996:132)

Mowlana's anxiety over the commercial nature of dominant communication and cultural products and their impact at international level is justified. This has been one of the central concerns for Mowlana, as well for a number of other leading scholars in the international communication field. But it is not so obvious why the choice in the region should be reduced to a familiar either/or, that of a completely alien westernized 'other', or true Muslims who are in touch with their traditional religion and 'culture'.

In Mowlana's view the information society paradigm has a number of elements that are evident in the United States as well as in a number of other countries. On one level 'the philosophy and theory of information and communication have replaced transcendental discourse as the prime concern of philosophical reflection in the West', while at the practical level it has 'come to portray the ideology of neomodernism, postmodernism, or postindustrialism *without abandoning the capitalist economic and social system*s that continues to characterize its core' (ibid.:131, my italics).

If not *capitalist economic and social systems*, then what characterizes Islamic Iran's mode of production and social relations? For Mowlana, this is irrelevant, since in the Islamic model 'the central question is not one of economics but of culture, ethics, and *tabligh*' (ibid.:126). This is of course in line with one of Khomeini's well-known comments that has haunted the regime for a number of years: 'We did not have a revolution for cheaper melons'. This is ironic since only in a society 'whose everyday existence seems drained of value could 'culture' come to exclude material reproduction' (Eagleton, 2000:31). Mowlana, conveniently, avoids specifying the economic and political system that the Islamic state would create or has created. He is content, or assumes we are content, by simply stressing the uniqueness of such a society. Here God is sole legislator, sovereignty belongs to him, and it is him to which all forms of communication are directed. And we all know God works in mysterious ways! The truth is he has nothing to say on this matter except pointing at *differences*. Difference has become, at the same time, cause and effect. It should be clear that it leaves a big gap in his model. (See Table 2.1)

Table 2.1 Information Society versus Islamic Society.

	Information Society	*Islamic Community*
Economic system	Capitalism	?
Motive of media	Profit	Propagation/Mobilization
Sources of funding	Advertising	State
Organizational structure	Hierarchical	?
Professional practices	Centralized/Produced by professionals	?
Relationship with Audience	Consumer	Guidance
Model of control	Owner/bureaucracy	?

Mowlana, like many contemporary Islamists, imagines a past that never was, a golden age that never existed, a pure and uniform Islam that could not be, and a model of communication and society which is not in need of any empirical evidence. *We are different!* This really should not be that much of a problem. After all people are allowed to present their views of what they perceive to be Islamic. The problem starts when, in the name of an 'imaginary past', such nostalgia is turned into a programme, and subsequently a whole range of associated 'invented traditions' are imposed on all aspects of public and private life.

As we have seen Mowlana regards Islam as not adaptable and subject to innovation tendencies. Deep down, and despite centuries of exchange and influence, Islam has remained the same. This leads to ahistorical assumptions about culture, and 'Islamic culture' in particular. If one focuses on specific culture, surely a substantial analysis of that culture should be the basis of any argument and should take into account the ambiguity of such culture in the past as well as the present. Such analysis also needs to provide comprehensive empirical evidence to support the arguments being made.

After detailing what he presents as a normative Arab-Islamic perspective, Ayish concedes that 'communication realities in the Arab world seem to defy the applicability of this normative perspective' (2003, 90). Although he mentions that there are 'enduring aspects of media work that strongly reflect this approach', he fails to provide any examples of such 'enduring aspects of media'. Pasha has gone even further by stating that

> contrary to the theoretical model rooted in the Qur'an, most government and power structures in the Muslim world are based on secrecy, exclusion, manipulation, coercion, authoritarianism and tyranny, as many Muslim governments are absolute hereditary monarchies, and many others are personal, military or party dictatorships. (1993:71)

In his view only Malaysia offers any hope, but he fails to provide any detailed account of why this is the case, and why the picture in 'Muslim' countries is as bleak as he suggests.

In contrast to Ayish and Pasha, Mowlana suggests that with

> the exception of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is founded on the Islamic notion of the state, the remaining Islamic countries have state systems that are a mixture of the modern and traditional monarchical or republican systems. Thus, their legal and ethical codes are heavily influenced by non-Islamic frames of reference. (1996, 116)

There are some references to different important public spaces in Islamic tradition in Mowlana's works (1979, 1989, 1996), but his analysis remains far too general, and it is based mainly on the experience of revolutionary upheaval in 1979, which was unique and should not be generalized. There are some references (1996) to the role of small media, again during uprising of 1979, without any reference and acknowledgment of detailed examinations of the role of small media in the Iranian Revolution by Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi (1994).

Two short articles (1989, 1997) deal specifically with the process of the 'Islamisation' of Iranian television. Much of the evidence provided in these, interestingly enough, deals with communication in its *Latin usage*. We read that 'Iranian external radio broadcasting has increased from about 170 hours a week in 1978 to 323 hours in 1986, in 13 languages and ranking 18th in the world's top 20 major broadcasters.' We are informed that Iran ranks fourth in the world when it comes to broadcasting weekly programme hours to the Middle East, as and of the fact that there are plans for a new television house, and that two television channels, under the Islamic regime, 'cover 628,000 square miles, more than three times the area of Spain and larger than the whole of Western Europe—or equal to more than one-fifth of the area of the United States' (1989:35).

It is, however, not the facts that are presented by Mowlana that we might find interesting, but the difference in accounts, which are the inevitable product of socio-economic changes in Iran. Mowlana proudly claimed (1989, 1996) that commercial advertising on television is not allowed in Islamic Iran. In another document [2] we are told: 'Commercial advertising is common but subject to specific rules and regulations, including the time framework to prevent the fragmentation of programmes' (1997:206). Any student of mass communication is fully aware that the central concern when it comes to advertising is not about 'specific rules and regulations'. There are rules in a number of countries against advertising tobacco and alcohol, as well as obscene materials, and measures to protect children from being targeted as 'rational' consumers. It is the very fact of the existence of advertising and its economic impact on the media industries, their content, and programming that is the issue.

In the same article, Mowlana admits—unlike before—that there is 'considerable demand and interest' for foreign programmes. And this is despite the fact that satellite TV is officially banned and declared illegal in Iran.

> One of the major criticisms directed toward television in Iran deals with the lack of entertainment programmes to occupy leisure time. The argument is made that Iranian television should create more attractive and popular cultural activities for leisure time; otherwise, the audiences will turn to foreign satellite television programmes or seek alternative means of entertainment elsewhere. In recent years, satellite piracy and illegal reproduction of international films and video have increased. The expansion of new television channels and increased amount of coverage given to sports, movies, and animated features are among strategies to overcome these problems. Television in Iran thus illustrates a fascinating communication problem in many Islamic countries: how traditional culture can be synthesised with contemporary electronic media, such as television, and how television can be employed in ways that better suit the mode and styles of the country's history. (1997:207–208)

This is far removed from the Islamic community paradigm in Mowlana's previous works. Yet he still manages to avoid providing clear explanation and reasons as to why this should be the case in Iran after 23 years of Islamic rule. Mowlana racializes politics and culture by asserting some cultural legacies in the *whole* 'Muslim' world and rejecting the centrality of the West by pointing at 'alternative' forms of communications and communicative experience and perception in the Islamic world in general and in Iran in particular. But then the examples that he provides clearly contradict the 'unique' vision of Islamic communication, and rather than highlighting the peculiar and particular experience of the region, he points at global communality in the operation and distribution of programmes and contents. From his analysis it is not clear what is so specifically unique and 'Islamic' in the expansion of television channels and programmes such as modern animated features, movies, and sports—and how, indeed, these developments correspond to the principles of Islamic *Tabligh*. In his view there are some 'problems' with such development and content, but he is silent on the nature and origin of such problems and why they do exist in Iran or other countries in the region.

These issues could provide an excellent platform for more critical assessment of the realities of media in Iran. However, Mowlana is keen to prove his ideas rather than reality and instead raises a number of questions: is there a chance for 'traditional culture' in the age of contemporary electronic media? Yet again a number of general issues are raised through a set of questions with the aim of not engaging with concrete examples but to prove (and approve) an already problematic situation to which Mowlana himself

has pointed. The answer lies neither in the *country's history* nor in methods of using electronic media. The contradiction that worries Mowlana is an integral part of Islamism as an ideology and the realities of running a modern country. It is quite true that electronic media were used to perfection by Islamists in Iran. It is also true that many of the claims of a 'Universal, Uniform Islam' would have never materialized without the aid of new global communication technologies. However, the very tools which give Islamism a global voice expose it to 'Western' consumerism and messages (Turner, 1994; Roy, 1994). They also create a movement for religious reform that will in turn undermine religious apparatus.

After 1979, television in Iran became central to the project of the 'Islamization' of Iranian culture and in imposing a homogenous view of culture and polity. The new ruling elite, who had mostly denounced television as un-Islamic for most of their lives, soon realized that it could be one of the most effective tools for the realization of what they considered to be a true Islamic state.

A new 'Islamic' big media replaced the small media that were celebrated for their effectiveness in struggle against the monarchy. For a short while there were lively discussions on Iranian radio and television, roundtable discussions between various groups, political organizations, and government officials in which a number of well-known secular and leftist activists participated. But the optimism of the early days of revolution was soon replaced by the realities of a theocratic state, which was not even in the mood to discuss adding 'democratic' as a qualifier to the title of the new regime, namely the Islamic Republic of Iran. Television instead turned into what Fathi has labelled the 'electronic pulpit' (1979).

Television later became the main tool in mobilizing and attracting public support and opinion for a long war with Iraq. In the name of national interest and the unity of *umma* the government expanded its security net and destroyed nearly all of the political organizations it considered un-Islamic. Even political parties that supported the anti-imperialist stance and rhetoric of the regime did not escape. During this period one of the main 'original' programmes produced by Islamic television was televised confessions of political prisoners. As Abrahamian (1999) states in his disturbing book, television confession was not a new invention. Public recantations are not peculiar Islamic or Iranian inventions and certainly have nothing to do with the 'tradition/modern' dichotomy. In Iran, however, it took a rather interesting twist. Other regimes, including Stalinist Russia, did not have television at their disposal. However, while the Shah used television exclusively for left-wing organizations, under the Islamic Republic

> television has become an equal opportunity medium featuring prominent figures representing a wide spectrum of opinion—from monarchists, liberals, religious conservatives, and secular nationalists, to conventional Marxists, Maoists, and Trotskyists, all the way to radical

> Muslims and even ex-Khomeinists, who, for one reason or another, have fallen by the political wayside. (1999:5)

Among the notable recantations was the appearance of Ayatollah Shariatmadari who many in Iran, and especially in Azerbaijan, believed outranked Khomeini in seniority and religious scholarship. As Abrahamian notes, Shariatmadari appeared on television hoping to save his son-in-law, Sadough Qotbzadeh, who supported and accompanied Khomeini on his return to Iran and was rewarded by being appointed the first Director General of the Islamic radio and television network. Shariatmadari's hope did not materialize. Qutbzadeh was executed for 'participating in a pro-Western military plot', and Shariatmadari was depicted as 'liberal, linked to SAVAK [Shah's secret service], the Royalists, the Saudis, and the West'. He was, in an unprecedented move in the history of Iran, defrocked and stripped of the title of Ayatollah (ibid.:155–159).

Mowlana is well aware of this dark chapter in Iranian history and 'Islamic Television'. Compare two largely similar comments in Mowlana's works. 'Exiled [Khomeini] from Iran by the Shah in 1963, suffering like the Shi'a leader of old, he and other leading ayatollahs like Shariat-mdari and Mahmoud Taleghani were the symbols of cultural integrity' (1979:111–112). This sentence appears in *Global Communication in Transition* with a *minor* change: 'Exiled [Khomeini] from Iran by the Shah in 1963, he and other leading ayatollahs like Muttahari, Beheshti, and Taleghani were the symbols of cultural integrity' (1996:49–50). Shariatmadari's name has vanished, but the evidence of the history that has been denied stands like Clementis' fur hat.[3]

His arguments are not simply there to explain the 'Islamic' tradition and history and possible outlooks for media in the 'Islamic World' to Western readers. Rather, and as Tomlinson notes, he

> also comes across—courageously [*sic*] it must be said—as a more fulsome advocate of this position. Read like this, the book [*Global Communication in Transition*] represents a retrospection of a more radical kind than any we have so far encountered: a return, in effect, to pre-Enlightenment thinking in a refusal of all-embracing logic of western secular modernity. (1998:243)

Meanwhile television still continues with the same role as before. Abrahamian concludes that as a result of the public losing interest in these 'horror shows' and the possibility that they might destabilize the regime rather than legitime those in power, such shows started to disappear. Though certainly they are not as common as they were, due to the new momentum of Iranian democratization movements, they have made a comeback. This has occurred partly in the shape of a controversial TV programme called *Hoviyyat* (Identity). It was used as a platform to trash and demoralize writers,

intellectuals, and leftist organizations as well as those living in exile. For example, Faraj Sarkohi, editor of the now defunct cultural monthly *Adineh*, was arrested and forced to confess to being a spy after signing a petition against the programme, while a new televised confession was extracted from Ali Afshari, one of the leaders of the Iranian student movement (Ganji, 1999). There is a direct link between the Ministry of Information and Iranian Television (IRIB).

The evidence against Mowlana's conceptualization of *Islamic Communication* is overwhelming. Still, one important question remains that we have to deal with. Why are his arguments and research concentrated on television? There are a number of secondary explanations, like easier access to a concentrated medium (in the case of Iran), sources, and data, and the general trend or researchers to focus more on electronic media than let us say the press. The press in particular has been relegated to the field of 'historical enquiry'. This is all true. However, the main reasons are surely linked with a particular worldview and a political project. I would like to point two such reasons.

First of all broadcasting in general and television in particular fits Mowlana's characterization of Islamic and traditional communication as oral. Oral culture for Mowlana is one of the key features of 'Islamic society' and one which distinguishes it from the European experience. The reasons, according to him, are not hard to find:

> The process of industrialization, coupled with the rise of economic classes and establishment of the nation-state system, elevated the print culture to a new frontier in which not only the oral mode of communication was diminished in importance but also a new division between information producers and knowledge producers was drawn. (Mowlana, 1994:211)

This has not been the case in 'Islamic society'. Mowlana argues that 'Islamic societies' are based on a rather strong oral tradition that finds their best expression in *Qur'an*, the *Sunna,* and *Hadith*. This means a centralized form of power, and therefore in such forms of polity, civil society which is grounded in print and electronic culture and 'synonymous with such modern concepts as secularism, nation-state, nationalism, and modern European parliamentary democracy' (ibid.:223) in 'Muslim society' are useless and meaningless. Nowhere is this distinction more visible than in the Islamization of broadcasting and particularly television under the Islamic Republic. In Iran, unlike Europe, it is religion that gives broadcasting its legitimacy. According to Mowlana, television in Iran is based on the traditional sources of religo-political authority and combines the indigenous written and oral forms of communication into a unified framework.

In general, and for some obvious reasons, traditional communication modes and certainly the religious ones are oral. This is certainly true in the

case of *khotbeh* (sermon) and *rowzeh* (homiletic sermon) in Islam. There is a great emphasis in all religions on the art of oratory and the word *preacher* is meaningful to all of us. Religious leaders filled much of early days of Iranian television after the Revolution with such sermons and speeches. As Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi have observed:

> Essentially the pacing and modes of oral communication were transposed into broadcasting, which fits well with Ong's (1982) model of second orality's reverberating many of the same qualities as pristine orality. The social ethos of the clergy and Khomeini himself were carried by VVIR [Voice and Vision of the Islamic Republic] into Iranian homes with the least artifice, almost bracketing or minimizing the mediation of television itself. (1994:173)

Secondly, broadcasting in Iran is a state-owned and -controlled network, and this factor cannot be overlooked. In an essay examining the role of the mass media in the political processes, Colin Sparks looks at three different ways of describing the mass media's relation to the exercise of power in society: 'fourth power', 'fourth estate', and 'watchdog'. Iranian state television and Mowlana's characterization of Islamic media falls into the category of 'fourth power'. In Sparks's view:

> The three traditional powers [executive, legislature, and judiciary] in principle constitute the realm of the state. They have no necessary responsibility to anyone apart from themselves. Activities outside of the state are here termed "civil society", which is used in the classical sense to include private economic activities. The terminology of "fourth power" implicitly assimilates the media to the same governing role distinct from civil society as that exercised by the other three powers. (1995:48–49)

It is possible, Sparks notes, under certain conditions, to have some form of citizen control over the media in such constructs. But that requires a degree of democratization. In today's Iran, however, traditional structures and especially the rule of the Supreme Leader (*velayat-e faghih*) and the *Guardian Council* have the power to veto the rulings of the legislature and the executive, let alone the demands of ordinary people. Iranian television, therefore, fits the model defended by Mowlana, in which sovereignty belongs to God and 'his representatives'. I will return to broadcasting in Chapter 7.

In contrast to television, the press, in spite of the strong presence of the state and different waves of attack on them at certain points over the past two decades (and throughout Iranian history), has been regulated rather differently. Some of them have managed to operate semi-independently of the state, and many representing the views of various interests within the

state apparatus have expressed views that have not necessarily been the same as those which are promoted by the tightly controlled broadcasting network. Thousands of publications are published in Iran, indicating a range of subjects and interests that exist within this market.

Many of these titles cannot be simply labelled as Islamic. There is nothing specifically Islamic about medical journals, general knowledge, sport (the only Islamic aspect of sport in Iran is the banning of female athletes from participation in tournaments and of women in stadiums). We can safely assume that many of the publications dealing with technical issues, art, and culture and surely humour (religions and humour have never had an easy relationship) are not easily definable as Islamic. Increasingly in today's Iran, the press has come to be hailed and defined as the 'fourth estate'. Whether such a generalization of the role of the press is accurate in the light of such evidence and the Islamic state's undemocratic structure is another matter, which will be examined in more detail in the subsequent chapters. The key point, however, is that under the banner of 'civil society' and the press as a 'fourth estate', a new movement for democratization in Iran has started to define itself. The battle between the 'reformists' and 'conservatives' in Iran is also a battle over the definition and the role of the media. We have, therefore, every right to ask, not only which Islam, but also which Iran and which media?

CONCLUSION

The intention of this chapter has not been, by any means, to deny the importance of 'religion' or 'tradition'. The case of Iran, where the old gods seem to have risen from their graves so 'suddenly', provides a good opportunity to re-examine some of the central concerns of the social theory. The key phrase, however, remains social theory. The experience of Iran should not be regarded as Islamic exceptionalism. Furthermore, as the *absolutism* of cultural relativism in Iran illustrates, the emphasis on differences and references to an ahistorical essence cannot provide us with proper questions that are central to research, let alone answers. 'Islamic culture', for the repressive regimes of the region and their official spokesmen, is what 'Asian values' have meant and have been for the repressive regimes of Asia. There are many lessons to be learned from this revealing parallel.

In Mowlana's 'alternative' model, culture is simply an 'extension' of the state, and 'religion' is determining the guidelines for 'community', political action, and participation. It is in this essentialist model that 'culture' and 'community' can be reduced to singular, unchanging, and ahistorical entities, and 'Islam' as the sole signifier of the realm of culture and communication. So there is little wonder that in Mowlana's analysis, there is no mention of possible conflicts of interests, power structures, the right to 'interpretation', and the possibilities of internal divisions in 'Muslim society'. And it is

exactly this 'vision' of media, culture, and society that came under attack by the movement for democratization in Iran. The events after the 1997 presidential election and the debate about 'civil society' (similar to, again a revealing parallel, movements in Asia) have shifted attention from a consideration of the repressive *state*, which Mowlana and the conservatives in Iran prefer, to engagement with democratic aspirations of society.

Cultures are meaningless without politics, and certainly their elevation into dominance has everything to do with the state. Without 'the state', nations are lost. Eagleton writes that

> the nation-state does not unqualifiedly celebrate the idea of culture. On the contrary, any particular national or ethnic culture will come into its own through the unifying principle of the state, not under its own system. Cultures are intrinsically incomplete and need the supplement of the state to become truly themselves. (2000:59)

Contrary to Mowlana's assumption, it is not Islam that gives meaning to the state. Rather, it is the coercive force of the state that makes the particular 'Islam' what it is in a particular national context. Eagleton suggests that it is exactly this assumption about the internal link between culture and politics which has helped to wreak so much havoc in our world. It is the state that imposes unity and coherence on culture, and creates forced unity out of a whole set of complex practices, diversities, and inconsistencies. Essentialist thinking about a non-existent singular, homogenous 'Muslim society' cannot provide adequate explanation of the realities of Iran, or for that matter any 'Islamic' country. How can they, since what they offer, fetishism of 'culture', is not even their own product, but rather like themselves, the product of 'modernity'?

The collapse of the residual into dominant and the continuing desire for *Azadi* (freedom), one of the main aims of the Revolution of 1979, can only be seen in the context of 'modernity'. The experience of Iran (before and after the Revolution) and the shortcoming of Mowlana's model also warn us to look at different roles that religion might play in such a historically short space and time. 'The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist' (Benjamin, 1968:255).

3 Iranian Press
The Paradox of 'Modernity'

> . . . rather than opposing class to difference, we need to explore how differences are classed . . .
>
> Graham Murdock

INTRODUCTION

The post-revolutionary state in Iran has tried to amalgamate 'Shari'a with electricity' and sought modernity alongside what it considers as 'Islam'. While in general sympathetic to private capital, on the basis of some quasi anti-capitalist politics, the state began to restrict market relations, confiscated major assets of sections of the Iranian bourgeoisie, and nationalized major aspects of Iran's industry, including its communication system. Since the end of war with Iraq and the start of the process of 'reconstruction', a more market-driven development and economic policy have been key aims of the state. This process has been anything but smooth, and the state's policy has been contested by the implications of ongoing protests by workers, various national minorities (including Azaris, Kurds, Turkomans, and Baluchis), students and women; further fragmentation of the ruling elites and intensification of internal factionalism and disputes over the state's policies; as well as the very definition and nature of the Islamic state itself. This chapter examines key aspects of the contradictions and tensions in the Iranian press market, social stratification, and competing forms of 'Islamism'/nationalism by looking at the context of production and consumption of the Iranian press. The first section of this chapter provides an overview of the expansion of the Iranian communication system in general and the press in particular. It then proceeds to examine the role of the state in this process and to consider realities of the economies of the press, trying to move beyond one-dimensional liberal/modernization perspectives with their sole focus on the repressive role of the state. By providing a comparative analysis of the development of the press in Iran and other Middle Eastern countries, this chapter challenges the assumptions about a unified and homogenous 'Muslim society' further, and paves the way for examination of the struggle for press freedom in Iran over the past few decades as well as review of the continued struggle.

THE PRESS AND DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Since 1979 Iran has witnessed a massive increase in the number of publications which have found their way to the newsstand. Between 1979 and 1993, 2,253 titles were published in Iran (Qasemi, 1994). This figure might not be that impressive at all. It is very likely that the number of titles that have been published in that 13-year period exceeds the amount that has been cited. Nevertheless, it looks significant if we compare it with the 4,841 titles which were published in the 53 years from 1925 to 1979 (Tabatabai-e Naomi, 2000). Such growth, recent events, development, weaknesses, and strengths of the Iranian press are a result of a number of social and economic developments. A number of changes at the international level, such as further globalization and commercialization of culture industries, 'new' political and economic formations, and the resurfacing of democracy, which was previously regarded as something that could only come after 'development', combined with internal changes, have made a massive impact on the culture industries and have increased demands for cultural products. At the national level these transformations have been crucial:

Changes in Population

Iran's population at the time of the Constitutional Revolution (1906) was around 9 million. According to the population census of 1956 (the first in Iran) the population had increased to more than 18 million. Since then the number has increased quite rapidly to over 25 million in 1966, 33 million in 1976, nearly 50 million in 1986, and a little over 60 million by 1996, making Iran the 16th most populated country in the world. Despite the relaxation of attitudes towards the 'un-Islamic' policy of family planning, the growth rate of Iran's population is still among the highest in the world.

There are a number of important points which we need to consider when looking at the human geography of Iran. The first is the rapid increase in urbanization. At the time in which Lerner was advocating his version of modernization, only around 30 per cent of Iranians were living in cities. As he argued: 'Population distribution shows little regional mobility or urbanization. There are over 40,000 villages in Iran housing about 60% of population, with another 10% living in migratory tribes. The 30% of townspeople are about equally divided between smaller towns, cities over 50,000 and Tehran' (1958: 361). As he observed at that time there was evidence of population movement from villages to the big cities.The picture in 1996 is a rather different one. Of the 60,055,488 Iranians in 1996, 38 per cent lived in the countryside (scattered in 65,000 villages) with 62.31 per cent in 612 cities all over the country. The number of people living in cities has increased further since 1996.

Another crucial point to note is the age pattern of the population. In this instance and for a number of well-known reasons including poverty and a rather low life expectancy, the Iranian population has generally been young. This aspect, however, is even more obvious in today's Iran. More than 40 million Iranians (about 70% of the population) are under 30 while nearly 50 per cent are under 20. Of these hardly anyone has a personal recollection of the 1979 uprising. It is the desires and aspirations of the 'grandchildren' of the Revolution which have become the focus of recent political debates. The 'problems' of the younger generation cannot be simply regarded as a sectional issue, but as a national one. There can be little doubt that this influences not only the demand for cultural products, but especially ones with a specific and more 'popular' content. In addition to these two points, we can also mention the movements and migration of population both inside and towards the outside of Iran, as well as the assured shift from the extensive to the nuclear family, which again impacts upon desires and demands for a wide range of cultural goods including the press.

Literacy and Education

Literacy has always been regarded as one of the key prerequisites of economic and political development. Without doubt the notions of citizenship and popular participation in the political life of any country without access to a wide range of information, resources, and communication channels are meaningless. However, it is safe to assume that literacy in itself is neither the cause nor a dynamic force of economic development, nor can it guarantee political participation. The experience of former Communist countries in East and Central Europe, as well Cuba, in which illiteracy in its general sense was non-existent is a good example. Furthermore, we can recall a number of brilliant examples of massive popular movements and magnificent political participation around the world at times when literacy levels were low. In this respect we can point to the impressive radical movements for universal suffrage in 19th-century Europe.

Nevertheless, this has been one of the main features of modern societies, with literacy regarded as a necessary pre-condition for progress and economic development. For decades now, advocates of modernization have been keen on educating a workforce that has not only the ability to read and write, but that is capable of organizing and running the most complex matters related to industrial production and services. In this respect Iran is not an exception. Iran, as Lerner pointed out a long time ago, has never suffered from the shortage of 'intellectuals'. If anything, it has suffered 'from the over production of intellectuals' (1958:363). The key question has always been the expansion of literacy and limited 'opportunity' for those who have the skills.

According to some reports (Barzegar, 1999) less than one per cent of the Iranians were literate at the time of Constitutional Revolution in 1906. Half a century later the figure had reached 14.6 per cent. The literacy rate in later decades increased rapidly, from around 30 per cent in 1966 to over 60 per cent in 1986 and nearly 80 per cent in 1996. The discrepancy in the literacy rate between urban and rural areas, as well as between men and women, is still an issue. In 1996 the literacy rate in urban areas was a little over 85 per cent, while the figure in rural areas was just below 70 per cent. Similarly while the literacy rate for women has increased from just over 7 per cent in 1956 to 74 per cent in 1996, the gap between men and women still remains. In 1996 nearly 85 per cent of the male population was literate.

The total number of university students has also rapidly increased, especially since 1979. In 1948 the number of university students at Iranian universities was estimated to be 6,525. In addition 2,000 more students were studying at universities outside Iran (Lerner, 1958). At the time of the Iranian Revolution, in 1979–1980, the number of university students had reached a record 175,675 studying in 541 fields. In 1995–1996 this figure increased by more than threefold to 526,621 studying in 966 different fields. If we add the 521,472 students who were studying at the private Islamic Azad University (an open university which runs on tuition fees received from students), and the thousands of Iranians who study abroad, in 1995–1996 there were well over one million Iranian students studying at different levels and fields. In the same academic year the ratio of university students per 1,000 people stood at 1.78. Only around 6 per cent of Iranians have higher education degrees, but the importance of this group, as the students uprising in the summer of 1999 showed, should not be overlooked.

Women and Public Life

One of the most important characteristics of modern Iran is the dynamic and multi-dimensional presence of women in public life. This presence is the direct result of awareness and their struggle for equal rights and citizenship. This awareness has also raised their 'expectation' of society and has been reflected in recent developments as well as in independent small media that bring into the public domain issues which in a patriarchal society have always been considered 'private'. Iranian women of course made a massive contribution to the demise of the Shah. Those who were supportive of the new regime participated in the long and bloody war with neighbouring Iraq, they participated in education, continued to work despite the introduction of more and more discriminatory legislation, and contrary to the general assumption, kept a high profile and a very visible public presence. Those who supported the regime campaigned on its behalf by various means, including through the media, while those who opposed it formed working groups, associations, and centers. A great number were members of both

the small and the big opposition parties, and many activists were arrested, tortured, and killed by the Islamic Republic.[1] The growing demands for a free press and a diverse range of cultural products is the result of such a presence, as well as wider social and political transformations, the continued crisis of legitimacy, and the changing and even more contradictory nature of the role of the state in Iran.

Such social transformations and their subsequent political and cultural impacts have little to do with 'Islamic values'. If anything, such transformations have further polarized Iranian society in terms of tastes, the consumption of cultural goods, and access to different products. The availability of 'global' cultural artifacts, despite the massive efforts of the Islamic Republic to fight this 'cultural invasion' has had a massive impact upon 'culture' in Iran.

UNEVEN ACCESS AND DISTRIBUTION

Despite these social transformations the state of the press in Iran is still well below the required international standards as outlined by UNESCO. It is even below that of many 'Muslim' countries. Table 3.1 indicates that demographic changes in Iran are not reflected in the number of daily titles in the country. There is, however, a close correlation between the circulation of newspapers and the degree of political openness and freedom; 1980, in tandem with the *bahar-e Azadi* (spring of freedom), shows an impressive increase in number of titles, two and one-half times more when compared with 1975. With the relentless repression of the opposition and of newspapers after 1980, with the introduction and implementation of the Press Law, and during the war with Iraq, we witness a decrease in the number of titles available, if not in circulation. The number of titles in 1985 is less than what it was ten years ago. The period of 'reconstruction' after Iran's acceptance of UN Resolution 598 and the end of war paved the way for the emergence of new titles. A period of downturn in 1991 to 1994 is followed by the observable increase in a number of titles in 1995 and 1996. The number increased further in 2000, and in the heyday of 'reformist' and independent press rose to 60 dailies. Despite the closure of a number of titles in 2000–2001 and the muzzling of the 'liberal' press, the number of titles produced and the total circulation of newspapers remains higher than at any time since the founding of the Islamic Republic. The emergence of these new publications redressed the balance in terms of the number of titles and their circulation per 1,000 inhabitants, taking the number of dailies to 60 and increasing the ratio to 53 per 1,000. This is the only time that Iran has managed to rise above the average of 44 copies per 1,000 inhabitants in the developing countries. Yet it still remains below the 100 copies per 1,000 recommended by UNESCO in 1961. To reach this target Iranian press circulation needs to exceed six million copies.

Table 3.1 Daily Newspaper Number and Circulation in Iran.

Year	*Number of titles*	*Circulation (000)*	*Per 1,000 inhabitants*
1975	19	700	21
1980	45	970	25
1985	15	1,250	26
1990	21	1,500	27
1991	15	1,300	23
1992	13	1,250	21
1993	13	1,200	20
1994	12	1,150	19
1995	27	1,446	23
1996	32	1,651	26

Source: http://unescostat.unesco.org/statsen/statistics/yearbook/tables/CultAndCom/table_IV_S_.html

Two more crucial issues merit a closer examination. One is the limited number of local papers. Of 60 daily titles published in 2000, only 12 were local and the rest (so-called national) were based in Tehran. Of 253 licences granted in 2000, only 35 were for the local press (Centre for Media Studies and Research, 2000). The concentration of the press in the capital is yet another indicator of uneven development in Iran with the concentration of wealth, literacy, the advertising market, and, of course, state institutions and government departments. Another important dimension of the development of the press in Iran is the circulation of major dailies. According to the same report (ibid.) the circulation of only one daily reached 400,000 copies. In the history of Iran, 1979 remains an exceptional year: the circulation of the two major newspapers (*Kayhan and Ettela'at*) reached 1.5 million copies. Compare this with the circulation of the major dailies in Egypt where the three major dailies each sell more than 650,000 copies, and in Turkey where the four popular dailies have a circulation of well over 500,000 and in the case of *Houriat* is around one million (Motamed Nejad, 1998).

A more steady and stable development can be seen in the diffusion of radio and television (see Table 3.2). However, in this sector, as in the case of the press the numbers do fall short of the UNESCO minimum requirements. As we shall see in both respects, Iran is lagging behind many of its Arab neighbours and many Muslim countries. But fascinatingly enough a closer look at the state of the Iranian press outside Iran indicates that the country is even behind those who have been forced out of the country.

Table 3.2 Radio and Television Receivers: Total and Number per 1,000 Inhabitants.

Year	*Number of radio receivers (000)*	*Number of receivers per 1000 inhabitants*	*Number of television receivers (000)*	*Number of receivers per 1,000 inhabitants*
1970	2,900	102	533	19
1975	4,000	120	1,500	45
1980	6,400	163	2,000	51
1985	10,000	210	2,600	55
1990	13,400	238	3,620	64
1991	13,860	240	3,731	65
1992	14,400	244	3,842	65
1993	14,900	248	4,030	67
1994	15,400	252	4,150	68
1995	16,000	257	4,300	69
1996	16,600	262	4,500	71
1997	17,000	263	4,610	71

Source: http://unescostat.unesco.org/statsen/statistics/yearbook/tables/CultAndCom/table_IV_14_Asia.html

Since 1979 the Iranians living outside of Iran have managed to produce far more titles, programmes, and cultural artifacts. Essentially their aim was to keep a sense of community, to create international campaigns against the abuses of human rights in Iran, and a forum for—in many cases violently disrupted—continued party/organizational politics or 'radical arts'. According to some reports, in Los Angeles alone Iranians have launched more than 80 periodicals, 63 TV stations, and 18 radio channels. The number of books published by Iranians outside Iran is 20 times more than the number of titles produced by Iranians living in Iran, and the number of dramatic plays staged by Iranians within several years in Cologne, Germany, exceeded those that were performed in Tehran. Many of these are produced, published, and staged by political organizations of different persuasions (Seif, 1999:20–24).

All together the estimated four million Iranians outside Iran have published more than 1,200 publications, of which 351 titles are still in the market (Bahrampour, 2002:89). Nearly 85 per cent of these are published in United States, Germany, Britain, Sweden, France, and Canada. While this sector is mainly dominated by the periodical press rather than dailies it is far more impressive than the press market inside Iran. In contrast to the

existing six television channels in Iran, Kamalipour (2003), in an article published on the website Iranian.com, suggests there are at least 13 'Iranian' satellite channels broadcasting into the country.[2]

Detailed comparison with the media market in the Middle East will pave the way for a more critical insight about the problems, dilemmas, and the peculiar nature of the culture industry in Iran which cannot be simply understood on the basis of 'Islamic Exceptionalism'.

As Table 3.3 illustrates, one of the striking features of the region is the wide variation among countries in terms of their population, literacy rates, expenditures on health and education, and gross national product (GNP) per capita. There is a close correlation between the wealth of countries and

Table 3.3 Human Development Indicators in Selected Middle Eastern Countries & United States.

Country	*Total Population, Millions (2001)*	*Adult Literacy Rate*	*Public Expenditure on Education (As % of GDP)*	*Public Expenditure on Health (As % of GDP)*	*Military Expenditure (As % of GDP)*	*GDP per capita (PPP US$)*
Qatar	0.6	81.2	3.6	2.5	…	18,789
United Arab Emirates	2.9	76.3	1.9	2.5	2.5	17,935
Kuwait	2.4	82.0	4.8 (1990)	2.6	11.3	15,799
Bahrain	0.7	87.6	3.0	2.8	4.1	15,084
Saudi Arabia	22.8	76.3	9.5	4.2	11.3	11,367
Turkey	69.3	85.1	3.5	3.6	4.9	6,974
Tunisia	5.7	71.0	6.8	3.0 (1990)	1.6	6,363
Iran	**67.2**	**76.3**	**4.4**	**2.5**	**4.8**	**5,884**
Algeria	30.7	66.7	.3 (1990)	3.0	3.5	5,308
Lebanon	3.5	86.0	3.0	…	5.5	4,308
Jordan	5.2	89.7	5.0	4.2	8.6	3,966
Egypt	69.1	55.3	3.7 (1990)	1.8	2.6	3,635
Morocco	29.6	48.9	5.5	1.3	4.1	3,546
Sudan	32.2	57.8	0.9 (1990)	1.0	3.0	1,797
United States	**288**	**100**	**4.8**	**5.8**	**3.1**	**34,320**

Source: UNDP (2001), UNDP (2002).

access to means of communication. Another striking feature is the high expenditure of GDP on the military. While the figure has decreased from the heyday of military development and expenditure of 1990 (thanks to the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and the subsequent Gulf War under then-President George Bush, Sr.), it remains amongst the highest in the developing world, with only a few countries in the world matching this level of military expenditure. What is distinctive about the Middle East is exactly related to such figures which stem from its peculiar colonial legacy. In Henry's view (2003) the most important and distinctive characteristic of the region is neither religion, language nor culture, but a colonial legacy that has continued to paralyze it.

The use of media in richer countries is more common and widespread (compare Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar with the likes of Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Iran). Yet this is no indication of the level of political participation and openness of the governments in the region. While certainly 'modernization' has taken place in terms of urbanization, literacy, and the uses of communication, the final indices (participation) are not even on the horizon in a number of countries in the region. And certainly the changes in 'attitude', 'values', and 'expectation' has led to anything but a welcoming response to the United States and other 'ideal' models of all that is modern. The 'curse' of authoritarian modernization and the paradox of underdevelopment are there for all to see.

The case of Iran further illustrates this point. Despite its higher GNP, it is lagging behind Turkey and Egypt in terms of media usage and certainly in terms of distribution of daily newspapers per 1,000 of the population. Iran is, though, ahead in terms of ownership of automobiles per 1,000 inhabitants (Motamed Nejad, 1998). The underdevelopment of the printing press cannot simply be explained in terms of a general assumption that Iran and many developing countries have 'bypassed' the literacy phase (Mohammadi, 1995). While there is evidence that electronic media, especially radio and television (with their oral residue), have diffused more rapidly, this in itself will not explain the differences between equally underdeveloped countries in the region. Other factors in this paradox of underdevelopment need further elaboration.

STATE AND ECONOMIC STRAINS ON THE PRESS

In much of the recent literature about the nature of the Iranian press, and we might add elsewhere in the South, the focus has been on the repressive role of the state. Such a liberal focus on the coercive role of the state, while highlighting serious political limits and the role of the state as one of the main enemies—if not *the* main enemy—of media freedom, is based on a dubious dichotomy of the state and 'civil society' which favours the market as a source of liberation. Lee's assertions that the liberal theory of the media

Table 3.4 Access to Communications in Selected Middle Eastern Countries & United States.

Country	*Number of Telephone (per 1,000)*	*Cellular Mobile (per 100)*	*Estimated PC (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	18.3	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	16.4	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
United States	**667**	**451**	**62.44**	**501.5**	**2116**	**806**	**1520**	**212**	**34,320**

Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook (1999), UNDP (2001), UNDP (2002), ITU (2003).

with its focus on the coercive force of the state is more useful in analyzing the media in Third World countries are a classic example. Starting from a rather strange and misplaced analogy that 'Obesity and anorexia are exclusively the problems of the rich; the poor suffer from undernourishment and malnutrition instead' (2001:83), he proposes a mechanical separation of the problems in the field and proposes that a focus on the economic context of the media (as offered by the political economy approach) is fruitless in the context of developing countries. This 'not yet' principle of modernization theory, echoed widely in Iran, not only makes the issue of ownership redundant, but in the most extreme 'liberal' cases, proposes privatization of the media and the establishment of big media conglomerates as the remedy to the ills of the state-dominated media market.

Qasemi (1998), a prolific writer and a media historian, for example, recognizes the significance of press ownership in Iran and regards it as the most urgent issue. In his view the organizational structure of the Iranian press has led to the separation of journalism (*roznameh-negari*) and ownership (*roznameh-dari*). He suggests that the creation of big press firms will pave the way for the emergence of professionalism and job security. Bahrampour (2002) in a similar fashion points at the ownership pattern of the Iranian press and calls for the creation of big press companies. What these two and many other commentators in Iran do argue for is not the creation of any big press groups to achieve the economies of scale and a more stable press environment, but big *private* press groups. In Iran there are such big media groups, but none of them are under private ownership.

The Iranian press market does indeed reflect the broader picture of the Iranian political economy, which is marked by the presence of massive and large-scale state-owned corporations on the one hand, and petty production and small enterprises on the other. It is deeply marked by a divide between some large state-owned companies on the one hand, and individual titles owned by individual owners (*roznameh-dar*) on the other. The three major players are Kayhan, Etella't and Soroush. Kayhan, the biggest and one of oldest publishers in Iran, is under the control of the Supreme Leader (or to be precise his representative) and currently publishes 13 titles.[3] The key title is the conservative daily *Kayhan*. Other dailies include *Kayhan International* (published in English since 1959, and claims to be the oldest English paper in the country); *Kayhan Arabia* (published in Arabic since 1980); and the daily sport newspaper *Kayhan Varzeshi*. The firm also publishes *Kayhan* in Turkish, as well as a number of weeklies and monthlies, including the monthly *Kayhan Farhangi* (Cultural, published since 1984), weekly *Zan-e Rouz* (Today's Woman, published since 1964), bi-monthly *Kayhan Caricature* (published since 1992), and weekly *Kayhan Havaie* (published primarily for Iranians living outside Iran). Since 1985 Kayhan also ventured into publishing books after the creation of its book publishing arm, *Sazeman Entesharat Kayhan*.

The other firm which is also state-owned and -controlled is Etella't. It has historically been the main rival of Kayhan and publishes rival titles to those of Kayhan. Its flagship publication is the daily *Etella't* which the firm claims to be the oldest daily in Iran.[4] Other publications include *Etella't International,* published in New York and London and targeting Iranians living outside the country, and weeklies such as the *Weekly Etella't*, *Donyae-e Varzesh* (World of Sport), *Javanan* (Young), and *Sahand*. In addition there are two periodicals: monthly *Etella't Science*, and the more academically oriented *Political and Economic Etella't*. The firm has a more moderate approach to public issues and is less controversial than its main rival Kayhan.

Another old big publishing house which has managed to expand under the Islamic Republic is Soroush Press. Soroush began its activity in 1966 as an affiliate to the National Iranian Radio & Television Organization (now Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting).[5] Prior to 1979 it only published the weekly, entertainment-oriented *Tamasha*. But as part of the rapid expansion of the operation of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) in the last decade or so, Soroush has expanded its activities and titles. The flagship title of the firm is the daily *Jam-e Jam* with a print run of 480,000. *Jam-e Jam* received its licence in 1997 but began publishing for the first time in April 2000.[6] Other titles include *Weekly Soroush* (prior to 1979 published as *Tamasha*); *Soroush-e Koodak* (a monthly for children which began publishing in 1991); *Soroush-e Now-Javan* (a monthly for adolescents, published since 1988); *Soroush-e Javan* (a monthly for youths, published since 1999); *Soroush-e Banovan* (a monthly for women, published since 1999); and *Soroush-e Andishe* (a quarterly review of philosophy, again published since 1999). The date of the launch of each publication should make it clear that the IRIB has been one of the main beneficiaries of Khatami's more open and tolerant policy towards press in Iran.

These three undoubtedly are the main players in the press market. Kayhan and Etella't both represent clear elements of continuity in terms of the press market and the survival of established players. The expansion and consolidation of the position of Soroush also points not only to the rapid expansion of the press market in Iran, but to the very fact that big organizations such as the IRIB, with its massive resources, news bureaus all over the country and abroad, and regular access to state and governmental sources, are the main beneficiaries in the rapidly expanding communication industry in Iran. A number of other examples demonstrate this trend. One such example is the publishing ventures of the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).[7] Its flagship daily title *Iran*, since its launch in 1998, has become one of the key newspapers in the country. IRNA publishes six other titles, some of which do compete with similar titles published by other firms, including *Al-Vefaq* (the only other Arabic daily is published by Kayhan); *Iran Daily* (the country's third English newspaper); *Iran Varzeshi* (a daily that is part of a growing market in Iran

specializing in sports news coverage); and *Iran Javan* (yet another title from a major player targeting a younger readership). In addition to these, Iran also publishes the monthly *Iran Azin* (focusing on interior design), *Iran-e Saal* which provides an annual report of Iran's significant events, and *Iran Sepid,* the only Braille publication in the region.

Other wealthy titles in Iran, with their own financial muscle and resources, are the provincial daily *Quds* that has been published in the holy city of Mashhad since 1987 and the daily *Hamshahri*, the best-selling daily published by the mayor's office of Tehran. *Quds* is part of a massive operation of *Astan Quds Razavi*, which since 1979 has been in charge of endowments and offerings to the shrine of Imam Reza, the eighth imam in the holy family of Shi'a. The shrine and the city of Mashhad attracts about 15 million visitors and pilgrims every year, and Astan Quds Razavi is the owner of massive resources and one of the richest organizations in Iran. The organization has its own grand custodian, directly appointed by the Supreme Leader, a board of trustees, and various departments of which the economic department is the most significant. This department has expanded its activities in areas such as agriculture, construction, industry, and mining, as well as trading in the economic free zone of Sarakhs in the Gulf. The publishing arm of Astan Quds Razavi (The Quds Cultural Organization) has also expanded its activities in recent years. In addition to *Quds* (published in Mashhad since 1987, and simultaneously in Tehran since 1997), it also publishes *Haram* (Shrine) magazine (published every 45 days since 1991), and *Zair* (Pilgrims) international magazine (published since 1994 for international readers).[8] *Hamshahri,* another powerful regional title with a national reach and a circulation of nearly 500,000, is printed in high-quality colour and has a large classified section which is the envy of other titles. Published since 1993, it is owned by the Tehran mayor's office. This paper is regarded by many including Qasemi (2001) as the ideal model of professional press and journalism.

The liberal theory of the press in general, and the 'not yet' theory of many advocates of the modernization school, only highlights the coercive aspects of the state and focuses on the propaganda functions of the state-controlled and -owned media. By taking this approach they neglect the very crucial fact that in many cases in the South, including Iran, these media are also clearly units of capital accumulation, and their economic basis and massive expansion cannot be simply understood in terms of 'malnutrition'. If anything these examples provide clear evidence of the realization, of the state and interested parties, that in the current climate and with increasing demand for cultural commodities by a growing number of middle classes, who have been the main beneficiaries of economic restructuring and reforms, they have no choice but to expand their media activities. While many of these titles might be regarded as 'official' propaganda outlets, the imperative of modern capitalism and the market forces them to launch titles with similar

Table 3.5 Major Media Players in Iran and Their Interests.

	Dailies	*Periodical*	*Publishing*	*Broadcasting*	*Others*
Kayhan	Kayhan, Kayhan (International), Kayhan Arabia, Kayhan Varzeshi	Kayhan Turkish, Kayhan Farhangi, Zan-e Rouz, Kayhan Caricature, Kayhan Havaie, Kayhan Bacheha	Sazeman, Entesharat Kayhan		News site
Etella't	Etella't, Etella't International	Weekly Etella't, Donyae-e Varzesh, Javanan, Sahand, Etella't Science, Political and Economic Etella't	Etella't Publishing		News site
IRNA	Iran, Al-Vefaq, Iran Daily (English), Iran Varzeshi	Iran Javan, Iran Azin, Iran-e Saal, Iran Sepid (Braille)			News agency, ISP, Online news, school of media/ journalism
Astan Quds Razavi	Quds	Haram (shrine), Zair (pilgrims)	The Quds, Cultural Organization		Agriculture, construction, industry and mining, international trade
Tehran's Mayor Office	Hamshahri				
IRIB	Jam-e Jam	Weekly Soroush, Soroush-e Koodak, Soroush-e Now-Javan, Soroush-e Javan, Soroush-e Banovan, Soroush-e Andishe	Soroush Press	**National:** Six TV channels seven radio International: Seven TV channels eight radio	Sima Film, Sima Chob, Takta Saba

Notes: **IRNA**: Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency **IRIB**: Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting.

concerns to compete with others. In the case of Iran such a move not only makes the official rhetoric of 'Islamic values' and anti-materialism absurd, it illustrates the massive shortcomings of a singular focus on the state as a unified and one-dimensional entity. It is not obvious, judging by historical evidence, that the transfer of these state-owned media to the private sector will transform them into democratic institutions and pave the way for more independent journalism. This is not to deny the significance of the role of the state in repressing dissident and oppositional views, but rather a call for a more critical engagement with the rapidly changing nature of the media market in the South.

Undoubtedly in countries where historically the press has emerged as an agent of modernization, and where the process of 'modernization' is a top-down and by definition an 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 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 with producing a newspaper in a country with no or little tradition of democracy is not an attractive prospect for the private sector. Heavy and expensive machinery, lack of proper distribution networks (roads, rails, etc.), difficulties in producing viable and credible newspapers where there are no political and social accountability and transparency are all major turn-offs for private investors.

First of all, and in such a context, the state is automatically in the driving position. Resources, necessary capital, labour, distribution network (especially when nationalized), and a much- needed and essential factor of access to state institutions and governmental departments are in no way a major obstacle for the state. Massive investment of the state in creating major publication firms in Iran (such as *Kayhan* and *Ettela'at*) is a good example. In this sense Iran is not an exceptional case. According to Mirzaie (1998), a majority of the scholarly, scientific, and social-cultural periodicals in Iran are controlled and owned by the state. Of 130 publications in these categories, more than 70 are controlled by the state.

Economic resources available to publications that are linked directly with state and government departments do work in favour of such papers and against unofficial and independent press. Subsidies in various forms (foreign exchange, papers, tax exemption, and so on) are distributed unevenly. Four major and best-selling dailies, *Kayhan*, *Ettela'at* (both regarded as 'public property', and their managing directors are appointed by the Supreme Leader), *Hamshahri* (owned by the Tehran Mayor's Office), and *Iran* (owned by the Islamic Republic News Agency–IRNA) swallow more than 60 per cent of foreign exchange subsidies. All have massive financial, technical, and transport facilities, and the two big, though not the best-selling dailies, *Kayhan* and *Ettela'at* (the longest running newspapers in Iran), have their own modern printing press (Rezaie, 1998:135).

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.[9] Because of their unfair advantage, neither circulation nor losing money are their prime concerns. 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 for political reasons, and the latter for 'moral' reasons. Both routes have been closed with brutal force to newspapers.

Income from advertising is similarly problematic as the major four receive the big chunk of advertising revenue. In addition to their print quality (colour print), the big four, especially *Hamshahri* (the best-selling daily which carries more classified adverts than any other paper), by attracting all announcements, projects, and jobs of Tehran's town hall, and *Iran,* the official 'state advertisers', are in the driving position (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 and especially from the mid-1990s onward, still (and in contrast to developed countries) less than 50 per cent 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 (compared with advertising in *Hamshahri*) while it attracts 25 times more audience. All these, technical costs, distribution costs (where up to 40% 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, the flourishing of Iranian cinema, exciting new publications, and the battle over the control of satellite and Internet) that the state is incapable of catering to, providing for, or even controlling the cultural sector. The same factors and much more prevent the existence of a healthy press market.

Economic crisis, inflation, high levels of unemployment, and escalating prices of essential goods have all squeezed the Iranian family's purse further and further. The share of cultural goods in the households' basket, despite a relative increase in the past decade, still remains among the lowest. Only 26 per cent of Iran's population is employed (UNDP Human Development Report, 2001). This is lower than Algeria (32%), Bahrain (44.6%), Egypt (37%), Jordan (28.9%), Kuwait (37.4%), Lebanon (34%), Morocco (39.1), Qatar (54.9%), Saudi Arabia (32.6%), and even Sudan (39.2%). Of all Arab countries only occupied Palestine (20.1%) has a lower rate of employment than Iran (Arab Human Development Report, 2001). In Iran one person is working so five people can live; the ratio in

some other countries is 1 to 2. In such a condition, cultural activities are necessarily sacrificed and are the first victim.

According to the Statistical Centre of Iran,[10] the share of recreation and entertainment (of which the press is only a tiny part) in urban households' expenditures on non-food commodities and services is even less than the amount spent on 'personal care and effects', 'restaurants, cafés and hotels', and 'communications'. A quick examination of the actual amount spent per year per household on 'recreation and entertainment' illustrates my point more forcefully. According to the same source the average annual expenditure on 'recreation and entertainment' is 328,045 rials. Divided by 365, the 'average' Iranian family spends 898 rials (less than US10cents) per day on cultural goods. The average cost of a newspaper is 339 rials. Satellite receivers (still officially illegal) cost more than US$150. The cheapest computer in Iran costs around 4,500,000 rials or US$450 and the average cost of Internet access is 350,000 rials (US$35) per month. This does not include telephone line rentals. For Internet access Iranians pay more than Americans and Europeans, while the average annual urban household income is 25,831,527 rials (US$2,583), which stands at around US$215 per month. The figure for rural household is 15,200,149 rials (US$1,520) or $126 per month.[11]

The cost of Internet access in general is linked to the density of a country's Internet population and the distance from the main servers. The politics of bandwidth and the very fact that the United States operates as the hub of Internet traffic means countries must make payments for traffic exchanges and connectivity to international telecommunication carriers. For this reason the cost of Internet access in developed countries is lower than in the rest of the world. According to one estimate 1Mpbs ADSL connection in London costs £80. For the same connection in Iran the cost is a staggering £9,200.[12] In Iran, a computer costs two times an 'average' monthly salary in urban area and three times in rural areas. In real terms, however, the cost is even higher. According to a recent report[13] the price of a computer is about 2,250PPP$, access to the Internet from a netcafé costs 3.5PPP$ per hour, a dial-up connection used by many in Iran costs 1PPP$ per hour and the price of using ADSL featuring 128–512 kpbs is around 1,200 PPP$ per month.[14] Such conditions price the media in general and the Internet in particular out of the reach of the majority. The media in general, judging by their circulations/readerships, are not (indeed cannot be) the main priority in household expenditures.

This is of course just a figure for urban households in 2001. The situation in rural areas is even more abysmal with the percentage share of families consuming newspapers three times lower than in urban households (Naderan & Abdoli, 2001). Another study estimates that three-fifths of the literate population in cities such as Hamadan, Arak, and Bushehr do not read newspapers (Rajabzadeh, 1998). The realities of the media market in Iran illustrate further the polarization of newspaper readership between urban

and rural areas, Tehran and smaller cities, and of course between those with different levels of disposable income. The share of income/consumption of the poorest 30 per cent in Iran is just 7.1 per cent while the 'share' of the richest 30 per cent is 83.6 (Human Development Report, 2001:284).[15] There is nothing 'Islamic' or 'exceptional' about this divide.

CONCLUSION

This chapter once again questioned the validity of essentialist arguments that suggest that the realities of the Iranian press can be explained by simple reference to 'Islam' as the determining factor in the development of the press. The answer quite simply has been that in order to make sense of the press industry in Iran we have to take into consideration various variables including important demographic changes and increases in urbanization, literacy, the rapid expansion of higher education, and the increasing role of women in public life. All these have contributed to a rapidly increasing demand for cultural products in general and the press in particular.

Furthermore, this chapter argued that the state is (and has been) the principal agent for the expansion and development of the press in Iran, as well as the key player in the press market. Rather than making the issue of the ownership of the media redundant, the reality of the press market and the emergence of the state as the main press 'conglomerate' points towards the increasingly dominant role of the Iranian state in the process of capitalist development. The realities of the Iranian press market also illustrate the further polarization of media consumers between rich and poor, urban and rural areas, and between Tehran and the smaller cities. In that sense Iran, rather than being an 'exception' to the rule, demonstrates once again that in conditions where cultural and communication goods are available only at a price; access to them is 'regulated' and restricted by limits on the amount of disposable income. The wide gap between rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots, clearly shows that access to communication is sharply differentiated by income in Iran.

However, and despite the powerful presence of the state in the press market, the state has been unable to respond to the increasing demands of an overwhelmingly young population for cultural products. In addition the state has used coercive measures to prevent the expansion of the free and independent press. In this sense the establishment of the Islamic Republic, as I will argue in the next chapter, suggests anything but a decisive break with the past. A more detailed historical examination of the Iranian press provides further evidence of the limited insights that are offered by the liberal/modernization focus on the coercive role of the state.

4 Emerging Public Spheres and the Limits of the Press

> A Tehran public prosecutor asked *Asr'e Azadegan* editor Mashallah Shamsolvaezin how long the game of cat and mouse must continue. Shamsolvaezin responded for all Iranian journalists: 'I told him that I would continue until the cat realized that the mouse had a right to live'
>
> William Samii

INTRODUCTION

Economic factors by themselves, however, do not tell the full story. The conflict of the underdevelopment of the press in Iran, and we might add many other peripheral countries with economic development indicators, is damning for the modernization school. In order to get the full picture, we need to return to what appeared at the end of causal chain of 'development': political participation. As Golding has argued Lerner was careful

> to place "institutions of participation (e.g. voting)" at the end of causal chain—nothing being worse than unready electorate. While apathy afflicts the advanced societies, "the parallel danger to developing democracies comes from the reverse configuration, i.e., non-literate voters". Again the reflection of change theory (in this case the "unripe time" theory) shines through. (1975:45)

Modernization school arguments revolved around changing notions of the characteristics of traditional and modern societies. They clearly saw the transformation as unproblematic and mechanical, changing societies in the process from static, agricultural, and primitive to dynamic, industrialized, urbanized, and rational nation-states. The 'development' of course did take place, in Iran and elsewhere, but the tools (mass communication) that were accorded a significant place to carry the strategy and the burden of 'development' have themselves remained underdeveloped. This is one of the great ironies of 'modernization'. Despotism, the biggest and most dangerous 'tradition' in 'traditional' societies therefore remained intact. The legacy of this 'tradition' has played a major role in the underdevelopment of the Iranian press. This factor has prompted one editor to suggest that although Iran at the end of the 20th century is unrecognizable from what it was in the early 20th

century, there is one similar trend: political underdevelopment. The structure of politics has not gone through similar transformations (Abdi, 1998).

At the beginning of the 20th century only 12 licenced publications were available in Iran. Of these only one was a daily newspaper, and its circulation less than 1,000. The number of publications at the end of the century had increased to 1,394, of which 58 were dailies with a circulation of well over 2 million and an even higher readership (Qasemi, 2001). At the turn of the 20th century there were no publications of scientific or special interest. In 1999, 284 such publications were available in the market, of which 172 were published by the state (Zare, 1999). In the past hundred years the Iranian press and media have changed radically and in the process, not too dissimilar from other countries, have had a huge impact on the public life. The press since its introduction to Iran has been one of the key agents of modernization and its rise, contrary to Mowlana's assessment (1996), has undermined the nature and the characteristics of tradition and traditional channels of communication. It brought with it, as Qasemi (2001) has stated, the demise of 'story telling' (*naghali*) in teahouses and replaced the pulpit (*minbar*) as early as 1906 (Constitutional Revolution). *Ulema* in that period and for the first time used the press as a platform to articulate their own views, religious discussions, and the waging of a verbal war against those who had a different point of view.

In this period the press has never been free, except at the times of revolutionary upheavals and in the strong presence of democratic social movements. As such the history of the Iranian press cannot be separated from the broader history of the struggle for power in Iran. Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi rightly suggest that

> The typical pattern of Iranian political life has been that when the central authority is at its weakest, a dynamic political public sphere emerges with a variety of political groupings and communicative channels. When central authority is strong, an atmosphere of repression exists, with central control over political activity and expression. (1994:54)

Such occasions, however, have been rare. In fact one can recall only five occasions in which the free press has flourished and free political participation has been at its best. These periods are: Constitutional Revolution (1906); collapse of Reza Khan (Pahlavi I) in 1941, premiership of Mosadeq in late 1940s and early 1950s; *spring of freedom* 1979–1980; and finally 1998–2000.

This chapter reviews these stages of 'accelerations' and 'breaks'. It begins by offering a brief review of the condition of the press at the beginning of the 20th century. It then moves on to provide some detailed examination of one of the significant democratic experiments in the region, the nationalization of oil movement under the leadership of Mosadegh and

the condition of the press in this period. The chapter then moves on to discuss the press under the Islamic Republic. It suggests that the control of the media in general, and the press in particular, has remained as contentious under the Islamic Republic as it has been throughout Iranian history. By providing detailed examination of different stages in the history of the Islamic Republic, it demonstrates that the history of the press in this period cannot be separated from the broader history of the Republic itself, and its development, expansion, and limits should be understood within the broader context of the Islamic state.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION (1906)

In the first 70 years of the Iranian press, from the launch of *Kaghaz-e Akhbar* (News-Paper) in 1837 to the Constitutional Revolution in 1906, there were no critical publications, and only a few that were published outside Iran could discuss the issues in a critical fashion (Qasemi, 2001). There were a few state-owned publications with circulations of no more than 1,000, including *Current Affairs*, which all government officials were required to subscribe to. Newspapers published outside Iran were the only independent publications and fared much better. Publications such as *Akhtar* (published in Istanbul), *Habl-e al-Matin* (published in Calcutta), and *Qanon* (published in London) had a circulation of well over 1,000, and in the case of *Habl-e al-Matin* it is estimated that its circulation exceeded 7,000, of which more than half were distributed in Tehran (Rezvani, 1997:375–376). It was banned no less than 47 times in its 33 years of existence for various 'offences', but continued to play a significant role alongside some of the other interesting and exciting titles. The Constitutional Revolution had renewed the interest and desire for newspapers. Public thirst for news and political opening paved the way for a flood of illegal and legal newspapers (Khaniki, 1997:379). This period produced some of the most celebrated titles of Iranian history, such as *Mosavat* (Equality) and *Nasim-e Shomal* (Northern Breeze), and *Sor-Esrafil*. Such publications were usually owned and edited by well-known literary and political figures with modern aspirations. Iran's first-ever press law was written in this period. The period ended with the collapse of the movement and bombardment of Iran's parliament in 1908 and imprisonment and executions of a number of key political figures and journalists, including Mirza Jahangir Khan, the publisher of *Sor-Esrafil*.

With the abdication of Mohamad Ali Shah in 1909, many publishers and journalists who had escaped returned to Iran, and a new wave of publications emerged. For the first time some publications clearly acted as political party organs. Democrats launched *Iran-e No* (New Iran), Eetedalion launched *Shoravi* (Soviet), and Hezb-e Taraghi Shargh (Party of Progress of East) began to publish *Esteghlal-e Iran* (Independence of Iran) (Bagher, 1997:400–401). During this period (1906–1911)

more than 200 new publications emerged. With the collapse of Majlis Dovom (Second Parliament 1909–1911) many publications were once again banned. Many resumed publication with the start of the Third Parliament in 1914. But World War I dominated the agenda, and with the end of the war in 1918 the state once again banned all non-official and independent press. The game of cat and mouse continued well after the collapse of the Qajar dynasty in 1923 and the emergence of Pahlavi as the new ruling royal family. Reza Khan, in order to consolidate his position and power, began to suppress independent newspapers with an iron fist. Some of the most celebrated publications in the entire history of Iran were banned, and many of the key literary figures and publishers were killed during his reign. Amongst those killed were Eshghi, poet and publisher of *Gharn-e Bistom* (20th Century), Faroukhi, poet and publisher of *Tufan*, (Hurricane), and many more (Bagher, 1997; Qazi-Zadeh, 2000). The fate of the Iranian press in this period (which has been repeated since then) was intertwined with the fate of revolution. As Abdo and Lyons (2003:173–174) have argued, the journalism of this period was inseparable from the political ideas and aspirations of editors and journalists. The Iranian press had started to act as missionaries for the European Enlightenment, advocating liberty, reason, and science. The interpretive and polemical nature of much of the journalism in this period was a key feature of the press: a tradition that has continued to the present day.

WEAK GOVERNMENT AND STRONG PRESS (1941–1953)

The collapse of Reza Khan, who had come to power with British help and in response to establishment of the Soviet Republic, led to another explosion of press freedom. Reza Khan and Seyyid Zia Tabatabaie overthrew the government in a coup in 1921. Reza Khan became army commander and then Minister of War in the same year. In 1923 he became Prime Minister, and finally in 1925, the Iranian Parliament deposed the Qajar dynasty and elected Reza Khan as the first king of the new Pahlavi dynasty: he relentlessly pursued the modernization of Iran. He abolished the veil, imposed new dress codes, paved the way for the establishment of Tehran University, created the National Bank of Iran, and requested that foreigners use the name Iran instead of Persia. The Allied invasion of Iran in 1941 ended his reign and brought a new cultural and political atmosphere. Between 1941 and 1946 there were around 22 active political parties, including the Tudeh party, and hundreds of trade unions and workers committees, with associations and student groups mushrooming all over the country. Newspapers also began to flourish. 'By August 1942 there were 50 newspapers; 120 by winter; and 200 by the next summer. By 1945 more than 4,000 newspapers, magazines, and other

publications existed (Taheri cited in Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1994:55). According to the same source, publishing became such a lucrative business that many people secured licences to print, only to rent them to proprietors with banned titles. Many of the political parties had at least one publication of some sort or another, and in the case of the Tudeh party many of its affiliates had their own organ. This level of press activity shocked even Western observers. Bullard noted that in 1943 'there are 47 newspapers in Tehran, a city of only 750,000 inhabitants, the large majority of whom are illiterate' (cited in Ansari, 2003:79). That figure was to reach 700 in the lead-up to oil nationalization in 1951. Just prior to the CIA-led coup that ousted Mosadegh's premiership in 1953, there were 373 publications, of which 70 were anti-Mosadegh (Qasemi, 2001). Literacy was no obstacle as newspapers were read in many *ghahvekhaneh* (tea-houses), in bazaars, factories, and during *shab neshini* (late night gatherings). The CIA-led coup against Mosadegh ended this golden period, and the erosion of this vibrant public sphere reduced Iran to what Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994:58) have called the 'dualistic culture' of the dictatorial state and religious opposition. American intervention got rid of those elements in Iran (secular and nationalist) that were effectively indigenous agents of change, and that were fascinated by all that was modern and ideologically closer to Europe and the West than their conservative religious counterparts. Iranians did return the 'compliment' in 1979: 'Death to America' and 'Yankee, go home.' It would take another revolution for the free press to flourish.

Despite this amazing flourishing of political expression, there were clear limits to this emerging public sphere in the 1940s and early 1950s. There were clear elements of continuity as personalities rather than institutions came to dominate, which provided further proof of the importance of family ties and traditional structure. In this period and as Abrahamian (1982) demonstrates, nine out of twelve premiers came from 19th-century titled families. The same is true of 81 ministers out of 148 cabinet members. The rest were technocrats with links to the court (13), army officiers (11), and businessmen (8). Only 15 cabinet members were salaried personnel or modern educated professionals. Bureaucrats, landowners, and the military elite dominated politics. Such limits of political awareness and the dominance of personalities can also be observed in recent political developments.

Some commentators (Qasemi, 2001; Mohsenian-Rad, 2001; Motamed Nejad, 1998; & Taheri, 1980) have cited this process of political instability and repression as the main obstacle to the emergence of a truly 'professional' press in Iran. The partisan nature of the press, they argue, has limited the possibility for commercially viable and objective journalism. In this context, not only the political turmoil, but also the press themselves have been blamed for their own downfall in different periods, by simply taking their criticism too far and mistaking a free and pluralist press with a *fahash* (scurrilous) one. Similar concerns have been raised since 1998.

IRANIAN PRESS: HOPE AND NO GLORY (1978–1997)

As I have already argued the history of the Iranian press cannot be separated from the wider history of the country. More or less there are visible consensuses about recognized stages in the post-1979 period among scholars (Poya; Mir-Hosseini, 1999, 2002; Qasemi, 2001; & Mohsenian-Rad, 2001), with some minor variations. The post-revolutionary period can broadly be divided into four distinct phases. These periods are as follow:

First is the revolutionary period of 1978 to 1981, in which the visible secular opposition and the press played a major role but were then marginalized and finally repressed. The second period, arguably the high period of Islamism that starts from 1981 and ends in 1988, is marked by the Islamic Republic's efforts to consolidate its position and power with an important part of this process the war with Iraq under the guidance of Khomeini. This period is also marked by an orchestrated effort by the media to promote Islamic values and mobilize all resources towards war.

The third period (the Second Republic, 'reconstruction'), is marked by the end of the war, Khomeini's death, the intensification of factional conflicts within the regime, and the marginalization of the 'radical' wing. This period, stretching from 1989 to 1997 sees the emergence of more politically oriented and motivated publications and growing criticism of the ruling factions. The fourth period (subject to intense debate) is marked by growing unease and protests from various classes and groups (including workers, women, students, and private capital), and the rise of new social movements resulting in the victory of Khatami. It encompasses a diversifying press, growing access to satellite and foreign products and programmes, and a new intense, vibrant, and dynamic debate about democracy and the fate of the Islamic state. This period of reform movement 'officially' ended in 2005 with the election of Ahamadi-Nejad. . In the rest of this chapter I will review some of the key developments in each of these phases.

Beginning in 1978, and under pressure from the Iranian public, the Pahlavi regime started to make some 'concessions'. The new Prime Minister, Sharif-emami, after his appointment on August 27, 1978, introduced a new policy which was designed to appease the clergy (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994:146). Amongst the pronouncements were a pledge to observe Islamic tenets, the changing of the Shahanshai calendar to the Islamic, the banning of gambling and pornography, the replacement of the Ministry of Women's Affairs with a Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the issuing of an apology to Ayatollah Shariatmadari (later stripped of the title of Ayatollah under the Islamic regime) for the invasion of his house in the holy city of Qom.

The press used these limited changes and freedoms to perfection and became an important channel of communication in the revolutionary uprising. A number of journalists who had used the weapon of the 'open letter' to object to censorship and the lack of freedom of speech, were for

their own security forced to live away from their homes (Beheshti-pour, 1993). The new cabinet also put forward a new press bill (Qasemi, 2001). After the objection of the press to this new proposed bill, the government sent army officials to the offices of the two main daily papers, *Kayhan* (Galaxy), and *Ete'lat* (Information), with the task of checking all domestic and international news. The representatives of these two papers, as well as the third best-selling daily *Ayandegan,* penned a resolution which included the demands for the end to censorship and government intervention, and went on strike for four days starting on October 11. As a result, on October 14, the government released a communiqué promising the freedom of the press and accepting the journalists' demand (Sreberny-Mohammadi, Mohammadi, 1994). For 22 days the Iranian press enjoyed a newfound freedom and published extensive coverage of demonstrations against the Pahlavi regime.

The Sharif-emami cabinet collapsed and was replaced by the military cabinet of Azhari. His first job was to silence the press, but the press response was to organize yet another strike, known as *Eatesab'e Kabir* (big strike); this one lasted 62 days (Qasemi, 2001:115). After the strike and the collapse of the Azhari cabinet, the circulation of the two main dailies exceeded 2 million copies, and in a short time the daily papers were catering to increased public demand, with many people unable to get a copy even after queuing for some time. *Kayhan*'s circulation reached 1,150,000; *Ette'lat*'s 1,080,000; and *Ayandegan*'s 600,000 (Beheshti-pour, 1993:89). Such unprecedented popularity and the coverage of domestic news in these papers angered the generals in Bakhtiar's government, who had replaced Azhari as Prime Minister. Five journalists (two from *Ayandegan,* two from *Ete'lat* and one from *Kayhan*) were arrested on January 25, 1979. They were held in prison for 80 days, and their release was met with huge cheers by the public and journalists. This was the last act of the Pahlavi regime against the press and journalists. The Pahlavi regime as well as thousands of years of monarchy ended on February 11, 1979.

By this time and as Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994) have argued, there were more than 200 publications available in Iran. During the journalists' strike of November 1978, journalist syndicates were publishing their own *Strike Bulletin* (*Bulletin-e Ehtesab*). Parallel to this emerged a new wave of underground press, mostly associated with students and political groups and amongst those of the Tudeh Party's organ, *Mardom* (People), and Fedai's organ *Kar* (Labour). The publications of newly formed political parties, pressure groups, professional and trade organizations, which represented political personalities and their politics, later joined these titles. Many such organizations had extensive national and regional networks and were usually publishing more than one title. Regional titles were common, as were the labour, student, and women's sections of these political parties.

The popularity of the press and the increased circulation of national dailies and weeklies persuaded more individuals to join the press market. More weekly magazines emerged in which photos of the Iranian Royal Family and their associates were regularly published. In truly *Hello* style, gossip, rumours, unfounded stories, and 'shocking' pictures filled the pages of such magazines. The only difference was the 'Islamic' twist. Stories and pictures such as those showing the Royal Family wearing swimsuits were used to highlight and confirm their 'un-Islamic' and decadent behaviour (Qasemi, 2001, Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi,1994).

The first act of the interim government headed by Bazargan was to replace the Ministry of Information and Tourism with a Ministry for National Guidance. The same ministry had the task of dealing with press matters. All publications, as the Islamic Revolution Court (*Dadgah-e Enghelab-e Eslami*) later announced, had to have permission to publish from this ministry (Seif, 1999). The same ministry prepared a new press bill which, after some amendments, was approved by the Revolution Council on August 11, 1979. Accordingly, a temporary committee consisting of representatives of the three powers formed to deal with applications for new publications. In the first 10 months the same committee examined 350 applications, accepting 250 and rejecting other applicants (Qasemi, 2001: 129).

By the end of May 1979, the new ruling elite had managed to reject even moderate calls for adding 'Democratic' qualifiers to the title of Islamic Republic, on the basis that it was unnecessary since Islam guaranteed all democratic rights. As a result there was less space for any democratic debate and the media. Secularists, leftists, and even Islamic groups and individuals who did not buy into the principles of *Velayat-e Faghih* (Guardianship of Islamic Law) became the targets of the newly formed state.

The first newspaper that managed to put itself on the wrong side of the new ruling clergy was *Ayandegan*. The paper had published an interview with Khomeini conducted by *Le Monde*'s journalist Eric Rouleau. In that interview Khomeini had expressed his desire to remain a man of the cloth and keep his distance from politics. *Ayandegan* received the usual treatment, being labelled as Zionist and Communist. *Ayandegan*'s reaction was symbolic and powerful. It published 'a symbolic four page paper with three blank pages, writing on its single page that 'it is the duty of a journalist to put the people in the picture and keep them informed of what is going on, not to sweeten everything or present it as divine guidance, so that no one knows exactly what and how bad the probable ills of the people are.' In addition they added that until the government clearly spoke in defence of free speech, 'it is no longer possible to continue at present' (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994:168).

With the undemocratic press law in place by August, there was little room for any oppositional voices. Twelve publications without licences and later 41 publications with licences were banned. The winter had arrived far too soon. Even publications such as *Mizan* (Balance), the organ of Iran's

Liberation Front whose members had formed the interim government, were declared illegal. Many of the new publications went in this wave of attack. Many other organizations still published their underground organs, paying dearly for each single paper that was distributed by their members. Only a few papers remained, including *Kayhan* and *Ete'lat,* both now under the control of the clergy and representing their view, as well as the newly launched *Joumhori-e Eslami* (Islamic Republic). *Englab-e Eslami* (Islamic Revolution) launched and run by Bani-Sadr, the first President of the Islamic Republic, moved to Paris, as did Bani-sadr after his fall in 1981. After the 'Cultural Revolution' of 1980 and the closure of all universities, the once buzzing streets of Tehran and other cities, especially areas around universities, were deserted. The prisons of the previous regime that were conquered so bravely by victorious people in 1979 were filled again with journalists, writers, a new generation of activists, and those who had spent so many years in them under the Shah and knew their walls too well. The war with Iraq and the 'fear' of an enemy also paved the way for some kind of permanent quasi-military state. As Ansari (2003:232) suggests, during the war and 'in the state of emergency which now existed, a far more centralized and authoritarian order could be both justified and imposed.'

For more than four years Iran and the Iranian press never witnessed another 'spring'. By 1985, and when the regime felt that the opposition had gone to the point of no return, some new titles appeared. Some publications, under certain conditions, were approved. The monthly *Adineh* (Friday) was among the first; followed by *Mofid* (Useful), which lasted only a few months mostly for financial reasons due to the high cost of paper; *Donyai-e Sokhan* (World of Speech); and *Gardon* (Sphere). The new wave was a cultural one. These were all cultural magazines that represented some kind of passive resistance, by covering and debating Iranian literature, poetry, films, and arts. None of them were political as such, but in a country in which even holding your partner's hand in public is deemed un-Islamic and by definition anti-state, nothing is ever outside of politics. All had to skate on thin ice.

The case of *Adineh* illustrates some of the 'conditions' and difficulties that even cultural magazines were facing. Zakeri, the licence holder and managing director of the paper, used to work for national radio under the previous regime. At the time of the magazine's publication he was still working for *Soroush,* the organ of the Islamic broadcasting network. After publishing a few editions he lost his job and decided to launch a cultural publication. According to the editor of the magazine (Sarkohi, 2002) among the conditions that *Adineh* had to meet was employing and publishing material by Masoud Behnod. Behnod's presence in the magazine was the guarantor of its publication. Behnod was well connected under both regimes: he was editor of the daily *Ayandegan* and among the very few radio presenters under the Pahlavi dynasty, which had total control over his programme. He was close to royal associates and the government. He was one of the trusted

political commentators on television as well. After the Revolution he edited *Tehran Mosavar* (Pictorial Tehran) and joined the chorus of anti-Pahlavi chants. For a short while he was arrested in 1981 for collaborating with the previous regime, but was later released and became well connected to some of the circles in the Islamic government (Sarkohi, 2002:61–68). In the same period, more apolitical titles and specialist publications covering sports, cinema, leisure, and family were given licence by the government (Qasemi, 2001). In addition, in 1985, a new Press Law, after some initial discussion, was passed by the Islamic Parliament (*Majlis*).

With Khomeini's acceptance of United Nations Resolution 598 and the end of the devastating war with Iraq came a renewed interest in debate about press and cultural activities. The press as a subject was elevated to the position of deputy ministerial duties in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Two new centers were established as part of the same trend: the Centre for Training Development of Media, and the Centre for Study and Research of Media. The two centers merged in March 1998 and were renamed the Centre for Media Studies and Research (ibid). The Ministry itself was already publishing *Rasaneh* (Medium), *Nameh-e Farhang* (Cultural News), and *Film*. The state-controlled broadcasting network was also producing its own monthly magazine, *Soroush* (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994).

Three more newspapers were launched in the early 1990s; *Salam* (Greeting), representing the left wing of the Islamic regime (those who did fight the war with Iraq and dominated the cabinets as well as the Majlis of the first decade and now found themselves out in the cold); and the professional looking Tehran daily *Hamshari* (Fellow Citizen), which has become the best selling newspaper in Iran and is usually regarded as the 'model' for other newspapers. Qasemi (2001:135) has regarded the publication of *Hamshahri* as an important step in elevating esteem for the journalism profession in Iran. *Hamshahri,* backed by Karbaschi the mayor of Tehran at the time, has the clear advantage of attracting the largest classified advertising amongst the Iranian press. The latter has made it the subject of envy in the newspaper industry, and its circulation is twice as big as *Kayhan*'s and *Ettela'at*'s. The third significant new entry in this period was the daily *Iran*, launched in 1994 by the Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency (IRNA). Both *Hamshahri* and *Iran* intended to target a much larger readership. But it was *Salam* that came to play a much more influential role both in the newspaper market and in politics. *Salam* emerged as the left wing of the Islamic Republic was being marginalized after the end of the war and Khomeini's death. It was to provide a platform for this faction and especially its main sponsor, the Assembly of Militant Clerics, to express its view. Increasing circulation, as Mazrui its economic editor told Abdo and Lyons, was never an issue given the format and the absence of advertising. But the events of 1997 and the financial aid and support by Khatami's rich supporters took *Salam* to a new height and a circulation of 500,000.

The rise of a more critical press had begun in the early 1990s during the presidency of Rafsanjani and the push for the 'reconstruction' of the economy after the war. In the absence of legal parties, much of the debate and dispute between different factions of the state were raised and articulated in the press. Tarock (2001:588–589) suggests that three related factors helped and paved the way for the emergence of more tolerance towards the press in this period. First of all the end of the war with Iraq made the issue of showing solidarity in the face of the enemy redundant. A free press critical of the government, it was argued, could give the impression to the outside world that the people were divided over the question of war and peace with Iraq' (ibid:589). The acceptance of the UN resolution not only put an end to this argument, it further brought the urgency to implement policies which were promised immediately after the Revolution but were put on ice due to the fact that all the resources and effort of the state had to go towards the 'holy defence'. Khomeini's death crystallized the inherent and obvious conflicts of the interests within the state. For nearly a decade Khomeini's commands as the charismatic leader of the Islamic Revolution and national interests became synonymous. This was no longer the case after his death and the tug of war between various factions, this time without the presence of an umpire, intensified. The third factor, according to Tarock, was the appointment of Khatami as the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance (1983–1992). Khatami was no stranger to this field and he previously was in charge of the state-run *Kayhan* firm. In this period he began introducing more open policies and lifted many of the restrictions on the press and communication sector.

Rafsanjani had hoped that by promoting a degree of openness and cultural glasnost alongside economic liberalization he might contain

> a state-dependent intelligentsia that had tired of state repression, while at the same time giving young people a medium through which their frustrations could be articulated by fictional characters. The trick was to promote this cultural venting *without* sanctioning a full-blown critique of the state and its ruling institutions.' (Brumberg, 2001:191)

Both Khatami, as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and Rafsanjani's own brother, as the director of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), helped to promote this policy by easing restrictions on film-makers, television producers, novelists, and the press. In this period a great number of new social and cultural journals and publications began to emerge, and the Iranian cinema was revitalized and flourished. However, Khatami under heavy criticism from conservatives, who accused him of being too soft, resigned from his post in 1993. Hashemi, the director general of IRIB, was also forced to resign after attacks by conservative papers and the Supreme Leader (See chapter on Iranian television for more discussion of his role.)

From 1992 onwards and under Rafsanjani (who served two terms as President from 1989 to 1997), there were regular attacks against the independent or reformist press, bookshops, and personalities, including burning down *Morgh-e A'min* bookshop, attacking offices of the two monthlies *Kiyan* and *Iran-e Farda*, and disrupting speeches by Khatami, Seroush, and other leading reformists. In that period the independent press and those who expressed a different view were the subject of violent and coordinated attacks from conservatives and rogue groups which saw the new cultural atmosphere as anti-Islamic and decadent. Besides the above incidents we can also mention the explosion of the *Donyai-e Sokhan*'s office; the trial of Abbas Ma'rofi, the managing editor of *Gardon*; the banning of a number of publications, including *Gardon*, *Takapo, Havades, Payam-e Daneshjo* (Student's Message), *Kadeh*, *Tous*, *Jahan-e Eslam* (World of Islam), and finally the arrest and torture of the editor of *Adineh*, Faraj Sarkohi (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

YET ANOTHER 'NEW' CULTURAL ATMOSPHERE: 1997–2000

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 perceptions of Iran as well as the Iranian press have been explicitly related to the election of the 'moderate' clergyman, Mohammad Khatami. Turnout at the presidential election was higher than expected. A record 88 per cent of eligible voters, the biggest of all time for a presidential election and only second in terms of popular participation in any election since 1979, cast their votes.[1] Khatami had the backing of 69 per cent of the voters. Since then the concept of civil society and its relationship to the state has become a growing concern among Iranian intellectuals, a subject which will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. The press, in the absence of a proper political party system, became a key space wherein the debates about the nature of political participation and the contours of the public sphere could be articulated. 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. Yet this period has been full of contradictions, with an increase in the number of licenced titles immediately after his victory, but also a campaign of growing vehemence against the press. The censoring and closing of newspapers and the harassment and arrest of journalists has become only too familiar in the last few years. The advocacy of 'civil society' by the pro Khatami press forced the conservative press and the proponents of conservative's policy to retaliate.

The election of Khatami simply raised the stakes in the dispute over the future direction of the regime and brought the chronic economic and social crisis to its inevitable conclusion. Khatami was also aware that since conservatives controlled the national broadcasting organization, the IRIB, he himself

badly needed a sympathetic press, which would gather support for his policies. After taking office in August 1997 he appointed Ayatollah Mohajerani as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the key person in charge of regulating the press and culture. Mohajerani promptly restored the licences of a number of publications, including *Jahan'e Islam* (World of Islam) and *Payam'e Daneshju* (Student's Message). He has never been popular with conservatives and his policies, especially his call for celebrating *Noruz* (Iranian New Year) in Persepolis, led to calls for his impeachment and removal (Samii, 1999). However his 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, 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) emerged colourful titles 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. In addition to more colourful titles, the new arrivals in the press market have also more distinctive and significant characteristics (Tarock, 2001:590). There were new and colourful regional and local titles that made sure that the movements were not limited to capital and major cities. Furthermore, many of these new titles had little time or space for religious and 'official' stories. Both national and regional reformist presses, began publishing hard-hitting investigative reports on corruption, inefficiencies and abuses of power by some of the most significant institutions in the Islamic Republic, including the Ministry of Intelligence and the Islamic Republic Revolutionary Guards.

By 1998, for every publication with a conservative outlook, there were two with reformist viewpoints.

> While newspapers such as *Hamshahri* and *Iran* may regularly sell at least 150,000 copies daily, *Kayhan*, widely regarded as a hard-line newspaper, is difficult to find. Newsagents don't stock it because it doesn't sell. *Jebheh*, the organ of the hard-line extremist group, Ansar-e Hezbollah, responsible for much of the street violence, is viewed with similar popular disdain. When I innocently, if inquisitively, picked up a copy, a passer-by quickly suggested I save my money rather than wasting it on such 'rubbish'! (Ansari, 1999)

However, and in response to the reformist press attempt to act as a legislative organ (fourth estate), the judiciary, much more than before, assumed the function of political control (Samii, 1999, 2001; Tarock, 2001). Among the measures used to curb the reformist press and journalists were the current press law passed just before the parliamentary election of 2000; anachronistic

law on libel and selective reading 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 outright banning. 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 an 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 *Kayhan*, to discredit and humiliate those that are not considered 'sympathetic' to 'Islam' and the 'Islamic Republic' and the Supreme Leader. Such attempts to control the press, as I have argued earlier, were not new. But many reformist journalists were quick to link this to the 'civil society' movement. As a prominent reformist has pointed out, the reason for violence and terror during Rafsanjani's time was simply to get rid of reformist intellectuals (*degar-andishan*), while the main aim of the recent violence is to depose Khatami and to destroy the civil society movement in Iran (Ganji, 1999:16).

Undoubtedly attacks on intellectuals, journalists, and the press were politically motivated, and in this process a number of institutions played a significant role. The evidence of renewed campaigns to silence recently emerged and more critical press was on display as soon as Khatami nominated Mohajerani as Minister for Islamic Guidance and Culture. He had already been called politically weak, and one conservative MP suggested 'all shrewd and cunning foreign media are supporting Mohajerani's nomination. Let us all disappoint them' (cited in Samii, 2001:2). His nomination was finally accepted, but some MPs tried to impeach him later. The Ministry of Islamic Guidance and Culture was then accused by *Kayhan* (Galaxy) and other conservative newspapers of providing financial assistance to the reformist press and of unequal distribution of equipment and foreign money subsidies. With massive inflation and constant devaluation of the Iranian currency, such subsidies are rather important. But in a campaign against the Ministry, *Kayhan* claimed that the *Kayhan firm* with 11 titles received less subsidy in 1998 than the *Etela't* group with 8 titles and *Hamshahri* (the best-selling Tehran local newspaper). Mohajerani rejected this claim during his successful defence against impeachment by the previous parliament (*Payam-e Emrouz*, May 1999). Mohajerani survived the impeachment motion by a vote of 135 to 121; however one of his deputies, Ahmad Borghani, Deputy Minister for press, resigned in January in objection to conservative pressure on the press.

Just one year after Khatami's victory the conservative judiciary closed down *Jameh*, a reformist paper, after this popular newspaper leaked a remark by the commander of the Revolutionary Guards that his force was ready to 'cut the throats and tongues' of journalists (*Pur'ostad*, 2001).

Jameh, which promoted itself as the 'First Newspaper for Civil Society', was launched in February 1998. The original idea of *Jameh* came from Hamid-Reza Jalaipour, once a commander in Kurdistan and a major player in repressing the movement for Kurdish autonomy, who after the end of the war, went to London to study for his PhD in sociology. After his return to Iran he began attending the meetings of activists who had gathered around and been involved with the influential monthly, *Kian,* and joined forces with Mashalah Shamsolvaezin and Mohsen Sazgara. Shamsolvaezin was a seasoned journalist with nearly two decades of experience, including his work in the *Kayhan* firm, and Sazgara, a former minister in the Ministry of Industry, was experienced in establishing industrial organizations as well as the publication entitled *Ayeneh'e Andisheh*. *Jame'h* was to take the messages and ideas of intellectually oriented *Kian* to a wider public (Jalaipour, 1999; *Pur'ostad*, 2001).

Jameh's publishers were keen to address all sections of society, especially the younger generation (50 million Iranians are under 30). From the first edition, official announcements and speeches by the Supreme Leader were relegated to the inside pages, official stories only merited brief mentions, and instead the paper began to portray a much more colourful and diverse picture of Iran by reporting on lifestyle, women's issues, political analysis, film reviews (including those that were officially banned in Iran), as well as regular photograph features. Not the pictures of well-known clerics, but pictures of ordinary Iranians, reformist figures, and international personalities and stars (including a *hijab*-less Juliet Binoche) appeared on the first pages of Jameh (Abdo & Lyons, 2003). Circulation of the paper soon exceeded 300,000. Of all reformist newspapers, this one was one of the most open about issues such as human rights. In March 1998, for example, it carried a sympathetic story about the work of Amnesty International. Three months after hitting the newsstands, in June 1998, the Press Court ordered the closure of *Jameh* for 'misquoting' the commander of the Revolutionary Guards. *Jameh* had reported a behind closed-door speech made by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps commander, in which he threatened to cut the throats and tongues of political opponents. The same team then produced a new newspaper, *Tous*, only few days after the closure of *Jameh*. However, after only three months, on September 16, 1998, *Tous* managers Jalaipour and Javadi-Hessar, its editor Shamsolvaezin, and one of its columnists Ebrahim Navadi—who through his satirical column had become one of the most celebrated journalists in Iran—were all arrested on the order of the Islamic Revolutionary Court. The four journalists were freed in October, but the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance ordered *Tous* to be closed. *Neshat* was soon born, and after its closure, almost the same team regrouped and produced yet another new newspaper by taking over the licence of *Akhbar* and turning it into *Akhbar'e Eghtesad* in October 1999. After the closure of *Akhbar'e Eghtesad,* Mashalah Shamsolvaezin became the editor of yet another reformist daily, *Assr'e Azadegan*.

Later, the weekly *Gunagon* succeeded *Asre-e Azadegan*, and other *Jameh* alumni launched *Aftab-e Emrouz*. The reformists' method of activating 'spare' licences and safeguarding the continuity of a publication under new titles prompted many conservative commentators to raise their concerns and complaints about the 'serial newspapers' (Samii, 2001).

In addition to renewed attack and closure of some titles, the conservative-dominated Parliament also began debating a more restrictive press law. Smarting under a humiliating defeat in the municipal elections, a resounding boycott of the election to the Assembly of Experts the previous year, and with their clear failure to control the press and its growing popularity in Iran, the conservatives went on the offensive and turned to promoting amendments to the existing Press Law of 1985. Ali-Akbar Nategh-Nuri, the speaker of the Iranian parliament who had lost to Khatemi in the 1997 presidential election, was one of the main supporters of the proposed amendments. He claimed that the 'press is a gateway for cultural invasion, so let us take appropriate measures' (cited in Samii, 1999). The proposed amendment, which was submitted to the parliament by 20 conservative deputies, passed in its first reading by 125 votes of 215 deputies, with 90 deputies voting against the amendment and 55 deputies absent. Of all the conservative papers only two dailies, *Kayhan* and *Resala't,* fully supported the proposed amendments (*Payam-e Emrouz*, July 1999). The controversial Press Law was one of the final acts of the outgoing conservative parliament alongside an equally controversial new Labour Law. The new Press Law:

- Allowed the courts to force journalists to reveal their sources
- Banned any form of journalistic activities by those who have been involved in any 'anti-establishment' activities
- Held the press (editors, managing directors, reporters) responsible for encouraging acts of violence and unrest against the 'interests of the Islamic establishment'
- Increased punishments for offences by the press
- Extended provisions to cover online media [2]

On the same day that the new Press Law was passed in a first reading, the Special Court for Clergy ordered the closure of the reformist daily *Salam* for publishing a secret memo written by a former intelligence agent, Said Emami, a former deputy Minister of Information. In this top secret memo, Emami advised his superior to tighten the press law. Emami, who died in June 1999 in Evin prison—allegedly having committed suicide—had been arrested as part of a rogue team which masterminded the wave of politically motivated murders in Tehran in the previous winter. Victims included Dariyush Foruhar, leader of the banned Iran Nation Party (*Hezb-e Mellat-e Iran*) and first-ever Labour Minister after the 1979 Revolution, and his wife Parvaneh Foruhar, who were both killed in their home in Tehran on November 22, 1998, as well as Mohammad Mokhtari and

Mohammad-Jafar Puyandeh, well-known intellectuals and writers who tirelessly were trying to re-establish Iran's Writer Association. Mokhtari 'disappeared' on December 3, and his body was found six days later. On the day that Mokhtari's body was found, Puyandeh, another member of the Writers Association of Iran and one of the seven signatories of its draft charter, disappeared. Two days later, on December 11, his family was told that his body had been found. Two other writers, Pirouz Davani and Majid Sharif, were also killed (Samii, 1999; Abdo & Lyons, 2003).

The editor-in-chief of *Salam*, Abbas Abdi, was arrested after complaints from the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, and the Special Court for Clergy imposed a five-year ban on *Salam* and banned the managing director of the paper, Kho'iniha (a senior cleric and close associate of Khomeini, who had led the occupation of the American embassy in 1981 and was a former Prosecutor General) from engaging in any journalistic activities for three years. Many of *Salam*'s readers later called the newspaper office to express their anger at the court decision, and thanked the paper and its staff for ten years of dedicated service to the civil society movement in Iran. One caller assured the paper that readers of *Salam* would respond to the new Press Law and closure of the paper in the February 2000 election (*Payam'e Emrouz*, August 1999: 28–37). However, other papers, such as *Kayhan* and *Jomhuri'e Islami* (Islamic Republic), escaped unpunished for publishing a letter from 24 commanders of the Revolutionary Guard (*Pasdaran*) to the Iranian President 'advising' him to take action against the student movement or they would act themselves. On the one hand, this comparison clearly suggests that the closure of *Salam* was politically motivated and aimed at weakening the pro-Khatami press and the pro-reform movement (Samii, 1999).

The closure of the newspaper *Salam* on July 7, 1999, coupled with the parliament's preliminary approval of the new and more restrictive Press Bill, triggered a wave of student protests unparalleled since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The regime responded to the students' action with considerable force. The 'six days that shook Iran' (July 8–14, 1999) clearly went beyond acceptable and tolerated slogans and demands. The activities radicalized the strategy of the student protests and with it the mass movement in its collision with the ruling powers. On July 7, members of the Central Council of the Islamic Association of the University of Tehran (*Shorai'e Markazi'e Anjouman'e Eslami*) decided to organize a demonstration against the new Press Law and the closure of *Salam*, but even before they announced their decision, many students were already marching outside the university and shouting slogans against the *Majlis* (Parliament). Demonstrators were attacked by riot police that night, and the next two days people were shot, more than one hundred were injured and more than a thousand students and other participants were arrested (*Payam'e Emrouz*, August 1999:6–27).

There is no official record regarding dead and wounded during the six days of demonstration. Some activists, including Ahmad Batebi (elected

honorary President of the National Union of Students of the UK in 2000) and a long-haired male student whose picture appeared on the cover of the *Economist* (July 17–23 edition) were charged and sentenced to ten years in prison. Four other students were charged; leading students were sentenced to death. As Geneive Abdo wrote:

> The student unrest, the worst since the aftermath of 1979 Islamic revolution, raised the political stakes to a level unseen since the President [Khatami] took office in August 1997. Their courage to cross the line from peaceful protest to public rage came from a determination to chart their own destiny. If at one time they doted on Khatami's every word, now they were willing to risk leaving him behind. The students and youth in general believe the pace of reform has been too slow. (Abdo, 1999)

Both the event and the extreme violence of the attack on students were not unexpected. Indeed the monthly *Payam'e Emrouz*, in its July edition published before July's events, had published a special report on students activities in spring 1999, and had warned that there was a great deal of evidence of unrest and dissatisfaction in all universities (*Payam-e Emrouz*, July 1999:7–10). The July demonstrations happened in the context of general dissatisfaction with unemployment and rising prices, the mounting sense of desperation as individual attempts to combat this poverty proved futile, and growing dissatisfaction amongst the public, especially women, young people, and intellectuals, about the political and cultural restrictions. In the background there was the ever-increasing split within the Islamic regime between conservatives and reformists, and the fact that Khatami's promises remained on paper, while his discourse on 'civil society and the rule of law' was seen to be a rocky road with an uncertain future.

Another significant casualty of the popular pro-Khatami press in 1999 was *Khordad* and its publisher, Hojatoleslam Abdullah Nouri, who had served under Khatami as Interior Minister till his impeachment by the Islamic Parliament in June 1998. Nuri was elected to Tehran's municipal council in 1999 in which reformists repeated the success of the 1997 presidential election. He had already announced his intention of running a campaign for Majlis and was widely tipped to become the next speaker of the parliament. Undoubtedly his prospects were enhanced by his publication, and the closure of his paper, *Khordad*, was seen as a way to block the possibility of him claiming a significant victory in the 2000 election. But on November 27, in a trial that gripped the nation, Iran's Special Court for Clergy tried and convicted Nouri. According to a detailed report by *Payam-e Emrouz*, he was accused of defaming the 'Islamic System', propaganda against the state, and disseminating false information. Charges against him included supporting the Middle East peace process and resuming a diplomatic relationship with the United States (*Payam'e Emrouz*, December 1999:14–30). He was sentenced to five

years in prison and barred from practicing journalism for the same amount of time. *Khordad* was ordered to close. Nouri's defence (Nouri, 1999) was published and reprinted four times and became one of the bestsellers in Iran. In it he criticized the Islamic Republic's economic policies, but more importantly he attacked the 'inconsistency' of the regime's foreign policy and asked for the end of 'isolation' and the serious rethinking of Iran's position with regard to the United States as well as Israel.

The continued attacks on the press after the parliamentary elections of February 2000 raised some serious questions about, if not the possibilities of reforms, certainly about the extent and speed of reforms. In this process even some of the conservative papers came under attack from the regime. The February 2000 elections to the Sixth *Majlis* were another sign of the widespread revolt against religious rule. In all previous elections candidates vied with each other in pledging complete adherence to the 'line of the imam' (referring to Khomeini), and total allegiance to the Supreme Leader. In the February election, however, the entire election discourse and campaign slogans had changed (Zarafshan, 2000; Mehreghan, 2000). Freedom had replaced guardianship; participation—the new buzzword—replaced obedience; and Iran rather than Islam was given prominence. More significantly, the more candidates distanced themselves from the ruling value systems the more attractive they became to voters. There was no surprise as such, and should not have been, yet the extent of opposition did take everyone by surprise.

One noteworthy feature of the election was the high turnout, over 70 per cent. This is ordinarily a high figure, especially for a country under a repressive government with which people are intensely disgruntled. The figure looks even more impressive if we take into consideration the fact that a significant section of those who oppose the Islamic regime still refuse to participate in elections. Another important feature was the unequivocal clarity of the 'protest vote'. None of those who pulled the largest votes were anywhere near the centre of power, while some of the candidates were almost unknowns until two or three weeks before the election. In contrast someone like Rafsanjani, the former President and speaker of the Islamic Parliament, who in the past 20 years had been the number two man in the Islamic Republic, was so humiliated that he had to resign after the election. In many places conservatives failed to get the votes that they predicted. For example in Isfahan, the conservative candidate Fallahian, the former intelligence minister, got a mere 28,000, a fraction of those on the direct payroll of the regime apparatus in the city. Similarly in the holy city of Mashhad, where the turnout was an astonishing 90 per cent, the conservatives could not get one candidate elected. What was also evident was the decisive defeat of the reformists who tried to play the centre ground. Both the Association of Militant Clergy and Rafsanjani's Agents of Reconstruction Party were given a slap across the face. Of 290 seats, 189 went to reformists, 42 to independent candidates, 5 to religious

minorities, and only 54 to conservatives (Samii, 2000; WWW.Iranmania.com/elections). But, having resoundingly lost the election, the conservative faction targeted the reformists and their publications.

The crackdown on the press did not come unexpectedly or without warning. On March 12, just three weeks after the election, Said Hajjarian, an advisor to the President and publisher of the influential reformist but banned paper *Sobh-e Emrouz,* was shot outside the offices of Tehran City Council. He was one of the main architects of the reformist victory in February, and his paper was influential in campaigning against conservatives and also in investigating the chain of murders of writers and intellectuals in recent years (Tarock, 2001). What seemed to trigger the new wave of attacks was the participation by some Iranian intellectuals, writers, journalists, lawyers, and reformists in a conference organized by the Heinrich Boll Institute in Berlin in April. The 'Iran After the Elections' conference held April 7 to 9 in Berlin by the Boll Institute, an organization associated with the German Green Party, hoped to promote understanding and informed political opinion. It was hoping to bring together critical voices from both secular and Islamic reformists. Some prominent writers, publishers, as well as reformist politicians and journalists, were invited to speak. A large demonstration of some Iranian political groups in exile, however, disrupted the proceedings, and a woman in protest against Islamic dress code in Iran danced in her underwear. Rafasnjani later condemned these people for shameful conduct. National television showed a highly biased and selective film of the conference, cynically skewed to inflame religious opinion and paint the participants in an anti-Islamic light. A number of participants, including two women, Mehrangiz Kar, a human rights lawyer, and Shahla Lahiji, an independent publisher; Alireza Afshar, secretary of the Office of Consolidation of Unity, the largest student association; as well as Akbar Ganji, a reformist and well-known investigative journalist, were all arrested and sent to jail charged with acts against national security by making propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran (Samii, 2001; Tarock, 2001).

A number of publishers and journalists were summoned to court for questioning. Well-known figures included Mohamad Reza Khatami, brother of the President, recipient of the highest number of votes in Tehran during parliamentary election, and publisher of the daily *Mosharekat* (Participation); Ferydon Verdinejad, managing director of Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA); Shamsolvaezin, editor of the reformist paper *Asr'e Azadegan;* Emadeddin Baghi, an active and leading member of Students of the Line of Imam who invaded the U.S. embassy in 1979, were indicted on charges similar to other staff members of the daily *Fath*. These charges were brought against them by the intelligence ministry, revolutionary guards, and state broadcasting (IRIB).[3]

On April 20, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei spoke to a large gathering of *Basijies* (mobilization forces): '10 or 15 newspapers are being directed

from the same centre; they write similar headlines that make it as look as though the country is losing everything. They kill hope in the youth, weaken the spirit of confidence in officials . . .' he said to the Basiji crowd. 'These [publications are] performing the same task as the BBC radio and Voice of America as well as the British and American and Zionist television' (Campagna, 2000). This was his second attack on reformists. He used the previous Friday prayer platform to praise what he called 'lawful violence'. The closure of a number of pro-reform and independent papers soon followed. On April 24, the government announced the closure of 14 papers, although the number was increased in less than two days. This major clampdown against the press made more than 1,500 journalists and press workers jobless. By this time the list of journalists summoned included Reza Ansarirad, a young clergyman who had written about Montazeri in *Aftab'e Emrouz*; Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, a former minister and publisher of *Ayam*; Hadi Khamenai, brother of the Supreme Leader and publisher of *Hayat'e No*; Yadollah Eslami, publisher of *Fath*; Mohamad Reza Yazdanpanah, publisher of *Azad*; and a young journalist named Mohammad Ghouchani, for his article in the daily *Asr'e Azadegan* about the assassination of Hajarian. Another cartoonist, Nikahang Kosar, had already been imprisoned for portraying an Iranian cleric as a crocodile in the daily *Azad*.[4] However, just two weeks after the closure of the pro-reform press there was already talk about publishing new newspapers. The titles mentioned included *Iranian*, *No-Sazi*, *Hayat-e No*, *Rai-e Mardom*, *Naghsh-e Jahan*, *Mellat,* and *Sobh-e Karoun*.[5] Of the titles published after the April attack, *Mellat* lasted only one day; *Bahar* only ten weeks; and *Goonagoun* only a few weeks, for closely resembling the suspended newspapers *Jame-h*, *Tous*, *Neshat,* and *Asr-e Azadegan*.

The press had thus become the open battleground on which conflicts between different sections of the government were played out. The struggle for power between the conservative religious forces, embodied in Khamenaie, was in conflict with the reformist tendencies and elected power of Khatami. The Islamic courts appointed by the Supreme Leader supervened over the professional judiciary. The reformist parliament called for a review of the restrictive Press Law passed by the previous parliament and appealed to the judiciary to reopen newspapers, which had been closed since April 2000. In an extraordinary and rare event, the Islamic Republic Supreme Leader Ali Khamenaie disrupted attempts by Iran's new assembly to amend the Press Law. A *Majlis* dominated by reformists had scheduled a debate to discuss and vote on amendments, which would have made closure of newspapers before any fair trial illegal on August 6. But Khamenaie, who had the final say in all state matters, sent a letter addressed to MPs and forced the parliament to abandon the debate. In his letter, which was read by Speaker of the House Mehdi Karroubi, he said:

> If the enemy infiltrates our press, this will be a big danger to the country's security and the people's religious beliefs. I do not deem it right to

> keep silent. The present press law has succeeded to a point to prevent this big plague. The (proposed) bill is not legitimate, nor in the interests of the system and the revolution. (cited in Tarock, 2001:597)

Karroubi, speaker of the parliament, argued that the MPs had to submit to Khamenaie's will. In an interview with state-run radio, he argued that 'the constitution emphasizes the Absolute Rule of the Jurisconsult [*Vilayat-I Motlaq*] and this is how it is, and you voted for it' (cited in Sami, 2001:6). The letter and 'decision' provoked a storm of criticism and verbal and physical clashes between rival MPs. But it was also seen as another green light to attack the reformist press.

The year 2001 also saw the end of another important publication, *Asr'e Ma* (Our Era). Authorities shut down the reformist weekly on December 15. It was the organ of the Islamic Revolution Mujahedin Organization, which was first published eight years ago. It followed the tradition of *Jahan'e Islam* (World of Islam) and *Bayan* (Speech), affiliated to the 'left' wing of the Islamic regime, which was the dominant force in the first decade of the Islamic Republic but was then marginalized after the end of the war with Iraq and Khomeini's death. This publication was primarily concerned, since its launch in 1994, with the crisis of the 'left' and the reasons for their defeat in the parliamentary election of 1992 and their isolation within a political system, which they helped to create and defend. Several important figures, including Said Hajarian and Hashem Aghajari (later condemned to execution for blasphemy), were writing for this weekly.[6] By early August 2000, 21 newspapers had been closed down, an editor shot (Hajjarian), top internationally renowned intellectuals imprisoned, and mere participation in debates about civil society and political reform sufficient to be considered an act of treason.[7]

The impact of this new wave of attack on print culture in Iran was devastating. According to the annual report of The Society for Defence of Press Freedom in Iran[8], by the end of 2001, 47 publications were closed down; among them were 16 dailies, 19 weeklies, and 7 monthlies. The circulations of press in Iran in the same period between 2000 and 2001 had decreased by 45 per cent, from 3,120,000 to 1,750,000.

The impact of this crackdown, however, went beyond the press. In almost all sectors of cultural industry there was clear and undeniable evidence of decline in 2000 compared to the optimistic year of 1998. Despite continuous attempts by the conservatives to suppress rival factions and internal dissident voices in Iran, Khatami won yet another term. Despite the relative decline in the number of those who participated in the June 2001 presidential election, Khatami managed to secure 77 per cent of the vote. Many still hoped that the second term would be more positive. But clearly the enthusiasm of 1997–1998 had been replaced by indifference. 'Reform' movements by definition are about urgent actions, and enthusiasm can be easily replaced by 'indifference' if the implementations of 'reforms' are met

Table 4.1 Cultural Productions 1998–2000.

	Item Output in the Year		
	March 2000	*March 1999*	*March 1998*
Published book titles	15,307	17,191	20,642
Circulation of books	82,568,000	86,418,000	105,687,000
Public libraries	1,149	1,263	1,304
Books in public libraries	7,772,057	8,713,252	9,605,508
Press titles	1,053	1,158	1,491
Total press circulation	857m	886m	911m
Play performances	1,530	1,855	2,068
Record titles	253	307	328
Theatres	295	305	307
Grand total of movie theatres	171,623	172,078	173,060
Screened movies	52	58	60

Sources: Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.[1]

with obstacles. At least in print culture and generally in the field of cultural production this is visible in Iran.

According to a report by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ),[10] Iranians seem less enthusiastic about reading newspapers, and many have lost track of which papers are banned, which publications are temporarily suspended, which have survived, and how many new ones are available on newsstands. The same, as can also be seen from Table 4.1, applies to other sectors of the cultural industry, including books. According to the same CPJ report political books are less popular. Mahbobeh Gholizadeh, herself a publisher and editor of the woman's journal *Farzaneh*, told CPJ at Tehran's 2001 book fair that people are tired of factional conflicts and prefer to read novels and books on culture and art rather than politics. This trend is not uncommon in Iran. Every time the channels for political participation are blocked there is this 'cultural' turn. The difficulty, however, is that under the Islamic Republic general areas such as 'culture', 'art', and even sports and science can be problematic. Hence the closure of *Cinema Jahan* (World of Cinema), *Gozaresh'e Film* (Film's Report), and *Honar'e Haftoum* (Seventh Art) for 'disturbing' public opinion; *Golbang'e Iran* (Iran's Shout), *Nakhl* (Palm), *Avay'e Varzesh* (Voice of Sport), *and Bazar'e Rouz* (Day Market) for their coverage of human interest stories

and tabloid journalism. Previous attempts at creating tabloid publication in Iran had met with the same anger. In 1994 the Press Supervisory Board had banned *Havades* (Accidents) for spreading inappropriate messages and culture (Abdi, 1999). Unlike China, where similar restrictive policies are in force but authorities consciously allow tabloid market and journalism to grow at the expense of real journalism and debate, in Iran even this area of the press is under heavy scrutiny. The truth is—at least in the case of Iran—once religion (or to be precise a specific reading of it) becomes the guideline for political actions and is linked to the state, it kills any other form of 'engagements' and all other issues are rendered irrelevant. How else can we explain the closure of *Danestaniha* (literally means things worth knowing), *Jahanee Pezeshki* (World of Medicine), and the arrest of Hossein Rafiei, a university professor and publisher of the monthly *Shimi va Towse-h* (Chemistry and Development) in April 2001?

Besides political disappointment, financial factors are playing a major role. 'Reform' can be extremely expensive. Many journalists have lost their jobs, and in addition to the insecurity of pinning hopes on a publication that might run for a short time there are other economic burdens to consider, such as heavy fines of thousands of U.S. dollars on editors, writers, and cartoonists in a country where the average income is just about $100 per month. Indeed, many journalists have second jobs and cannot simply survive on one uncertain income in a country with massive economic problems and high inflation, especially in a sector (semi-independent publishing) which is mostly financed on loans and mortgages and has very little chance of securing advertising revenue due to politically charged content.

Meanwhile the struggle to control the press has continued, and there is little sign of conservatives willing to loosen their grip on public life. In 2002 a number of publications were also shut down, and many journalists were fined, arrested, and barred from practicing journalism. According to an annual report by RSF,[11] in 2002 Iran was the biggest jail for journalists in the Middle East. More than 30 journalists were behind bars, at least 6 journalists and writers had been killed between 1998–2002, many had been banned from further journalistic activities, and hundreds had lost their jobs. The Committee to Protect Journalists had listed the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader at the top of its annual list of Enemies of the Press in 2001, an improvement from 2000 when he was a runner-up. Reporters Without Borders also denounced him as a predator of press freedom. In contrast and not surprisingly Iranian journalists were receiving recognition at the international level. The Iranian woman publisher Shahla Lahiji received a 2001 PEN Freedom to Write Award; Mashallah Shmasolvaezine, editor of a number of reformist publications, received CPJ's International Press Freedom Award; Faraj Sarkuhi, editor of the defunct *Adineh,* was listed among the International Press Institute's 50 World Press Freedom Heroes; and there was regular coverage by International Pen, Digital Freedom Network of a number of Iranian activists and journalists, including Mehrangiz Kar (Samii, 2001).

By 2002 the 'reform' movement had lost its momentum, was marginalized, and through the banning of a number of papers, silenced. After the closure of many of their publications, reformists also lost control of the *Majlis*. The Council of the Guardians yet again played a major role in the electoral process by disqualifying hundreds of candidates including 80 deputies who had expressed their desire to remain members of the *Majlis* by nominating themselves. More than 4,000 candidates (half of those who had nominated themselves) were rejected. Reformist MPs objected by barricading themselves inside the *Majlis*, and over one hundred resigned in protest at the interference of the Guardian Council in political affairs.[12] The defeat of the reformist camp became obvious as the election results showed that the Reformist candidates who chose to contest the election took only about 20 per cent of the 225 seats decided in the first round. Even some of the well-known figures of the reform camp, including the Speaker of Parliament Mehdi Karrubi, failed to secure a seat in the first round. In contrast conservatives took about 70 per cent of these seats, with the remainder going to independents. The 'official' turnout rate was 51 per cent and considerably less than the near 70 per cent of 2000. If the presidential election of 1997 represented a major expression of an end of an historical era in which the ruling political system could reproduce itself by means of ideological cohesion, mobilization of the masses (based around the concept of the *Umma,* the community of the faithful) and charismatic leadership, the most important conclusion to be drawn from these results is that the Iranian people were deeply disillusioned with the Reformists and chose to repudiate them, either by abstaining or by voting against them in this election.

CONCLUSION

Control of the press, throughout its entire history, has been one of the key features of the development of Iran, a point which was conveniently ignored by modernization theory. The 'not yet' attitude towards democratization and the decoupling of political development from economic development was an astonishing misreading of the evolution of the West. While this school of thought celebrated the idea of modern media and saw it as essential to 'development', it failed to provide either a substantial analysis of the emergence of communication channels in Iran (and elsewhere), or any discussion about the context or the content of media that might have paved the way for the emergence of 'modern personality'. The 'tradition' (despotism) that was absent from modernization school analysis has remained visible in the real world. The history of the Iranian press provides ample evidence of the rude health of this tradition. Mohsenian-Rad offers a detailed periodization of the Iranian press since the publication of the first-ever newspapers in Iran. The 11 phases that he identifies in Iranian press

history, prior to Khatami's victory, are summarized in Table 4.2 which appears here with minor modification. He suggests that in its entire 162-year history, the Iranian press has only been free for three per cent of this period (Mohsenian-Rad, 2001).

This brief analysis of the struggle for freedom of the press clearly demonstrates that the fate of the press and the fate of social movements in Iran have risen and fallen in tandem. A big section of the Iranian press, since its emergence, has acted as agents of modernization, missionaries for enlightenment, and advocates of social change. They have given meaning to the very notion of 'public', provided a voice for alternative narratives and histories of Iran, and have acted as a significant social force. Yet for the very same reasons their existence has very much depended on a degree of political openness which has come as a result of revolutions, strong

Table 4.2 162 Years of Iranian Press.

Beginning	*Duration in months*	*Event*	*Characteristics of era*
March 21, 1837	834	Publication of the first Iranian paper	State press
September 24, 1906	20	Victory of Constitutional Revolution	Free and scurrilous press (First Press Law)
May 24, 1907	13	Mohammad Ali Shah coup	Suppressed press
June 25, 1908	197	Mohammad Ali shah escapes	Free and self censored press
June 26, 1925	189	Reign of Reza Shah	Suppressed press
August 28, 1941	143	Reign of Mohammad Reza Shah	Scurrilous and free party press
July 29, 1953	306	CIA-led coup	Neutral and westoxicated press (Second Press Law)
Jan 28, 1979	19	Islamic Revolution	Range of free press (Third Press Law)
August 31, 1980	95	Iraq attacks Iran	Panegyrist and mobilizing Press (Fourth Press Law)
July 1, 1988	107	End of war	Range of self-censored press (Fifth Press Law)
June 1, 1997	33	Seventh presidential election	Range of free press with Party's function

social movements (nationalist and secular), and the weakness of the state. Throughout the entire history of the Iranian press, those in the clerical establishment have remained key players. They were among the early adopters, saw the clear advantage of the printing press, and even allied themselves with various organizations and intellectuals to further expansion of the press. Yet the competing interests of different publishers with those of the clerical establishment has remained one of the key features of press history. Indeed the conservative clerics of 1997 were repeating the same charge as their Constitutional Revolution hero, Sheikh Nouri, had made in 1909 over the debate in the *Majlis* about Article 20 of the first Press Law in Iran. Nouri and his allies were adamant that prison terms and fines had to be set for publishing anti-Islamic materials and insulting *Ulema* (Abdo & Lyons, 2003:174–177).

If the 'Western' history that Lerner had in mind failed to repeat itself in Iran and much of the 'developing' world, the history of some parts of Europe provides some clues to the nature, evolution, and development of the press in Iran. Much like the press in Southern Europe (see Hallin & Mancini, 2005), the Iranian press developed as part of the world of literature and politics. Most press proprietors, from Constitutional Revolution to the present day, have been well-known literary or political figures. With few exceptions, circulations of newspapers have been low, have been elite-driven publications, and have been platforms for exchanges of ideas/insults among varied sections and interests. Journalism has remained a politically charged and a politicized profession, and the level of state involvement and intervention (in terms of economic and political control) have been visibly high. Variations of political aspirations and ideologies (Islamists, Nationalists, and Marxists), on the one hand, and political instability and repression and the absence of any reasonably long period of political openness necessary for formation of political parties, on the other, have meant that there has always been a high degree of political parallelism between political/economic interests and the press. Undoubtedly, and as Hallin and Mancini (ibid:223) argue in their analysis of the Southern European media system, the strong presence of institutions of *ancien régime*, most notably the strong presence of monarchy and conservative religious institutions and *ulema*, have made the transition to 'modernity' a long, difficult, and conflicting process.

However, while the low circulation of the press can no longer be explained in terms of low levels of literacy or a huge gap between rural and urban areas, the strong and forceful presence of the state and an elite-centred pattern of political participation have remained key issues. For example, even at the height of the reform movement and the student uprising in 1999, Khatami and his reformist allies were weary of the spilling of Iranian anger and disappointment into the streets of major cities. It is for this very reason that we need to examine, in more detail, the relationship between the Iranian state, media, and the advocacy of 'civil society' by the pro-Khatami

press. Under reformists, there was to be a clear demarcation between the state and civil society, and the press was instantly recognized as a key institution of 'civil society' and outside the realm of the state. Did 1997 mark a new phase in the history of the Iranian press? Was the reformist press truly independent of the state? The next chapter deals with the illusions and realities of the press as an agent of 'civil society' in Iran.

5 Press, State, and Civil Society
Illusions and Realities

> You cannot have democracy; you cannot have human rights, freedom, and popular participation without people's economic participation. The people must contribute. They must share in economic and financial affairs in order to establish democracy. I think this is obvious. If you are looking for political liberalism, you need economic liberalism, too.
>
> Mohsen Sazgara

INTRODUCTION

From the mid-90s under the banner of 'civil society' and press as a 'fourth estate', a new movement for democratization in Iran started to define itself, which resulted in two landslide victories for reformist candidate Khatami in 1997 and 2001. Undoubtedly and due to the nature of the Iranian press, the battle between the 'reformists' and 'conservatives' in Iran was also a battle over the definition and the role of the media. Since then and due to the significant role that was played by the reformist press in mobilizing public support for the reformist camp, the press has come to be hailed and defined as the 'fourth estate'. This chapter examines such generalizations about the role of the press and the term 'civil society' with particular reference to the reformist press and whether they were located 'outside' the realm of the state. This chapter begins with a brief review and critique of the term 'civil society. It then examines various definitions and approaches and debates about the notion and various responses to such debates inside the Islamic Republic. By analyzing the background and the context of the emerging reform movement, it begins to examine the relationship between media and state and suggests that the new political space that emerged after 1997 was inextricably linked with the state and, as the continuing struggle over the press demonstrates, the arena of competition among various social, economic, and regional interests. The 'civil society' very much did depend 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 also demonstrates that in order to understand the rise and fall of a dynamic press environment in recent years and its role in democratization, we should take into consideration the two contradictory elements

enshrined in the Islamic Republic of Iran's Constitution, various political programmes, 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 intimate relationship between state and 'civil society', as well as the crucial factor of the contradictory role of the state.

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 block 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. Certainly 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' (2003:275).

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' (1995:238). 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: one which 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', and/or which identifies the economy (capitalist system) as only one of the many equally important spheres in complex (post) modern society (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 civil society concept. In his view:

> Modern civil societies have comprised a constellation of juxtaposed and changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, an essential 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, 1988:19–20)

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. Keane typically attacks the Marxist 'reductionist' approach which equates 'civil society' with 'economy' and argues that in Marxist accounts other institutions of civil society are devalued and rendered insignificant (1991:33). 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 effected the organization of health care and the nature of medical institutions' (Wood, 1995:245). 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 (1994:33), 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 dichotemic 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 financial markets exactly in the same way that market forces affect 'displacement' of people.

Sparks rightly suggests that Keane's reading of the classical texts is selective, and his 'interpretation' of such texts misses the very particular context (including the nature of state and the fact that it mainly conceived of as an instrument of power; and presumption of universality of small-scale property which did not anticipate the emergence of massive conglomerates) that paved the path for emergence of the concept in the first place (1994:31–33).

The more significant point, however, is the undeniable link between the state and 'civil society'. The separation of the state and civil society in liberal theory camouflages discrete forms of expression of social relations under capitalism. The state undoubtedly has a set of presuppositions in 'civil society' in terms of private property, family, judiciary, and education, among many, which under capitalism become divided into separate spheres. In this process public and private spheres are separated, issues of class and class exploitation are set aside, and 'individual' freedom is accorded a decisive status. The state should not be regarded as a thing in itself but a concrete form of social relations. Within much current thinking about social change, including that of globalization, it has been customary to counterpoise state and the market as two opposed forms of social organizations, and declaring the 'retreat' or 'decline' of the state under the pressure of the global flow of capital (Hirst and Thompson, 1999).

Furthermore, and as Gramsci argued, we need to understand state not simply as a set of institutions limited to the government and political personalities with governmental responsibilities. The state indeed presents itself as more than a mere 'political society' of political leaders and personalities. It is 'the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those whom it rules' (Gramsci, 1971:244). For Gramsci this aspect of the state constituted 'civil society', and the combination of the inseparable realms of politics and economics produced what he called the 'integral state'. It is also crucial to note that it is no accident that it is the concept of civil society that has propelled questions of the separation of the public and private, and the rule of law has coincided with the neo-liberal revolution in economic and social policy. Iran is a case in point.

REFORM AND CIVIL SOCIETY DEBATE IN IRAN

In the 1990s a wide range of issues that had occupied Iranian intellectuals began to resurface. If the debates in the 1960s by a number of intellectuals, including Al-Ahmad, had turned the previous issues of Iran's backwardness on its head and offered the return to the root and authentic/indigenous self (Boroujerdi, 1996; Mirsepasi, 2000; Vahdat, 2002), some intellectuals in the 1990s turned their critical gaze towards that very root and authentic national culture. The debate on who Iranians are and their relationship to the west and modernity was central to a reform movement in the last decade of the 20th century. The new reform movement that emerged in 1997, as Ashraf and Banuaziz (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 the restrictive cultural policies of the Islamic Republic, and of course the crippling economic crisis and economic policies of 'structural adjustment' and reconstruction which began after the end of the war. The major issue, however, remains the massive gap between the early promises of the Islamic state over redistribution of resources and catering to the disinherited, and the realities of a set of policies which has led to a massively stratified and unjust society and the increasing gap between the haves and have-nots. As I have already discussed in Chapter 2, the level of inequality in Iran and the rate of unemployment well surpasses other countries in the region. The reformers have conveniently avoided this sensitive issue and have mostly tried to downplay the ideology of 'just Islamic' society, focusing their attention and energies on certain political reforms, not in favour of the marginalized but of the private sector. This came to haunt them in the 2005 presidential election when the conservative candidates succeeded (partly) by promising to redistribute in favour of the poor, to provide jobs, and to fight corruption.

The reform movement inside the Islamic regime, while always strong, essentially took off after the end of the war with Iraq and Khomeini's death, a period which Ehteshami has dubbed the Second Republic. According to him, only after Khomeini could 'development of any independent political institution . . . really effectively take place' since his style of leadership and his supremacy of power did not allow such development (1995: 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 his post was an IMF reform package that included exchange-rate unification, increased fiscal discipline, deregulation of trade and foreign trade, the attraction of foreign investment, and privatization (Ehteshami, 1995; Karbasian, 2000). De-nationalization of foreign trade happened in 1989 as a result of the powerful lobby of *Bazaaris* and also a ruling by the Guardian Council that suggested that 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 per cent (from US$1=IR600 to US$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 per cent 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. While undoubtedly religious and public intellectuals, including journalists, have challenged the state (or dominant factions of the state), the sole focus on such social forces by many commentators (Khosrokhavar, 2004, 2004a; Sadri, 2001; Kurzman, 2001; Tabari, 2003) neglect the very fact that private capital has become one of the main challengers to the state monopoly of key major industries, including the communications industry. Little wonder that the most passionate and vocal voices within the reform movement have failed to provide a critique of capitalism. The purpose more than anything else was to expand the base of the Islamic state to the private sector and the rising and upwardly mobile Iranian middle class, who have been the main beneficiaries of Islamic state policy and are the prized consumers of the private capital keen to compete with state for providing luxurious services to them. Kadivar, one of the frequently mentioned reformist figures, for example, accepts that catering to the interests of the 'new middle class' became the first priority of the reformist cabinet and parliament (2003:26). The need for political reform and relaxation of existing social and cultural policies to some extent is to address the need and desire of these new agents of social stability. As many reformists later began to argue, in addition to failures of economic reform, Rafsanjani's presidency was marked with the absence of much-needed parallel political reform. Yesteryear revolutionaries who had been marginalized since the death of Khomeini have echoed such calls and began to champion the cause of liberalization.

In 1997 Khatami moved the idea of 'civil society' (*jame-i madani)* to the centre-stage of political debate in Iran. There was a clear shift of emphasis in terms of the purpose of the state and the cultural atmosphere of the country. As one commentator argued it seemed that the 'discourse of civil society has replaced the discourse of Westoxication (*gharbzadeghi*)' (Mahruyan, 1998:11). Yet the response to this call for 'civil society', rule of law, etcetera has been anything but uniform. There are of course many at the centre of power who regard the concept of 'civil society' as antithetical to the basic values and ideals of an Islamic society and state. Mowlana is a representative of this approach. Equating orality with tradition and the print and electronic culture with 'civil society' (Mowlana, 1994), they are dismissive of the concept not on the ground that it has simply been promoted as a euphemism for capitalism, but on 'cultural' grounds and the perceived incompatibility of its associated terms, such as 'secularism, nation-state, nationalism, and modern European parliamentary democracy', with Islam.

There are many reformist intellectuals and activists who find the term useful but are keen to Islamicize the idea of civil society, and want to make it compatible with the existing norms and values of the present order: an 'Islamic civil society' that, as Khatami promised and advocated, would be

different from its secular, Western counterparts. Kamrava suggests that, while the concept is borrowed form western scholarship, in the case of Iran it has gone through a process of indigenization. In his view this is part of an attempt by Iranian writers to 'lend it more credence before the larger public audience and to increase its compatibility with indigenous social and political circumstances' (2001:172–173). An important part of this 'indigenization' has been about the relevance of religion. Undoubtedly religion and religious institutions have been rather significant in the resurgence of the concept of 'civil society'. Their role in various countries including Spain, Brazil, Eastern Europe, South Korea, and so on were noticeable and important. For this very reason and in particular because of the role of the Catholic Church and groups, Huntington (1991) and Casanova (1996) did not hesitate to argue that the 'third wave of democratization' was predominantly a Catholic one.

However, a very significant section of the advocates of 'civil society' in Iran indeed have focused on discarding the 'traditional' elements of society since Mohammad Khatami's landslide election victory on *Doe'h Khordad*, literally 'Second Khordad' (23 May 1997), and the emergence of the Third Republic.[1] It is indeed one of the great ironies of the recent development that the situation has been reversed since 1979: Islam and the Revolution once again are being undermined, but this time by the very forces that were among the main beneficiaries of the Islamic Revolution. In Iran the revival of 'tradition' has only been one of the revivals that has followed after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The more significant development, however, has been the strong revival of the 'tradition' of enthusiasm for material products and the benefits of capitalism, and with it a persistent idea, which blames the existence of 'tradition' for all the ills in modern Iran. A large collection of different groups of political intellectuals, who gathered under the umbrella of the concept of civil society and welcomed Khatami's call for a parallel political reform next to economic liberalization, share a critique of the ruling political system, but do 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 (Ziba-Kalam 1998; Rashidi, 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 (Mahruyan, 1998; Bazargani, 1998). A significant aspect of this 'cultural' definition of 'civil society' in Iran has revolved around the idea of 'cultural modernity' (Ashuri, 1998), abandoning certain traditional practices and institutions (including that of the role of supreme jurist in Iran), and even challenging 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 which allow participation by different interest groups, a political pluralism, and tolerance (Ashuri, 1998; Yazdi et al., 1998; Sahabi et al., 1998). However, as Kamrava suggests, the emphasis on the 'rule of law' in the debate about 'civil society' implies 'both directly and indirectly, a primary role for the state' (2001:167). 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'.

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 constitutions. What is interesting is that many of the reformist writers (Ganji, 1999, 2000; Baghi, 1999, 2002; Ghuchani, 2000a, 2000b; Jalaeepour, 2000a, 2000b), despite some clear differences in their methodologies and approaches, skate over the first decade of the Islamic Republic. This is a period that, as I have argued, was dominated, especially in the early years, by strong presence and opposition to the Islamic Republic from secular organizations. These writers have ignored the role 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.

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 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 Khomeini as the 'floor'. He and his legacy is the 'ceiling', and the debate has revolved around not questioning the wisdom of Khomeini's 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 undoubtedly also casts doubt over the reasons for the continuation of the war. Questioning the 'war effort' also means questioning a large section of the current reformists that enjoyed their dominant position in the Islamic state because of their instrumental role in 'holy defence'. It was after the Islamic Republic's 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 which is linked with an

attempt to influence the reform movement, and to offer a prescription for the ills of Iranian society which sees liberalization of the economy, not democratization, as the perfect remedy (Mukhtari, 1999). Many dissident intellectuals in Iran, whom Vahdat (2002) calls neo-Westernizers, simply want not to challenge the West but to imitate it, and generally champion the free market and further liberalization as a remedy to Iran's economic and social problems. Akbar Ganji in his *Manifest-e Joumhori-Khahi* (Republicanism Manifesto) suggests that 'economic liberalisation and privatisation is essential for moving towards a free political system.' For him this is precisely what Iranian intellectuals have often neglected. 'Free economic system (competitive market) which is based on individual rights and freedom (human rights) is the foundation of modern and free democracies. Intellectual manifesto if it's not directed towards this will not lead anywhere' (Ganji, 2002).

One of his most recent books, *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 favour 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 favour of 'depoliticization' which is a necessary condition for 'liberalization'. 'Law', 'order', respect for 'constitution', and the call for the end of 'chaos', is used not only to fend off 'disorderly' conservatives—and with some positive democratic effect—but also to support the law of the market and the collapsing of 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 alike 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 suggests, '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' (1995:51). 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. The tension between various programmes and interests in Iran were more visible in the press arena than anywhere else.

A closer look at the number of licences 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 5.1). In just one year between 1998–1999 the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance licenced 168 new publications, including 7 daily newspapers, 27 weeklies, 59 monthlies, 53 quarterlies, and 2 annual publications. The Ministry stressed that its policy was based on 'expanding legalized freedoms and increasing the number of publications' (IRNA, August 29, 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 licences had reached 1,055. By then there were 828 publications available in the market, while 227 had not printed a single copy despite having licences; a further 615 were in the process of applying for licences.

The new and more open policy (between 1997–1999) clearly had encouraged a huge number of people, some with limited or no experience, to try their hand in the newspaper market, and perhaps this movement for 'quantity' happened at the expense of 'content and quality' (Jalali and Amini, 1998). Some of the new publications never entered the market, some closed down after a short period, but it seems that many licences were used as 'spares' and were quickly activated whenever a publication closed down so that the same project could continue with minimal disruption.

As Siavoshi suggests, conventional views on Iran have been based on the assumptions that sharply divided societies lack tolerance, and the polarization between state and society as a whole prompts the state to use more coercive force (1997:525). Such severe dichotomic views fail to acknowledge the division within the state and the society. The history of the Islamic Republic of

Table 5.1 Number of Licences Given by PSB between 1990–2000.

Year	*Number of Licences*	*% of accepted applications*
1990–92	282	18.9
1993	69	4.6
1994	70	4.7
1995	105	7.1
1996	116	7.8
1997	281	18.9
1998	168	11.4
1999	333	22.4
2000	62	4.2
Total	**1486**	**100.0**

Source: Bahrampour (2002:85).

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 with 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 acknowledge crucial institutional interests of divided *ulema* and the continuing struggle to claim the monopoly of economic capital and the 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.

As I have suggested in the context of Iran the link between the state and the press is inevitable. The economic realities of the press in Iran remain as harsh as in most countries, and the so-called legal barriers, existing press law, and the instability of the political situation prevent the formation and establishment of private press industry. However, recent figures released by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance were promoted as evidence of growing confidence in the private sector and the desire to invest in the press market. (See Table 5.2.)

A quick scan of this table indicates that 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. According to some reports, in 1999 about 40 per cent of the Iranian press was state-owned and controlled (Bahrampour, 2001). However, this is a rather distorted figure for a number of good reasons. It only covers the period of renewed struggle for democratization, which has helped (and has been helped) by the semi-independent press or oppositional publications. Many of the 'non-governmental organizations' are directly or indirectly linked to the state apparatus. But more significant is the fact that many 'natural persons' are current and former government officials using the press as an organ to mobilize popular support for their own goals. The wold 'private' does not necessary mean 'commercial' in the classical sense or as understood in the European context.

As I have argued before the Iranian press market reflects the broader picture of the Iranian political economy, which is marked by the presence of massive and large-scale state-owned corporations on the one hand, and petty production and small enterprises on the other. In the former case there are the *Kayhan* firm with 13 titles (including 3 dailies in Farsi, Arabic, and English); *Ettela'at* with 8 titles (including 2 dailies catering to national and international readers); Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), also with 7 titles, including *Jame-Jam* daily, all published by the publication arm of the corporation, Soroush Press. Other major firms with direct links to the state are the Iranian News Agency (with 7 titles, including daily *Iran*), *Hamshahri* (best-selling dailies published by the Tehran mayor's office), and *Quds* (controlled and published by the estate of Emam Reza in the holy city of Mashhad). All of these, because of massive financial

Table 5.2 Authorized Press, by Concessionaire 1996–2000.

Year	*Total*	*Natural persons*	*Government organizations and institutions*	*Non-governmental organizations and institutions*
1996	662	338	223	101
1997	800	444	239	117
1998	905	523	254	128
1999	1018	610	268	140
2000	1207	724	290	193

resources and generous subsidies by the state, have their own state-of-the-art printing presses and facilities.

The other model of ownership, wrongly perceived as *private*, is the *individual* ownership of newspapers. Many of these individuals, however, are ex-ministers, MPs, and officials, who have turned to the press market to promote themselves and their policies. Indeed, some of the best-known dailies and weeklies were owned by such officials: *Salam* was owned by Khoeini'ha (ex-district attorney), *Khordad* by Nouri (ex-Interior minister), *Jameh* by Jalaipour (ex-commander of the Islamic regime army in Kurdistan), and so on. Only a very reductionist notion of the state can claim that these publications are located outside the realm of the state. If the dominance of petty production has provided a platform for the emergence and revival of many titles and has contributed to some extent to the existing diversity in the press market, it equally has made the survival of many such publications a difficult task. In addition to the economic difficulties and failure to reach the necessary safe margins, the judiciary has managed to suspend many of these papers by simply targeting the individual owners. *Salam*, *Khordad*, and many others ran into difficulties as soon as their owners found themselves in the wrong side of the judiciary.

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

As I discussed in Chapter 2, economic resources available to publications that are linked directly with state and government departments, competition for advertising revenue, and political immunity for those who are closer to the centre of power, do indeed contribute to underdevelopment of the semi-independent and private press. 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 programmes, and the historical amnesia to which I referred to 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 Middle Eastern countries in terms of access to media it has one of the most vibrant presses in the region. 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 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* religion; 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: 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, including the television centre. It also created modern institutions such as *komiteh* (committee) and *shura* (council) in factories, schools, universities, neighbourhoods, 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 monarchy was in many ways the only thing that varied 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. It was a repeat of the previous major social movements, most notably the Constitutional Revolution (1906) and the

1951–1953 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 efforts in 1979 and are still pressing for the two main aims of the Revolution which have not only been realized but suppressed: *Esteghlal, 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 *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 strong institutional interests which included taxation and monopoly of 'economic capital'(not, as it is usually assumed, competing 'values' and 'worldviews'). 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 rival sources of social authority (Gill & Keshavarzian, 1999). This is a point which 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 (state) after 1979, as 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 which are under the control of Supreme Leader (Saeidi, 2001). The existence of these institutions, known as *Bonyad* (Foundation),[2] has made the borders between public and private very ambiguous. These foundations, as Khajehpour (2000) argues, operate in the gray area between the public and private sectors. It is estimated that these foundations own some 20 per cent of the asset base of the Iranian economy with a 10 per cent contribution to the country's GDP. In some estimates they are as large as the government itself (Agene, 2003). Undoubtedly these are major obstacles in the way of 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 the Islamic cause 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.

Lacking support from the IRIB, or even equal access to broadcasting programmes compared to his conservative rival, Khatami relied on a growing 'constituency' that had already formed and gathered around a number of influential publications. Khatami's resort to these publications was inevitable, which again can be seen, providing evidence, as another example of the 'dual nature' and 'dichotomy' in the structure of the Islamic state. In his examination of political communication in a non-consolidated presidential democracy, Chalaby (1998) argues that such systems demonstrate some distinct and general features. In this model the state is a major player in the media, television is either controlled or heavily influenced by the state, and key members of the state and the government may own or control some newspapers. Television in this model is used as a tool to promote national unity and foster national cohesion. More important for our discussion, however, is the third feature, which according to Chalaby indicates a division within different media and their relationship to power.

> In fact, it is often the case that while the President and the Presidential office have a hold over television, political parties in opposition have close links with the leading and influential newspapers. On many occasions, Presidential regimes offer a contrast between the television of the President and the press of the opposing political parties. That does not preclude the possibility of one or several newspapers being close to, or even controlled by, the government or the presidency specifically. (1998:437)

Iran of course does not qualify as a 'non-consolidated Presidential democracy'. My aim is to show this fact and again point out the deficiency and the undemocratic nature of the 'dual' structure and split in political communication in Iran. Since the Supreme Leader controls the state television, a President or officials with views different from the *rahbar* (leader), have to resort to the press. If we accept Chalaby's argument and a contrast between the relationship of the television and the press to power, then we have to conclude that in the Islamic Republic context, presidential uses of the press to promote himself and his policies illustrate not only the divisions within the political/economic elite, but also how the relation between media and power is media specific. The 'political' nature of the 'private' in the private press in Iran also derives from this undeniable reality.

All the above factors contribute to the formation of 'state within 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 agendas, and their views are expressed in their official and unofficial organs. As I have already argued there are four main trends within the Islamic regime, all with their own publications (see Siavoshi, 1997; Zarifi-Nia, 1999). Traditional Right (*Rast-e Sonati*) views are published in the daily *Resalat* (Prophetic Mission) and the monthly *Shoma* (You). The Modern Right, mostly organized around Executives of Reconstruction of Iran, and their views are expressed in *Hamshahri* (Fellow Citizen) and *Iran* (published by IRNA). Two newspapers express the views of the Traditional Left*: Kayhan* (Galaxy) and *Enghelab-e Eslami* (Islamic Revolution). The final current, the Modern Left, has produced a range of reformist newspapers and journals including the now defunct *Kian*, *Salam*, *Asr-e Ma (Our Era), Sobh-e Emrouz (This Morning), Khordad,* and *Mosharekat* (Participation), the official organ of Participation Front. In the absence of real political parties (Fairbanks, 2003), these groupings and their publications have acted as surrogates. Their existence and survival all depends on financial resources, loyal agents and various familial, political, and economic networks.

Such close links between 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 in three circles (*halghah*) (Jalaipour, 2000). The first, gathered around one of the most influential Muslim intellectuals in Iran, Abdulkarim Seroush, openly argued for 'civil society' and 'political development' (*towse-h siasi*). The monthly *Kian* 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 'Centre for Strategic Studies' (*Markaz-e Motaleat-e Strategic*), where researchers and activists such as Saeed Hajarian and Alireza Alavitabar (both later involved in *Sobh-e Emrouz* newspaper as managing director and editor), and Abbas Abdi (who later became editor-in-chief of *Salam,* and then *Mosharekat* (Participation) were among the key players. This group's views were regularly published in publications such as the monthly *Rahbourd* and fortnightly *Asr-e Ma* (Our Era), and later in newspapers with wider appeal and circulation such as *Salam*, *Hamshahri*, 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. And among those were Mohammad-Reza Khatami (brother of President Khatami) and Mohsen Mirdamadi. Both of them played a crucial role in establishing 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 the specific organs, it is not surprising that the reform movement in Iran was strongly associated with the press. This relationship 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, 2003:25). In this process, as I have already argued, the judiciary assumes the function of political control. 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 given 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 4 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 are distinctly located outside the realm of the state. While certainly there are 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 consciously tried to prevent popular politics from flowing out onto the streets.

CONCLUSION

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 which aligns the state against civil society, it is not clear exactly where the state starts and ends. Furthermore, there is the issue of entanglement between the state and 'civil society'. The danger of seeing the 'civil society' as essentially an oppositional force misses the crucial link between the state and civil society and, as can 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, 2002:26). 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 mechanism 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 pigeonholed in the 'private' category). While they point to the lack of clear and unified developmental media policy (a point which will be discussed in the next chapter), they divide the approaches to media policy in Iran into two broad categories; one which favours domination of the press by the state and recognizes no function for the press except as a megaphone for their own agenda; while the other, despite recognizing some role for the state in media policy, see the press as a 'commodity' whose survival should depend on market competition (Bahrampour, 2001; Baghi, 2002).

'Civil society' perspectives, by focusing on the media–state relationship, not only turn a blind eye on the connection between the two, but also see the role of the media as only providing checks and balances on government and therefore ignore 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, and 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 relationship with the government.

The 'reform' era, inevitably, was full of contradictions, with an increase in the number of licenced titles but also a campaign of growing vehemence against the press. Censoring and closing newspapers and harassing and arresting journalists became only too familiar in the last few years. Despite encouraging and favoring self-regulation, the reformist cabinet was acutely aware of the potential danger of a free press and continually called for total respect for the Constitution of the Islamic Republic and recognition of the cultural/religious sensitivities of the nation. The advocacy of 'civil society by the pro-Khatami press (which as I have already suggested rely on state funds) forced the conservative press and the proponents of conservative policy to retaliate. Arjomand has argued that this new political space was 'disorderly but also pluralistic and boisterously public, and is inextricably linked with government. It is the arena of competition among various social, economic and regional interests' (2000:296–297). But this new political space, very much dependent on the state, did not last long as the two pillars of Khatami's reform (rule of law and civil society) were unrealistic and so easily crumbled in the face of the realities of Iran.

6 Media Policy Under the Islamic Republic

Rights, Institutional Interests, and Control

> The construction of the state monopoly over physical and symbolic violence is inseparable from the construction of the field of struggles for the monopoly over the advantages attached to this monopoly.
>
> Pierre Bourdieu

INTRODUCTION

In thinking about state it is of course always possible to *overstate* the state as a 'body' that claims the monopoly of legitimate use of physical violence. The state, of course, does rely on the bayonet, but as the saying goes cannot sit on it. The main strategy to avoid the latter option is to 'claim the monopoly of the legitimate use of symbolic violence'. According to Bourdieu we need to rethink state as the

> . . . *culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital*: capital of physical force or instruments of coercion (army, police), economic capital, cultural or (better) informational capital, and symbolic capital. It is this concentration as such which constitutes the state as the holder of a sort of meta-capital granting power over other species of capital and over their holders. (1999:57)

The concentration of a symbolic capital of recognition, or legitimacy, goes hand in hand with the concentration of armed forces and financial resources. Parallel to a unified army and unified taxation, Bourdieu argues, there has to be a unified 'culture'. It is in this process of promoting a 'particular' culture or language to the status of 'universal' that all others fall into particularity. In this respect anything outside of this 'unified culture' will be perceived as irrelevant, foreign, and in many cases against national character and therefore any criticism labeled as 'treason'. Any serious discussion of 'dominant' culture therefore needs to avoid ahistorical analysis of certain 'characters' and realize the importance of the state

in constructing that sense of 'national character'. It is usually the case that when the advocates of 'authentic culture' refer to the notion of collective identity, they fail to address exactly whose identity is being defined and by whom. 'National characters' are constantly constituted and reconstituted by selective reading of 'tradition' and images of social memory. The existence of criticisms inside Iran, as I have already pointed out, indicates the failure of the state to impose its monopoly over legitimate use of symbolic violence and its continuing struggle to manufacture consent to its rule.

The Islamic state, which came to power after 1979, more than anything else defined itself in a 'cultural' sense. The two aims of the cultural policy of the new state were based on destruction of an imposed 'western' and 'alien' culture, and the replacing of it with a dignified, indigenous, and authentic Islamic culture which had declined under the previous regime. As a result of such broad cultural aims, the state began to develop a whole range of institutions to implement and safeguard the 'Islamic' culture of Iran. The Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, established as early as 1980, was to provide broader settings and cultural policy. Various other organizations were assigned the task of implementing such policies.

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in particular was given the task of managing and running the press, the Iranian news agency (IRNA), as well as charities and religious endowments. The Iranian Broadcasting System brought under the direct control of the Supreme Leader two major Iranian publishing firms (*Kayhan* and *Etel'at*) which control and publish a number of newspapers and periodicals became 'public property' and were put under the control of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the representatives of the Supreme Leader; telecommunications were put firmly under the control of the state and in particular the Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI), a branch of the Ministry of Post, Telegraph, and Telephone. Since 1979 the media has been one of the key sites of contestation under the Islamic Republic. As part of the programme of controlled modernization the Islamic Republic restricted private ownership in all aspects of Iran's communication system. In addition, since 1979 the Iranian state has continued to control the rest of the media through various legal and non-legal legislation and ploys: from providing subsidies and machinery to passing different acts, such as the Constitution and Press Law, through relevant legislative and non-legislative organs and councils. As Siavoshi points out the plurality of these institutions subjected cultural developments and policies to power struggles among many factions within the state. 'Although every faction declared its commitment to Islamic cultural ideals, all consensus vanished when it came to the question of what these ideals were and which policies were required to achieve them' (1997:513).

So far I have examined a number of key issues including ownership, subsidy, as well as repressive measures used to curb media activities. In this chapter I intend to look at some of the issues raised in the relationship between the state and the media and the contradictory role of the state in Iran in

some more detail by looking at the legal context and policy-related issues. In this chapter I have limited my analysis to mainly the press and the Internet. Broadcasting in Iran is by far the most accessible form of communication, has by far the biggest media company, and has recorded the biggest growth and expansion. It requires a more detailed examination, and I will turn my attention to its history and development in the next chapter. Moreover, in Iran as in many other countries, broadcasting is organized according to a different set of rules. While the level of state intervention in the press and Internet is also visibly high, it is nowhere near the entanglement between state and broadcasting. The reason for examining the press and the Internet is quite simply that both of these are far more diverse, less uniform, and more representative of the existing political parallelism in Iran.

The first section of this chapter begins by looking at the place of media in general and the press in particular in the Constitution. It then moves on to examine the press law and with it, the limitation of the press, various bodies and agencies involved in observing such limits, and the level of continuity in this field. The chapter then proceeds to assess the development of the Internet and the role of the state. I first provide a brief review of the introduction of Internet in Iran. I then examine the internal struggle by various state institutions to control the Internet. The last section of this chapter reviews the latest state effort, via a modified version of existing press law, to regulate the Internet.

LEGAL CONTEXT OF THE PRESS

The Rights:

The dichotomy of the 'public' and 'private', so central in the liberal theory of the press, is well known and requires no further elaboration here. Nativist Islamic 'theory' has tried to solve this problem by merging the two into one. The dual system and the contradictions within the Islamic polity and the Islamic Republic's Constitution are also evident in the case of media and its place in Iran. Notions of freedom, dignity, and the right to express and publish are contradicted with the idea of the mass media as a megaphone to advertise and further the cause of the ruling elite. In the introduction of the Constitution we read:

> The mass-communication media, radio and television, must serve the diffusion of Islamic culture in pursuit of the evolutionary course of the Islamic Revolution. To this end, the media should be used as a forum for the healthy encounter of different ideas. . . .

Amendment 2 of Article 3 of the Constitution states that one of the duties of the Islamic state is to raise 'the level of public awareness in all areas, through

the proper use of the press, mass media, and other means'; Article 9 puts on show the Constitution's ambivalence towards freedom of expression:

> In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the freedom, independence, unity, and territorial integrity of the country are inseparable from one another, and their preservation is the duty of the government and all individual citizens. . . . no authority has the right to abrogate legitimate freedoms, not even by enacting laws and regulations for that purpose, under the pretext of preserving the independence and territorial integrity of the country.

Article 23 also in a similar fashion states that 'The investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief'; and, in the case of the print media, according to Article 24 of the Constitution, 'the press have freedom of expression. . . .' Article 175 also recognizes the freedom of broadcasting: 'The freedom of expression and dissemination of thoughts in the Radio and Television of the Islamic Republic of Iran must be guaranteed in keeping with the Islamic criteria and the best interests of the country.' As for press-related offences the Constitution also is clear on legality, accountability, and transparency of the judiciary. Article 168 states: 'Political and press offenses will be tried openly and in the presence of a jury, in courts of justice.'

The Limits:

However, while there are references to freedom, dignity, debate, and development of human beings, the aim of the media seems to be the construction of Islamic society and the diffusion of Islamic culture. The mission of the media under the Islamic Republic is 'propagation' and defending the values and ideals of not only Islam in general, but one which is considered pure and revolutionary as defined by the ruling clergy in Iran. This is the system which Mowlana (1996) has presented as authentic and 'alternative' to the 'Western' model of the media.

While in its introduction the Constitution suggests that the media should be used as a forum for healthy encounters, the limits are forcefully and clearly identified too: media 'must strictly refrain from diffusion and propagation of destructive and anti-Islamic practices.' Article 9 also contains clear warning against any 'abuses' of freedom of the press and speech:

> In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the freedom, independence, unity, and territorial integrity of the country are inseparable from one another, and their preservation is the duty of the government and all individual citizens. No individual, group, or authority, has the right to infringe in the slightest way upon the political, cultural, economic, and military independence or the territorial integrity of Iran under the pretext of exercising freedom.

Article 24 also sets the limits of the press. Press are free 'except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public'. The same section of the Constitution which deals with the 'rights of people' also contains Article 40: 'No one is entitled to exercise his rights in a way injurious to others or detrimental to public interests.' And as we have already seen, Article 175 recognizes the freedom of broadcasting within a certain context: 'The freedom of expression and dissemination of thoughts in the Radio and Television of the Islamic Republic of Iran must be guaranteed in keeping with the Islamic criteria and the best interests of the country.'

Undoubtedly the writers of the Islamic Republic Constitution recognized that there was a degree of institutional tension in the document itself as well as in the system. This duality, as I argued in Chapter 1, has everything to do with the class nature of the Revolution itself and the nature of the 'experiment' which is the Islamic Republic. The document clearly recognizes the basic rights and freedom of the people. As we have seen certain articles contain clear elements of the constitutions of many democracies. But every one of such 'democratic principles' are negated by theocratic elements and clear limits to the 'rights of people' and the 'press'. The dual nature of the Islamic Republic and the tension between Islamism and Republicanism, as well as the tension over the source of legitimacy and sovereignty, is evident in the case of the media too. Close reading of the controversial Press Law provides further evidence.

Press Law:

The above model, and a definition of the rights and limits of the media, as we discussed in the previous chapter, has been challenged by a reform movement in Iran under the banner of civil society and freedom of press, recognizing it as the 'fourth estate'. It was the tension over modifying the 1986 Press Law that became one of the defining moments in the movement for democratization and one of the reasons for the student uprising in the summer of 1999.

The struggle for a free press challenges not only the mission of the press as identified by the law, but also the interpretation and application of the law by the state. Since Article 24 states that 'details of this exception [to freedom of the press] will be specified by law', it is important to examine the legal context and the press law in more detail. This is how the press law defines the mission of the press. Article 2 of this law lists the following as the objectives of the press in the Islamic Republic of Iran:

a. To enlighten public opinion and increase the level of their knowledge on one or several topics mentioned in Article 1.
b. To advance the objectives outlined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic.

c. To endeavor to negate the drawing up of false and divisive lines, or, pitting different groups of the community against each other by practices such as dividing people by race, language, customs, local traditions, etc.
d. To campaign against manifestations of imperialistic culture (such as extravagance, dissipation, debauchery, love of luxury, spread of morally corrupt practices, etc.) and to propagate and promote genuine Islamic culture and sound ethical principles.
e. To preserve and strengthen the policy of neither "Neither East nor West".
   Note: Each publication should at least enforce one of the above goals and such a goal must in no way be in conflict with the other goals specified above or with the principles of the Islamic Republic.[1]

Articles 3, 4, and 5 of the Press Law recognize the rights of the press. According to Article 3 'the press have the right to publish the opinions, constructive criticisms, suggestions and explanations of individuals and government officials for public information.' Article 4 states that 'No government or non-government official should resort to coercive measures against the press to publish an article or essay, or attempt to censure and control the press.' And Article 5 lists acquiring and dissemination of 'domestic and foreign news aimed at enhancing public awareness' as lawful. In each of these articles the limits of these rights are also vaguely emphasized, such as the limits of 'constructive' criticism and how the press need to take into 'consideration the best interests of the community and by observing the provisions of the existing law'.

The Press Law is more explicit and precise when it comes to the limits of the press. Article 6 lists all those 'exceptions' that are argued in Article 24 of the Constitution. Such exceptions are:

1. Publishing atheistic articles or issues which are prejudicial to Islamic codes, or, promoting subjects which might damage the foundation of the Islamic Republic;
2. Propagating obscene and religiously forbidden acts and publishing indecent pictures and issues which violate public decency;
3. Propagating luxury and extravagance;
4. Creating discord between and among social walks of life especially by raising ethnic and racial issues;
5. Encouraging and instigating individuals and groups to act against the security, dignity and interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran within or outside the country;
6. Disclosing and publishing classified documents, orders and issues, or, disclosing the secrets of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic, military maps and fortifications, publishing closed-door deliberations of the Islamic Consultative Assembly or private proceedings of courts of justice and investigations conducted by judicial authorities without legal permit;

7. Insulting Islam and its sanctities, or, offending the Leader of the Revolution and recognized religious authorities (senior Islamic jurisprudents);
8. Publishing libel against officials, institutions, organizations and individuals in the country or insulting legal or real persons who are lawfully respected, even by means of pictures or caricatures; and
9. Committing plagiarism or quoting articles from the deviant press, parties and groups which oppose Islam (inside and outside the country) in such a manner as to propagate such ideas (the limits of such offences shall be defined by the executive by-law).

Further limits include a ban on activities such as 'publishing a publication without a licence and a publication whose licence has been cancelled', 'publishing a publication the greatest part of whose items are incongruous to subjects which the applicant has undertaken to publish', 'publishing a publication that may be mistaken in name, symbol or format for the existing publications' or those which have been temporarily or permanently closed down', 'publishing a publication without mentioning the name of its licence holder and the legally responsible director or the address of the publication and its printing house', and finally 'publishing and distributing publications which the Press Supervisory Board deems to be in violation of the principle stipulated in this by-law' (Article 7: a, b, c, d, & e).

One striking feature of the existing Press Law under the Islamic Republic is the observable element of continuity in terms of the 'rights' and 'limits' of the press. The first-ever press law in Iran was introduced during the Constitutional Revolution which recognized the freedom of the press and publishing (Gharabaghi and Asghari, 1999). In 1922 a new legislation trying to take issue with 'supervision of the press' was introduced. According to the first article of this legislation publishers were obliged to consult to learned *ulema* when planning to publish religious materials. The next Press Law, introduced in 1952, also listed Islam and religious authority as a no go area for the press. Not dissimilar to the existing legislation, Article 42 of the 1952 Press Law stated that no publication will be closed without prior ruling by the court except when the charges related to 'violating Islamic principles', 'offending the king', 'releasing sensitive military information', 'encouraging and instigating rebellion against the government', and 'publishing obscene articles which violate public decency' (Nikokar, 1998:290–291).

What is unique about the current existing law and the place of the press within the broader legal context is the variety of bodies dealing with regulation and violation of the Press Law under the Islamic Republic. This is part of the reality of post-1979 Iran and the emergence of many parallel organizations alongside the already-in-place state institutions: Revolutionary Guards alongside Army; Revolutionary Committees

alongside Police; various Foundations competing directly with Government Ministries; and revolutionary courts alongside general courts.

The Press Law of 1985 introduced The Press Supervisory Board (PSB), which according to Article 10, consists 'of devoted Muslims who possess the required scientific and moral competence and are committed to the Islamic Revolution'. The PSB has five members, including one of the judges of the State Supreme Court as elected by the Supreme Judiciary Council, the Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance or his fully authorized representative, a *Majlis* deputy elected by the *Majlis*, a university professor appointed by the Minister of Culture and Higher Education, and one of the press managing directors as elected by the press. Its duties include examining applications for press licences, judging the competency of applicants and managing directors, and dealing with 'press violations directly, or, upon the request of the Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance and, if necessary, it may file written requests for legal proceedings at competent courts' (Article 12). It is, however, unclear whether the PSB is a judicial body capable of sitting in judgment of all press-related matters from granting licences to violation of laws, or simply a body processing applications by 'qualified' candidates seeking to launch a publication.

Furthermore, due to constant restructuring of the judicial system in the past 25 years, and the existence of various 'qualified' judges and 'courts', the whole system is open to systematic abuse and an 'imaginative' reading of the law. Article 34 of the Press Law rules that 'crimes attributed to the press shall be examined by competent courts in the presence of a jury.' This is in accordance with Article 168 of the Constitution which states that ' press offences will be tried openly and in the presence of a jury, in courts of justice. The manner of the selection of the jury, its powers, and the definition of political offences, will be determined by law in accordance with the Islamic criteria.' Prior to 1979 and even in the first Press Law introduced in 1980, there were no references to 'competent courts' in legislations and press laws.

In all previous press laws, as Moghadamfar (1998) suggests, criminal courts were assigned to deal with press violations. It is only in the press law of 1985 that the idea of 'competent courts' is introduced. This vague and ambiguous term is the result of various changes in the judiciary system and the existence of so many parallel courts and legal systems. Immediately after the Revolution, all criminal courts were abolished and replaced by general courts in 1979. In 1989, and as a result of another restructuring of the judiciary, new courts (penal courts) were introduced. And finally in 1994 General and Revolutionary Courts replaced all the existing courts. The latter were originally established as a temporary measure in 1979 with the aim of dealing with officials of previous regimes. Since then these courts have been regarded as 'competent courts' dealing with press crimes. Many journalists have been tried by

the Islamic Revolutionary Courts. They have become part of the 'mixed model' judiciary and are anything but open.

There are, however, a few notable exceptions to this rule. While there are provincial general courts that are 'competent' in dealing with local crimes, it is the Tehran General courts that are assigned to deal with *all* criminal charges (including press related) brought against members of parliament and provincial governors. The other exception is criminal charges against clergy. These, press-related crimes included, will be dealt with by a Special Court of Clergy. Much of the debates about these courts have usually focused on the discriminatory nature of legal practices in Iran and how clergies have been given the privilege of separate courts. Undoubtedly there is clear evidence of preferential treatment. The most crucial point about these courts, however, is the fact that their very existence indicates the continuation of the state's main grip on the institutions of government. It is the state authority and not the 'autonomous *ulema*' that runs and supervises all key state institutions. The third exception is related to press-related criminal charges as stated in Articles 24, 25, and 27 of the Press Law. Crimes such as publishing 'confidential military documents and orders, and secrets of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' (Article 24); instigating and encouraging 'people to commit crimes against the domestic security or foreign policies of the state' (Article 25); and insulting 'the Leader or Council of Leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran' (Article 27) will be dealt with by Revolutionary Courts. Furthermore it is not clear which court is 'competent' in dealing with press-related criminal charges brought against the President or cabinet ministers, or members of the military or police forces. Offences are also dealt with by a number of courts other than the open press courts.

Another contentious issue is not just over the laws and the agencies that are there to enforce them, but the 'interpretation' of law. As we have already seen (see Chapter 4) the judiciary's approach and actions have been anything but 'legal' or lawful'. *Kayhan* and *Jomhuri-e Islami* escaped punishment despite committing bigger offences than *Salam*. Similarly the closure of *Khordad* had everything to do with an internal power struggle rather than with the Press Law. A number of other observations can be made regarding the crackdown on the press in recent years and the application of 'law'. In the first place, if there was evidence of the existence of 'serial newspapers', one can similarly see clear evidence of 'serial plaintiffs' (Samii, 2001). These are the revolutionary guards, the Ministry of Intelligence, and the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. Complaints against leading reformist and semi-independent presses have come from these institutions, and have been enthusiastically cheered and supported by conservative dailies, especially *Kayhan* and *Resalat*.

Second is the extent to which various 'laws', 'codes', and agencies have been used freely to suppress the press. None of the 'courts of law' have

responded to criticism that such acts of muzzling the press are illegal. Clause 5 of Article 156 of the Constitution and Article 13 of the Security and Correctional Act of 1960 (a pre-revolution law which by standards of the Islamic Republic should be regarded as *taghuti*—decadent—have proved popular among the judiciary and conservative judges, especially Mr Mortazavi.[2] The dispute between reformists and judiciary is over interpretation. Reformist proprietors and lawyers accept that according to Clause 5 of Article 156[3], one of the duties of the judiciary is to prevent crimes, but argue it does not mean that the Justice Department can independently punish someone without trial. They are at pain to explain that the closure of a number of newspapers in 1979 and early 1980 and 'rash' measures taken by Islamic judges were somehow justified since there were no constitution, no Islamic courts, and no necessary institutions to prevent crimes.[4] As for Article 13 of the Security and Correctional Act of 1960, which similarly focuses on prevention of crimes, reformists claim that using a pre-revolution act to ban Islamic press has no legal base. These selective uses of various laws has prompted some commentators to argue that the problems of the Iranian press do not have much to do with the law, and changing the press law alone will not solve the problems of the press.[5]

Similar concerns have been raised by the Society for the Defence of Press Freedom regarding judicial interpretation of the Press Law.[6] Usually Article 13 of the Press Law is ignored. It requires the Press Supervisory Board (PSB) to investigate applications for publication and to give a verdict within three months. While the authorities have been 'firm' with the publishers who have received licences to put their product on newsstands within three months of receiving permission, the majority of the applications are not processed within the required period, and many do not receive a reply from the PSB.

In short the Press Law 'forbids' censorship, but also opens the way for the harshest possible rulings. Reformists who object to the 'illegal' acts of the judiciary are missing the point. It might not be the 'rule of the law' that Khatami had promised, but it is the 'law' as understood by the judiciary. The problem is not located in the new Press Law and more restrictions on the press, rather it is rooted in the undemocratic Constitution, which recognizes and ultimately hands the power to the *Velayate-e-Faghih* (Rule of the Supreme Jurist). In assessing media policy and the prospect for change and 'transition', it is not enough to look at specific press laws and measures, one must look to the ultimate institutional determinants of the Iranian political system, which are its constitutions. The failure of the reformist camp and the press to advance the 'rule of law' and 'civil society' derives from their commitment to this Constitution, and a firm belief that it has the capacity to instigate reforms. But it is exactly this structure which has proven to be the main obstacle to 'reform'.

INTERNET: NEW TECHNOLOGY, OLD PROBLEMS

Internet access in Iran was provided for the first time in 1992 through a single line connecting the Institute for Studies in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics (IPM). The link was through the BITNET network system and Iran's membership in the Trans-European Research and Educational Networking Association (Arabshahi, 1997). A year later private use of modems was permitted. This single line was later expanded and developed further with the allocation of 500 IP addresses to Iran. The main users of the Internet in the early days were academics and research institutions through their own connections to the IPM (ibid.). By 1996 the number of people who had access to the Internet was 2,000, and their usage was mostly limited to sending and receiving emails. A year later the number increased to 5,000, and then to 22,000 in 1998. It increased further to 48,000 in 1999. Since 2000 the increase in the number of people with access to the Internet has been significant: 132,000 users in 2000, 418,000 users in 2001, and finally 1,326,000 in 2002 (Abili, 2002; Musavi Shafaee, 2003). A recent report suggests that the number of Internet users has increased to 7 million, although only half of these users have regular access.[7] The Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI) expects that the number of users will reach 25 million by 2009 (Opennet Initiative, 2005).

Social Dimensions of the Internet and Institutional Interests

Besides the harsh economic realities of Iran, a number of other factors have prevented the more rapid penetration of the Internet. First of all there is the well-known tension between the United States and Iran and the effect of the U.S. embargo (Samii, 1999; Arabshahi, 1997). Access to the Internet is not altogether a national matter, since the United States, in hosting about 80 per cent of Internet sites, is the undisputed gatekeeper of the so-called 'super highway'. In addition to difficulties of acquiring machinery and software (Iran increasingly relies on Asia), Iran's Internet access to the United States can be blocked. Yet, despite clear tension between the two countries and American sanctions, Iranian companies and institutions are happy, as are American companies, to establish ventures through an intermediary. Among the most notable is the Data Communication Company of Iran's (DCI) agreement with GulfSat Kuwait (a joint venture between the Kuwaiti government and Hughes Network System of the United States). In addition, two of the early ISPs in Iran, *Virayeshgar* and *Pars Supaleh,* respectively represented American companies 3Com and AT&T. Many of the deals with American companies are usually done through their subsidiaries and joint ventures in Europe and Asia (The Global Diffusion of Internet, 1998). However, American embargos prohibit software companies such as Microsoft doing business in Iran, a factor that contributes to widespread piracy in the country (*The Guardian,* 2002).

The second crucial aspect of the development of the Internet in Iran is the competing agendas and conflicting interests within Iran's state apparatus. Friction and the competition between various factions of the regime, institutional interests of various agencies involved in the process, and ultimately the tension between the state and private sectors are some of the many faces of 'digital' divides in Iran. Such tensions clearly illustrate the social dimension of the Internet. In particular, the private sector and the 'moderate' factions of the Iranian establishment echo recent debates about the Internet as profoundly democratizing and competitive. Yet the dominant conservative faction of the Islamic Republic, much like other authoritarian regimes, has been quick to try to limit the potential of the technology and to utilize it for its own benefit. Both sides of the divide do indeed present a highly political account of the role of the technologies. If the private sector and advocates of 'civil society' in Iran subscribe to the 'common sense' view of the Internet as inherently decentralizing, democratic, progressive, and therefore unsuitable for public ownership, the 'conservative' agencies and officials will regard it as a threat to their interests and future. What is at the centre of the debate is the very institutional and technological structure of Iran's rapidly expanding communications. And what is brushed aside is the very reason behind 'digital exceptionalism': that is, the notion of public interest and the Internet as a social resource.

While the IRI officially encourages the use of the Internet (Rouhani, 2000; Rahimi, 2003), the issues of access, control, and content remain contentious. Despite the fact that the earliest effort to connect Iran to the Internet was made by the Institute for Studies in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics (IPM), commercial imperatives and motives, as well as the desire for effective control of the Internet, has meant that the government has taken the leading role in providing internet access and services. As Rahimi suggests, the tension between various agencies in the early 1990s, including the Data Communication Company of Iran (DCI), a branch of the Ministry for Post, Telegraph and Telephone; the High Council of Information; and IPM were over the quality and availability of network access (2003:102).

Lack of resources, expertise, and clear policies as well as the commitment to privatization has meant that for a few years, especially after 1997 (with growing public access to the Internet) the private sector began to dominate the market. With more than 100 private ISPs and the increased use of low cost 'Voice Over IP' (VIOP), popular among those with relatives abroad, revenues of the state-owned Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI) were hit severely. According to a report by BBC PERSIAN.com, TCI reported US$20 million profit in 1998. In 2002, despite the staggering threefold increase in the number of people who had access to telephone lines in this period TCI reported a loss of US$32 million. Private Internet and telephone providers were blamed for this loss. The use of VIOP service became widespread despite limited penetration of the Internet, simply

because of the growing number of Internet cafés across the country. Musavi Shafaee (2003:194) suggests that in 2000 there were no Internet cafés in Iran. Two years later, 7,000 to 8,000 such establishments had mushroomed in Tehran alone. The government began to act as early as 2001, and according to a report by the Digital Freedom Network, more than 400 of the Internet cafés in Tehran were closed in May 2001. An official of the Ministry of Post, Telephone and Telegraph called the move appropriate, as it was a step towards ending the large losses that such cafes were inflicting on the TCI (Lebowitz, 2001).

Matters are further complicated by the nature of the Internet, and in particular over which organization will ultimately be responsible for monitoring and supervising it. Mostafa Mohammadi, managing director of Parnham (a private ISP), in an interview with the daily *Hambastegi* pointed at such confusion and tension:

> Right now IRIB [Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting] believes itself to be in charge of the Internet because it believes that it is a media. Also on the other hand, the Telecommunication Company, the Ministry of Culture and the Islamic Guidance as well as the Intelligence Ministry believe themselves to be responsible for the Internet, whereas none of these institutions have the power to support Internet. (*Hambastegi*, 2001)

State-owned and -controlled IRIB has tried to control and influence the state policies on the Internet. Hated by many, including reformist officials, for its constant campaign against intellectuals, students, and women activists, as well as the reformist press, IRIB has been one of the key political actors in Iran. In an interview with the now defunct reformist daily, *Norouz,* the minister of Communications and Modern Technology, in response to the question of whether the IRIB is one of the sponsors of the Internet said:

> We are strongly opposed to this measure of the IRIB. Their activities must be within the limits of the radio and television organization. Establishing two-way communications is among the duties of the Communications Ministry. In all bylaws (so far approved) all these duties have been entrusted to the Communications Ministry. Of course there are certain people who hold contrary views but we are fully opposed to this. Nothing has been approved to the effect that the IRIB can function like a ministry. (Ahmadi, 2001)

He was proved wrong, as one of those 'certain people who hold contrary views' was the Supreme Leader.

The Internet also reveals, once again, the existence of many contradictory institutions and units, policies, and individual and institutional differences and interests in the Islamic Republic. First of all, and as I have already

argued, by providing cheaper forms of communication and especially much cheaper telephone connections, popular among those with relatives abroad, it seriously threatened the state monopoly on long distance calls. But more importantly, as one after another reformist and independent press are being banned, many publishers have moved online to try and keep a public presence, and by doing so they produce a form of news information not covered by the press law. All major groups have their own news websites, and new sites covering areas as wide as news, technology, music, sports, entertainments, and students' sites, as well as large numbers of weblogs, which are appearing on a daily basis. The Internet has also provided a much stronger link between activists and intellectuals in Iran and the opposition abroad. The Internet has become the latest tool to offer alternative news channels to Iranian activists in Iran, and much- needed International support and solidarity, including that of Iranians living in exile.

Internet Policy and Control

The dominant faction response to the Internet has been twofold. Firstly, they have recognized the usefulness of the Internet as a tool for propaganda and furthering their policies and aims. In that respect they have embraced technology, and there are conservative websites, which do (or try to) challenge the more critical websites. The most fascinating examples of such attempts, however, come from religious centres in the holy cities of Qom and Mashhad, where websites are designed and launched to promote Islam and the teachings and values of the Islamic Republic. In one computer centre in Qom, more than 2,000 Islamic texts were transferred onto CD-ROM and later onto the Internet (Rahimi, 2003). Sheikh Ali Korani, director of the centre, argued that the Internet is a reality, and Iran must learn to live with it: 'Take a knife, for example. You can use it in the kitchen or you can use it to commit crimes' (CNN, 1997). This, as Rahimi (2003) has suggested, is to allow the clergy to spread Islam and provide their own *tafsir* (interpretation). Official net cafés are also launched and promoted to tackle 'alien' and 'decadent' western culture and provide a 'better' and 'safer' environment for religious Internet users.

Besides the attempt to colonize the Internet with their own materials, news, and analysis, the conservatives have tried to block access as well as censor 'undesirable' content. In addition to regular crackdowns on Internet cafés, a number of web journalists, users, and webloggers have been arrested. According to BBC PERSIAN.Com, a DCI official reported that the company had spent more than 70 billion rials (US$70 million) on censoring the Internet in Iran. Another report by the BBC (2003) announced that a list of 15,000 sites had been drawn up by the government and sent to Internet service providers to be blocked.

In an announcement in the summer of 2001 the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, Khamenaie, while encouraging the use and development

of the Internet, contrary to the initial plan for wider participation of the private sector and investment, put the state in charge and reserved a big slice for IRIB. Following his direct instruction, the High Council of Cultural Revolution (which has no constitutional powers to issue a ruling on the Internet or other matters) passed a resolution regarding the regulation of the Internet.[8] In this document, published in November 2001 and announced on state-owned IRIB, the Council ruled that Internet connections would be a state monopoly, and all connections would be provided through TCI, despite an emphasis on free access to information and facilitating free flow of information. Even though government organizations are required to get the permission of the High Council of Information (HCI) to connect independently from the Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI), IRIB has been exempt from seeking HCI permission to broadcasting their programmes on the Internet. Applications for providing access will be assessed by the Ministry of Post, Telephone and Telegraph and the Ministry of Intelligence. In addition, the document requires all access providers to prevent access to immoral or political websites, making available the databanks of their users' activity to the Ministry of Post, Telephone and Telegraph, to be handed to the Ministry of Intelligence upon request.

As for the ISPs, the document states that the permission of the Ministry of Post, Telephone and Telegraph is needed to provide VOIP. The rest of the document that deals with conditions, quality, and objectives of the ISPs is very similar to the existing Press Law, which was one of key reasons for the six-day students' revolt in the summer of 1999. Section B of the document states that the managers of the ISP companies have to be: an Iranian citizen and committed to the Islamic Republic Constitution; at least 25 years old; free of incapacity, bankruptcy by fraud or guilt; free of moral corruption and criminal conviction; a believer in one of the recognized faiths in the Constitution; and finally not a member of illegal and 'anti-revolutionary' organizations.

The limits on ISP services include (again similar to the limits on the press in the Press Law): publishing atheistic articles/issues and items which undermine the Islamic Republic, Islam and the teaching of Khomeini, and are against the unity of the country, its constitutions and its Islamic values; creating discord between and among social groups; encouraging acts against the security of the country; propagating luxury; publishing obscene and religiously forbidden articles and pictures; disclosing information; and finally creating any broadcasting networks without the control of the IRIB.

Similar rules and limits are also duly listed in Section C dealing with Internet cafés. The only major difference is that those applying for a licence to run an Internet café are required (in addition to conditions as listed for managers of ISP companies) to have finished their military service, be at least 30 years old and married. One can only guess that the inclusion of marital commitment as a condition for Internet café owners is yet another indication of the paranoia over the perceived immoral dangers that are

associated with the Internet. After all there is no legislation in Iran which requires, for example, boutiques and kebab shops owners to be married!

In each *Ostan* (province) a committee consisting of representatives of the Telecommunication Company, the office of Culture and Islamic Guidance, a district attorney, Internet cafés official guilds, and, finally, a representative of the IRIB will control the activities of net cafés. The committee's decision regarding any violations of the Internet law is final. In a separate announcement, the duty of observing all Internet-related matters at a national level was given to a committee of three members. According to Ali Kaynejad, spokesman for the High Council of Cultural Revolution, this committee will consist of representatives of the Council, a minister for Post, Telephone and Telegraph, and the Managing Director of IRIB (IT Iran, 2002).

This resolution and subsequent announcement was yet another indication of the dilemma of the Islamic Republic, which is caught between the need for liberalization and its 'revolutionary' claims. Both IRIB (threatened by satellite channels and calls for introduction of private channels) and the Telecommunication Company of Iran (threatened by the private sector) not only kept their grip on their respective fields, but were also given further opportunity to influence the development of the Internet in Iran. Iran's ISP Association (one of the newly established institutions of 'civil society') criticized the decision requiring them to provide Internet access through the TCI.

Although these measures have not been strictly observed or implemented, various attempts have been made to control the Internet. With the help of the IRIB, the regime has gathered lists of hundreds of websites deemed un-Islamic, anti-revolutionary, and immoral.[9] In addition to filtering a number of allegedly pornographic and immoral sites, a number of political and oppositional websites, including legal reformist sites such as *rouydad.ws* and *emrooz.ws*, some news sites located outside Iran, and all oppositional parties in exile were blocked. Recent legislation intends to block those dissident voices that had found the web useful to get around Iran's repressive press law.

According to Iran CSOs Training & Research Center,[10] there are two layers and three methods of Internet censorship in Iran. In the first instance, the Internet in Iran is controlled and censored via Access Service Points that remains the monopoly of TCI. A recent report by *Opennet Initiative*[11] argues that Iran, along with China, is among a small group of states with the most sophisticated state-mandated filtering systems in the world. Iran and many other countries use the commercial filtering package SmartFilter—made by the U.S.-based company, Secure Computing—as the primary technical engine of its filtering system. The second layer of control, as we have already argued, is the government regulation which forces ICPs and ISPs to use filtering systems, take notice of regulation, and update themselves with the lists of banned sites provided by authorities. Delegating censorship to ISPs and obliging them to filter sites deemed 'corrupt' and

'un-Islamic' (which ironically includes many news sites run and maintained by factions within the Iranian state) allows the state to share the blame with companies and small businesses such as Internet café owners.

In addition to these two main layers the government also uses three known methods of censorship. One method is to close all ports that have been used by savvy Internet users to bypass filtering systems. In the past few years Internet users have managed to break through the existing filtering system by using proxy servers. But since 2004 the committee set up to control and monitor the net (Committee in charge of determination of unauthorized websites) have provided ISPs with regular lists of proxy servers to be censored. Another method is censoring key words in URLs, yet another obligation that ICPs and ISPs have to meet. For example, many Iranians still use prepaid cards to access the Internet in Iran, but the cards are designed so that searching words such as 'women', 'birth', or 'sex' while using search engines such as Google is impossible. It matters not if the search is related to science, history, or literature. The banning of 'women' in particular generated a campaign supported by many bloggers that employed the slogan 'censorship is indecent, not women'. Using filtering systems of course reduces the speed of the Internet access. But in addition and despite official approval of ADSL by the government, high-speed Internet remains a dream instead of reality, as the current speed of ADSL in Iran is less than 144kbs. Most Internet users still use dial-up services due to the limited availability and cost of broadband. Iran CSOs Training & Research Center believe that this is yet another form of censorship and another method used by the government to restrict access to Internet. This organization suggests that increased availability of broadband will jeopardize the state monopoly in broadcasting.

Yet the policies have always been ad-hoc and contradictory, and therefore the development and expansion of the Internet (as rapid as it has been in the last few years) is constrained by confusion in government policies, varied institutional interests, and above all the dialectical tension between the imperative of the market and the 'revolutionary' claims of the state. News websites have proliferated, as have sites about technology, music, sports, entertainment, women's issues, and student matters. Weblogs, however, have become the most significant area of Internet growth. What was initially started in September 2000 by a young Iranian blogger has grown into a massive body of around 700,000 blogs, making Persian one of the leading languages in the blogsphere and increasing the share of Persian material online. A combination of factors paved the way for such a rapid growth of the blogsphere. These include the disabling factionalism of the central Iranian state and the ongoing conflicts between Islamism and Republicanism; the intense pressure from private capital in Iran (that for so long relied on the mediation of the state to exercise class domination) seeking a larger share in the expanding and lucrative cultural industries; and above all the existence of an already dissatisfied young population challenging the Iranian

state and actively seeking a new order. As a result, weblog service providers in Iran (weblog farms) have emerged as part of the economic liberalization in Iran's communication industries. Companies such as *persianblog* and *blogfa* have become leading and recognized online brands in new media in Iran and provide a range of services. Iranian sites and blogs have become new sources of information on various aspects of public life in the country. The battle to control the Internet, therefore, cannot be separated from the broader social movements and political concerns that produce the very contradictory developments and the ongoing conflict between 'accelerations' and 'breaks' in the Islamic Republic.

'Internet Studies' throws up a number of questions and debates about the entanglement between media and society. Two significant questions revolve around the problem of access/social inequality and the nature of political participations and whether the new media has solved (or is capable of solving) some of the old problems. Undoubtedly the notion of 'Internet' remains problematic, not least because the singularity of the 'Internet', as Livingston (2005) reminds us, suppresses the diversity of technologies imbedded in 'new media', as well as differential access (both socially and geographically) and the different policies and responses it has generated across the world. Much like media studies, whether Internet studies is a field or 'discipline' remains problematic, and its academic roots, methodologies, concerns, and politics are diverse and contested.

A key concern and a fruitful line of research developed in recent years has been about the 'digital divide' and differential access to new technologies. Moving beyond the simple statistics at both national and international levels, the idea has evolved from a 'singular' digital divide to include questions of the quality of access, models of engagements, and the diversity of content. And we need to continually remind ourselves that even communication technologies by themselves cannot solve political, social, cultural, and economic discrepancies within societies, nor can they be regarded as the engines of history. They do not teach literacy, are not education in themselves, and cannot resolve lack of clean water, electricity, and food. Technologies are developed in historical societies and as such have all the marks of their historical moment painted on them: in their shapes, designs, functions, and the very fact that they are sold in the marketplace as commodities. The debate about the digital divide, therefore, raises a basic but nevertheless interesting set of questions: what is exactly a digital divide; is there only one; who is excluded and by what/whom; and to what extent is this divide distinctly 'digital'?

The other key concern in Internet Studies has revolved around issues of the public sphere and political participation. The early promises of the Internet were based around the idea of universal access, empowering citizens, and the potential of 'e-democracy' to provide all citizens with direct involvement in public life and policy. That the realization of this dream and the potential of the Internet depends on access for all is an indisputable fact. But

nevertheless it is still significant to look at how the battle to control these new technologies is evolving and how those who have access to it use it to their advantage. No one can deny the real potential of new technologies for empowerment of citizens. This, however, is not peculiar to Internet or only to Internet. Alternative uses of technologies are nothing new. An important aspect of all new technologies is what Williams called 'uncontrollable opportunities' and a set of interesting complications. He demonstrated this with the case of literacy: 'For there was no way to teach a man to read the Bible which did not also enable him to read the radical press. A controlled intention became an uncontrollable effect' (Williams, 1974:125). Furthermore, as Brian Winston reminds us, the history of technologies seems to consist of both processes of 'accelerators' and 'breaks'. Applying Braudel's model of historical analysis, Winston suggests that in the case of technologies,

> the 'accelerator' is the supervening social necessity transforming the prototype into an 'invention' and pushing the invention out into the world—causing its diffusion. But there is also a 'break': this operates as a third transformation, wherein general social constraints coalesce to limit the potential of the device radically to disrupt pre-existing social formations. (Winston, 1998:11)

Mapping such 'interesting complications' and the contradictions and the struggle for control of new technologies remain some of the most significant and fruitful areas of research at national and international levels. The case of Iran is no exception and provides us with ample evidence of such contradictions and complications.

CONCLUSION

Broadly speaking, these were some of the issues that the reformist factions of the regime wanted to address and change under the banner of 'civil society' and the press as a 'fourth estate'. While changes to the current Press Law are important, the freedom of the press cannot be guaranteed without extensive and fundamental changes to the current Constitution. The term 'fourth estate', as Sparks (1995) has argued, implicitly regarded the press as part of the legislative process. In the absence of genuine political parties and limited franchise, the press in Europe rather happily took the role of representing ordinary people. Theoretically this is not an issue in Iran. Legislative as well as executive branches of the state are elected by popular vote, although after careful sieving of the candidates by the Islamic House of Lords (Council of Guardians). The confusion that exists over the definition of the 'fourth estate', for example regarding the relationship between the press and other forms of power (executive, judiciary, and legislative), is even more apparent in Iran.

The problem with the Iranian media environment is not whether other estates are subject to periodical elections or not. Indeed they are. The issue is the lack of sovereignty of the people in this system. The Islamic Republic Constitution, which 'allows' and recognizes political participations, keeps an ultimate veto for the ruling clergy on the basis that the sovereignty belongs not to the people but to God, and in reality to representatives and the guardians of his will. There is nothing in the holy text on what an Islamic media should look like. What has been offered is a made-up law (and some old ones as we have seen) in the interest of the Islamic Republic, and the press has been regulated and controlled as such.

In this system, while the press and indeed other elected estates have some external responsibility to the electors, their responsibility ultimately is to the Supreme Leader. The personal intervention of the ultimate power in Iran has not been, by any means, rare. The press in Iran is not, as was in the original definition of the 'fourth estate' in Europe, part of the legislature. Rather it was regarded as an integral part of the political structure and power in which it is placed, not as reformists want, outside of the state and within 'civil society', but subject 'to the same governing role distinct from civil society as was exercised by the other three powers' (Sparks, 1995:49). Overturning such a construct and the structure is only possible through radical changes in the structure of the state in Iran.

As for the Internet, there is little doubt that this new technology has become the subject of a lively debate as well as a lively forum for discussion on many political and social issues in Iran. In response to the re-emergence of home-grown dissent and the increasing popularity of unofficial programming and content on satellite and the Internet, the regime yet again waves at the shadow of 'alien' and 'un-Islamic' threats and 'cultural invasion' and does its best to suppress the potential of technology. The case of Iran certainly illustrates that the claim over the imminent entering of the world into a distinctly new epoch where time, space, political authority, economies of scale, and social relations will become irrelevant is not grounded in reality. It also illustrates that similar claims about the impact of the Internet for prosperity and democracy for developing countries is a myth.

In short, this chapter has tried to address some of the most complex aspects of media policy in Iran. It provided a review of the Constitution and the Press Law. It also closely examined the state response to the emergence of the Internet. I suggested that what keeps the state as significant as it was before is that it still remains the primary actor in engineering political legitimacy and the definer of the 'national' character and culture. I also argued that while much of this political legitimacy rests on the state's use of force as its ultimate sanction, the struggle to claim the monopoly over the means of symbolic violence plays an increasing role, and in the current climate cannot be separated from the former. But my analysis also demonstrates the tension within the Iranian state and stressed the significance of elite factionalism and the institutional interests of various factions, agencies,

and institutions. The reality of these divides and tensions not only explain the already existing diversities that I addressed in the previous chapter, but also the dilemmas of the state in pursuing the Islamization of the Iranian media. Nevertheless, and as the case of Iran demonstrates, states are seldom abstract or singular. The next chapter provides more evidence of contradictory cultural policies in Iran which cannot be explained in terms of the general ideals of 'Islam', but rather as the evolution of different periods of the post-revolutionary polity and concerns.

7 The Politics of Broadcasting

Continuity and Change, Expansion and Control

> Never ever screen passive and empty films and useless, hollow programs which aim only at passing time. The IRIB should stand against and defy the propaganda of the enemy against revolution and react strongly to defuse their fabrications. View the IRIB as a university for teaching the principles of revolutionary Islam. This is our approach to the IRIB. Today the world is propagating against us. We are left with IRIB.
>
> Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

INTRODUCTION

Many of the recent studies of 'global media' have focused on television: its expansion and reach as a clear indication and evidence of the end of national media. Yet television has remained a national medium, and even the advocates of globalization inevitably use 'national' examples to map out the emergence of a new global media environment. There are good reasons for such nationally focused studies. Languages as well as political and cultural frameworks, among other things, remain overwhelmingly national. Yet across the Southern hemisphere and in countries with few resources, television has been a complex blend of national and global. It has been nationally organized, financed, and controlled, either through direct state intervention or through family media businesses that have sought power and profits via political connections and patronage.

Bourdon (2004:94) argues that the 'interaction between nations has been a key part of television history' in three significant areas. Firstly, through interaction in policy. Developing countries in particular have adopted policy frameworks from other nations, usually the former colonial master. Secondly, through interaction and exchanges of technologies, again from the most advanced countries of the North to the South. And finally, through program sales and flows which for the most part have been uni-directional, an area of research which is far more developed and documented in international communications research. For Bourdon, however, such interactions do not indicate the demise of the nation-state, but its transformation.

As I have argued, the significance of the state in advancing the tenets of the market and in facilitating the globalization of free market capitalism demonstrate that the nation-state clearly still remains the primary actor in engineering political legitimacy.

This chapter continues the focus on the relationship between the media and state in Iran and suggests that any serious assessment of the nature of the Iranian media needs to take into account the structure and the continuing attempts of the Islamic regime to maintain its monopoly over physical and symbolic violence. As I have argued in Chapter 2, broadcasting, as the megaphone of the dominant faction and purveyor of the views of the Supreme Leader, remains the subject of heated dispute. In the same chapter I also suggested that the two reasons for Mowlana's solitary focus on broadcasting is, first of all, how television fits his characterization of Islamic and traditional communication as oral, and secondly, that he assimilates the media to the same governing role distinct from 'civil society'. But even on this ground, and perhaps even more so, Mowlana's analysis remains too 'idealistic', far too general, and not grounded in reality. No analysis of the relationship between the state and the cultural industries in Iran can overlook the case of broadcasting. It is here, at the center of power, which the disabling conflict and tension between the imperative of market and the ideology of Islamism, as well as the battle over the very nature and the definition of 'Islam' and the 'Islamic state', becomes even more evident.

By examining the politics of broadcasting since its introduction to Iran in the late 1950s, this chapter suggests that the Iranian state has been and continues to be an active agent of capital accumulation in the media sector and the driving force behind the expansion of media networks. The first section of this chapter reviews the development of Iranian television before the Revolution and the active role of the Iranian state to develop and control broadcasting, as well as the failure of the state-sponsored broadcasting network to create political legitimacy for the ruling elite. It then moves on to examine the struggle to control broadcasting networks by the Islamic state and efforts for the establishment of a new order in broadcasting culture, namely an attempt to Islamicize broadcasting. I examine the changing attitudes of sections of *ulema* with regard to the significance and the role of broadcasting and suggest that this period is marked by the emergence of a variety of institutional arrangement and difference that produced different results. The final section of this chapter looks at the history of the last decade (1994–2004) of broadcasting policy and development in Iran. This period clearly demonstrates clear dialectical tensions between what Harvey (2003) has called the 'logic of capital' and the 'logic of territory', a period in which the Iranian state has actively sought to expand and privatize the broadcasting networks but has remained fearful of private capital and private television channels. Within this period the Islamic state has tried to respond to the further internationalization of the television industry and

the emergence of satellite channels broadcasting programmes in Farsi to Iran, and to actively engage in the struggle for influence in the region.

TELEVISION IN IRAN BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

Robins and Webster (1985:37) have argued that the spread of Social Taylorism was an important variable in the formation of television: 'It is in the context of an extending and encroaching corporate activity which required the best possible regulation of sales achievable that television should be placed since it was both shaped by and responded to these trends.' The early years of television in Iran are a case in point, where unlike many European ex-colonies, the adopted pattern was not the public-national model, but the then exceptional commercial system of the United States. It was no accident that it was Habibolah Sabet who brought television to Iran. The Sabets were the most influential of a limited number of families that dominated the booming Iranian economy. Through his Firouz Trading Company Sabet came to dominate the domestic consumer market. A graduate of Harvard University, he held the franchise for international brands such as Electrolux, Kelvinator, Westinghouse, General Electric, Volkswagen, General Tyres, and Pepsi-Cola. He was also the RCA representative and sold the television sets that were receivers for his programs and commercials for products that he was producing and selling (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994:61–62). Unlike other forms of communication, including radio and the telegraph, television was introduced by the private sector after a favorable parliamentary bill was passed in June 1958. A single television channel, which reached only a few major cities, followed soon after in October, and was introduced by a mandatory opening speech from the Shah. As Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994) have argued, *Television of Iran*, which was run by an American, was the first commercial television in the region. Much of the output of the early years of Television of Iran consisted of imported U.S. programs, with some domestic production that was itself heavily influenced by American formats. Iran's national news agency, Pars, provided the domestic news, and the United States Information Service provided the international news. Pan American Airlines sponsored the news bulletins. Television soon became the most sought after domestic technology, and with the support and blessing of the Shah it began to serve the interests of private capital in Iran through advertising and the rapid spread of consumerism.

The Shah began to recognize the potential of television as a political tool and ordered the creation of a second network in 1966. Iranian television began to expand rapidly and for a while the two channels, one owned and operated by private capital and the other owned and controlled by the state, were broadcasting mostly American programs to major cities in Iran side by side. Fearful of the possibility of any autonomous base of power, the Shah's

government took over Sabet's operation. *Television of Iran* was nationalized and merged with the state channel. By 1971 the state had restructured both radio (which had been run since 1964 by the Ministry of Information) and television and incorporated them as a public broadcasting monopoly (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994; Tunstall, 1977). The new organization was named NIRT (Iranian National Radio and Television) and Reza Ghotbi, a cousin of the Queen and a trusted member of the court was appointed as its first (and last) Director General.

Establishing television, as with a national news agency, was regarded as a sign of progress, independence, and nation building. Bourdon has argued that the gap between potential coverage and actual reception in the Southern hemisphere can partly be explained 'by the fact that television was first of all a symbol for other states to see, not a means of communication—a place which foreign heads of state could visit, not programs for all citizens to view' (2004:98). This was undoubtedly true in the case of NIRT, which was used as a tool to gather support for dependent development and modernization and above all to consolidate the Shah's power by broadcasting lavish royal ceremonies and festivals in which he played a central part. The sole intention of such programming was to stress the 'glorious' tradition of the monarchy and dynastic continuity. A. Mohammadi argues that even a brief glance at the Iranian media in the 1970s proves that the content had very little to do with preserving national culture or raising the level of public education, 'Rather, they promoted the alluring manifestations of Western culture, with little consideration of the urgent needs and demands of Iranian society; they did little more than amuse and entertain their audience' (1995:372). Nearly 80 per cent of all NIRT programs were imported from the West, mostly from the United States. Typical of these programs were the soap operas, serials, comedies, and detective dramas that were being watched by audiences across the world.

NIRT began to address some of its shortcomings in terms of geographical reach and original programs and implemented a long-term plan for the expansion of its operations which included training communications personnel in the United States. By the mid-1970s access to radio in Iran was almost universal with around eight million radio sets in the country. NIRT had a total of 14 regional television production and transmission centers. The number of transmitters had increased from 2 in 1966 to 153 in 1974. It employed 7,000 people of whom 2,000 were stationed in Tehran and there were already plans for the purchase of a satellite for educational purposes (Tehranian, 1975, 1977). By this time the Iranian broadcasting system had become the second largest broadcasting network in Asia, after NHK in Japan (Mohammadi, 1995). NIRT had become a symbol of progress and was given substantial budgets to expand its operations. However, this expansion and the creation of a 'magic multiplier' for consumerism rather than development was inconsistent with development in other media sectors, notably the press. Literacy remained low and the

press severely limited, censored, and available only in major cities. This inconsistent media policy prompted Tunstall to argue that if 'Iran continues on its present path it will be the first nation in the world to have nationally spread television before a nationally spread press (1977: 247).

In 1974 NIRT produced a document specifying the role of mass communication in national development. Listed among its goals and missions were: 'to strengthen the bases of national unity and participatory democracy', 'to assist in the revitalization of the Iranian national culture', 'to sponsor artistic and cultural activities', 'to provide recreational programs tailored to the taste and preference of every major sector of Iranian society' (Tehranian, Hakimzadeh and Vidale, 1977:3–4). Broadcasting did contribute to the spread of a single national language (Farsi), if that is the only indication of 'national unity'. But throughout its history and despite the grand plan of NIRT to use it as a tool for national development, and despite its supposed independence from government, the actual content of television provided little evidence to that effect. Domestic production did increase, and popular national programming persuaded even the poorest people to go and buy a television set to prevent their children making a permanent base in neighboring households with television sets, did create mass audience for television.

However, as the economic realities of the mid-70s began to hit Iranians and as criticism of the Shah's policies grew louder, television began to promote the King of Kings (*Shahanshah*), his policies, and interests even more than before. The use of television to scare and humiliate political opponents, the state security service SAVAK's sponsored programs and televised coverage of 'trials' and 'confessions' of captured activists and intellectuals, left little credibility for NIRT. Such vast, sophisticated and well-oiled machinery failed to create political legitimacy for the Shah or his policies. The big media failed to counter the dynamic and growing small media of the Revolution of 1979. On February 11, 1979, NIRT's headquarters came under the control of the public after the Shah's military forces were ordered back to their base after three months of occupation (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994:169).

IRANIAN TELEVISION 1979–1994

In contrast to a relatively diverse and controversial (though limited) press market, broadcasting had always been under the tight control of the state. The reasons are not hard to find. In Iran, as in most countries, television is the most popular and accessible media. In contrast to poorly distributed newspapers, broadcasting reaches almost all corners of Iran and around 81 per cent of Iranians have access to television. In the capital 92 per cent of households have at least one television set, 70 per cent of them colour. This is complemented by around ten million video sets (VCR) (of which

seven million are home videos, one VCR for every 35 Iranians), and by the late 1990s, more than 250,000 satellite dishes, which were often shared by more than one family (Habibi-Nia, 1998:63). Broadcasting is accorded a significant place by the leadership of the Islamic Republic. The Constitution is also specific about the role of broadcasting. According to Article 175:

> The freedom of expression and dissemination of thought in the Radio and Television of the Islamic Republic of Iran must be guaranteed in keeping with the Islamic criteria and the best interests of the country. The appointment and dismissal of the head of the Radio and Television of the Islamic Republic of Iran rests with the Leader. A council consisting of two representatives each of the President, the head of the judiciary branch and the Islamic Consultative Assembly shall supervise the functioning of this organization. The policies and the manner of managing the organization and its supervision will be determined by law.

While there are references to freedom, dignity, debate, and the development of human beings, the aim of the media seems to be the construction of Islamic society and the diffusion of Islamic culture. The mission of the media under the Islamic Republic is the 'propagation' and defence of the values and ideals of not only Islam in general, but a strand which is considered pure and revolutionary as defined by the ruling clergy. In this sense, those at the head of the Islamic Republic, like the monarchy before them, have seen the media as a crucial tool in re-enforcing and consolidating their hegemonic power. The centerpiece of this policy has revolved, more than anywhere else, around broadcasting. Yet the inherent contradictions between the imperatives of the market and the official state ideology, varied factional interests, the strong presence of oppositional (legal and otherwise) classes, and finally the logic of territory (the so-called national interest) and of the rapid integration of Iran into global capitalism, is nowhere more obvious and visible than in the broadcasting sector. All these interrelated factors have paved the way for an intriguing media environment in general, and a very peculiar broadcasting terrain.

The lack of a clear alternative economic policy and the dismissive attitudes towards wider economic issues of the ruling elite has always meant that much of the emphasis of the regime which replaced the monarchy was on what they saw as the cultural trends that had pushed Iranians away from their Islamic heritage and teaching. It has come as no surprise that this 'cultural war' and the debate about competing values dominated much of the early and subsequent discussion about the nature and the role of the Islamic Republic. Up to the collapse of the monarchy a large number of *ulema* saw television as an instrument of foreign powers/cultures that were vigorously pursuing nothing but the corruption of the Iranian public

(Algar, 1981). For that reason watching television and going to the cinema was discouraged by them, and many cinemas, alongside financial centers such as banks, were burned down during the uprising of 1978–1979. But immediately after coming to power, the new ruling elite seized the initiative and began to see broadcasting no longer as an instrument of the Great Satan, but as a powerful tool for spreading the message of the Revolution and Islam. In his first speech after returning to Iran, Khoemeini argued:

> We are not opposed to the cinema, to radio, or to television; what we oppose is vice and the use of the media to keep our young people in a state of backwardness and dissipate their energy. We have never opposed these features of modernity in themselves, but when they were brought from Europe to the East, particularly to Iran, unfortunately they were used not in order to advance civilization, but in order to drag us into barbarism. (Algar, 1981:258)

Despite rhetorical differences and the early objections to broadcasting in Iran by a group of *ulema*, a brief review of the development of broadcasting and its evolution to date reveals clear elements of continuity in its structure, expansion, control and a strong association with the state.

In the early stages of the Islamic Republic broadcasting was an open platform for a diverse range of views. This free and open period did not last long. The title of the organization was changed to the Voice and the Vision of the Islamic Republic, or VVIR, (and some years later to Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, IRIB) and Sadiq Gotbzadeh, who had accompanied Khoemeini on his triumphant return to Iran, was rewarded with the post of leading the organization and the task of the Islamization of broadcasting. Gotbzadeh immediately came into conflict with old VVIR personnel who were dismayed by the rapid transformation of television by those who had little knowledge of the requirements of a modern organization such as theirs. In tandem with the populist policies of the early days of the Islamic Republic, Gotbzadeh promised to make broadcasting a forum for the *paberehneha* (barefoot people). He immediately began the process of *paksazi* (cleansing), dismantling many subdivisions and research projects and programs and tried to make the VVIR into a power base for himself (Mohammadi, 2003:25). Programming remained a key issue and while changing the title and structure of the VVIR and purification of its personnel did take place with rapid pace, the Islamization of the content and implementation of overall policies of the new regime was much harder to achieve. Television had clearly failed to create much-needed political legitimacy for the previous regime, and the new ruling elites were keen to try their luck. Much of the early VVIR content was clearly politico-religious, and *ulema* began to dominate television. Much of the Iranian popular music was banned, and Islamization severely limited VVIR's options for other forms of programming such as films (both national and foreign), game

shows and many popular sporting programs including wrestling, etcetera. As Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994) have argued Iranians, with their typical sarcasm, nicknamed television 'mullahvision'. The public also sarcastically were dismissing the usefulness of colour television in Iran since most of the programmes were filled with members of clergy who were wearing either black or white turbans (Baghi, 2002).

Gotbzadeh left his post at the height of the American Embassy hostage crisis and became Minister of Foreign Affairs and one of the leading figures in negotiations between the Islamic Republic and the U.S. Administration. Gotbzadeh began his new post as he had done with the previous one, purging and 'cleansing' the foreign ministry of undesirable personnel. He himself became the target of cleansing as the battle to control the newly formed republic intensified, and he was later executed on the dubious charge of 'collaborating' with the enemy. The control of broadcasting became a major site of dispute between different factions, and the newly formed Islamic Republic Party began to monopolize power and took over. Those who were appointed by Gotbzadeh and the first President of the Republic, Bani-Sadr, were brushed aside or forced to resign, and the prosecutor-general, Ayatollah Mosavi-Ardabili, appointed new directors for broadcasting services and television channels. In a further move to undermine the President (who later fled the country), the Iranian Parliament passed a law that, contrary to the Constitution, allowed the Prime Minister (a member of the Islamic Republic Party) to appoint a representative of the executive branch to the VVIR Council (Bakhash, 1985:153). At this stage broadcast media played a major role in silencing the factions who had formed the provisional government and dominated the executive branch. For a short time VVIR had two acting directors, Ali Larijani the son-in-law of Ayatollah Mottahari, one of closest associates of Khomeini, who was put in charge of the day-to-day running of *Sima* (vision), and Saeed Rajaie Khorasani, one of Mottahari's ex-students, who was put in charge of *Seda* (voice) (Mohammadi, 2003). Despite the efforts of these two and the centralization of the organization, Khomeini remained unhappy about the performance of VVIR. Rafsanjani the speaker of the Iranian Parliament and another close associate and a powerful figure in the Islamic Republic suggested that his brother should take over the organization. Larijani left to lead the Revolutionary Guard Intelligence Unit (he returned later as the Director General), and Rafsanjani's brother Mohammad Hashemi became VVIR's second Director General. Under the leadership of Hashemi VVIR was burdened more than anything else with the 'war effort' (Barraclough, 2001) and the endless need for mobilization and propaganda during the conflict with Iraq. This issue dominated much of the first decade of the new regime. Military songs and marches, regular news from the front and similar content that was deemed suitable dominated the screen.

One of the unique features of VVIR was the fact that it (like NIRT) remained independent from the newly constructed Ministry of Islamic

Guidance (that later became the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in 1986) which was given the task of managing and policing the press, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), the film industry, charity organizations, and tourism. The Constitution kept VVIR independent from the ministry and instead opted for a council (as suggested in the first Constitution of the Republic) consisting of representatives from the three powers (legislative, judiciary, and executive) to supervise the running of the organization in cooperation with the Director General. The general idea was to avoid making VVIR a direct arm of government and prevent any form of despotism and the control of the broadcasting by just a single individual, institution, or interest. Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi have argued (1994:175) the new state not only took the centralization policy of the previous regime even further, it also continued with the tradition of giving sensitive positions to trusted individuals and close associates of key figures, making VVIR akin to a family business. Hashemi indeed appointed family and friends of the family to create a unified and homogenous organization that not only satisfied the leadership of the regime, but also without doubt managed to promote Rafsanjani as the second most powerful man in Iran.

Clear elements of continuity can also be seen in the revival of the previous regime's policy for the development and expansion of broadcasting in Iran. Hashemi not only brought back some of the personnel who had lost their jobs in the first few months of Ghotbzadeh's directorship, he began to recruit more personnel, which increased from 8,000 to 14,000. He revived much of the development plan of Reza Ghotbi, who had been director of the Iranian National Radio and Television before the Revolution, including reopening the Office of Satellite Research and Development, co-productions with foreign broadcasters including the BBC and NHK, and adding a third channel devoted mostly to sports coverage.

Just before Khomeini's death and under his direct order the Constitution of the Islamic Republic was revised in 1989. Two significant changes paved the way for an even more centralized state: the lowering of the clerical qualification required for the post of Supreme Leader, and the abolition of the post of Prime Minister, which paved the way for a more powerful presidency. This move towards centralization was also evident in the third significant change to the Constitution which brought the VVIR under direct control of the Supreme Leader, and it indicates the crucial strategic value of broadcasting for the Islamic state. The first two constitutional changes were a direct response to an urgent need for a more dynamic, centralized, and somehow less ideologically rigid structure for the state, that judging by the third change, could not be achieved without total control of broadcasting. The intention and the message were clear: in the period of reconstruction and liberalization, it was no longer viable to keep broadcasting as the voice of the three main powers in Iran. A single voice and vision was a crucial requirement for the relentless drive towards 'reconstruction'.

The VVIR was to continue with its significant political role as before, but needed to expand and develop more comprehensive policies towards more popular forms of programming. For a decade all the early promises of the Islamic state had been put on hold due to the war with Iraq; now was the time for the state to deliver.

Political rivalries since the Revolution have centered on the appropriate source of religious interpretation as well as upon juridical power; with the established legal system superseded by religious legal authority in the form of the *Velayate-e-Faghih* (Rule of the Supreme Jurist). There were two sources of power, an elected President and/versus a Supreme Leader. This dual system, problematic from 1979, became an even greater source of crisis after the end of the war and Khomeini's death. In the period between 1989 and 1993 Iran began to witness a mini-Glasnost. The process of reconstruction which had begun immediately after the end of the war with Iraq and the election of Rafsanjani as President in July 1989 not only meant following the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's recommended policies of liberalization and privatization, it also instigated a less restrictive cultural policy. For a decade various factions of the state had waved at the threat of external forces and had fallen back into a rhetorical use of conspiracy theory and 'cultural imperialism' when their politics had clearly failed to satisfy a very youthful electorate. That Iran has always been faced with external threats is beyond dispute. Although never colonized directly, the history of Iran is also the history of foreign threats and interventions. Despite expression of neutrality during World War II the country was occupied by Russia and Britain. And in 1953 when the democratically elected government of Mosadeq (one of the first significant democratic experiences in the region) nationalized the oil and sent the British packing, British and American government intervened by staging a military coup which brought down the only democratic government in the region, reinstated the Shah, destroyed the secular oppositions, banned all political parties and unions, and ended a vibrant cultural atmosphere.

Since 1979 and with the collapse of monarchy and the main ally of the United States in the region (bar Israel) Iran's external role and position has become even more central. The Iranian Revolution wiped away the U.S. foothold in one of the most politically senstive and significant locations in the region. The United States and its allies supported Saddam Hussein's attack on Iran, and for more than eight years, between 1980 and 1988, they supported Iraq in a war in which many lives and resources were lost and ruined. In recent years, and steadily since the end of war with Iraq, the Iranian state embarked on new diplomatic efforts and foreign policy to attract foreign investors and capital. However, Khatmai's flirtation with the west and policy of 'dialogue of civilization' only met with the 'axis of evil' tag in the aftermath of the tragedy of September 11. The neo-conservatives dominating the U.S. administration showed no interest as they began to utilize the September events to remodel the world and in particular the

Middle East. Keen to protect the interests of foreign and domestic capital, but incapable and unwilling to protect civil liberties, students, and journalists and the huge army of jobless and disposed ordinary Iranians, the reformist president concerned with foreign relations gave way to a new one in 2005. The threat of sanctions and looming war and intervention is more real than at any time since 1979. Surrounded by members of the exclusive club of atomic states—India, Pakistan, China, Russia, Israel—as well as the U.S. nuclear submarines/machinery that patrol the Persian Gulf, the Iranian state increasingly looks incapable of dealing with new imperialist intervention.

As Tariq Ali (2006) has argued, Iran's 'foreign policy has been little more than a ragbag of incoherent opportunism, combining conventional diplomacy of a cautious', keeping meaningful silence during the Gulf War of 1991, collaborating with the United States in the invasion of Afghanistan, and collaborating with the CIA in prepration for invasion of Iraq. The temptation, as Ali suggests, 'to ratchet up cultural repression to compensate for economic frustration is usually irresistible'. That has always been the case in Iran where the state has reduced imperialism to 'cultural invasion', and independence to 'cultural authenticity'. The contradiction in the cultural policies of the state since the end of war with Iraq demonstrate this trend.

The major problem to be faced by the reform-minded President and his cabinet was how to pursue a less restrictive cultural policy without encouraging an independent public sphere and a full-blown critique of the state.

The job of establishing such a delicate balance was given to Mohammad Khatami as the new Minister of Islamic Guidance. He immediately began to promote the Iranian film industry, granted licences to many new social and cultural periodicals and paved the way for a more vibrant and dynamic press environment. For the first time since the brutal repression of the independent media in the 1980s, Iranian media began to address sensitive social issues. A similar policy was promoted and followed by Hashemi, the head of VVIR. Iranian television began broadcasting serials, movies, and other programmes that were not totally in line with the cultural standards of conservative factions in the state. This new policy of promoting cultural liberalization alongside economic liberalization soon produced a backlash. Many, including the Supreme Leader, began to attack Khatami and criticized him for the deterioration of cultural standards and paving the way for an onslaught of Iranian culture by the corrupt and un-Islamic West. Khatami resigned in July 1992 but as we know he later won two landslide victories in the 1997 and 2001 presidential elections.

Hashemi continued in his post till 1994 when the Supreme Leader finally decided to use his power to replace him with Larijani. Factional politics, the association of Hashemi with President Rafsanjani (who in 1994 was serving his second term), and the fact that it meant a very close link between VVIR and the executive branch were all important factors in the changes to

the broadcasting hierarchy. A campaign by the Iranian Parliament that provided ammunition against the broadcasters also played a key role in forcing Hashemi and his associates to resign. Prior to his resignation in November 1993, the Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Iranian Parliament produced a report which further polarized the debate over the supposed 'cultural invasion'. The report condemned the performance of broadcasters and in particular the rise of foreign programming shown on Iranian television. According to the report, out of 900 films broadcast on Iranian television between 1988 and 1991, 700 were foreign. The report also asserted that even Iranian productions failed to observe Islamic guidelines. Animations were condemned for showing wine drinking, relationships between boys and girls, and female characters with no *hijab*; and even the popular cartoon *Around the World in 80 Days* was regarded as dangerous for showing an Englishman as powerful, brave, and enchanting (Brumberg, 2001:193–195). Hashemi tried to fend off such criticisms by accusing the writer of the report of having other interests than the interests of the Islamic Republic. He was brushed aside as his powerful brother failed to protect him. The new minister, Ali Larijani, promised to promote a cultural policy that showed 'the deceptive face of the west that infiltrates the societies in the guise of human rights and democracy in order to achieve its filthy purpose of domination' (cited in Brumberg, 2001:193). Thus the mini-glasnost that had emerged after the end of the war had ended, and a new wave of attacks against the press and intellectual freedom had begun.

IRANIAN TELEVISION 1994–2004

The new Director General Larijani, much more than his predecessor Hashemi, shared the conservative values of the Supreme Leader. Larijani, according to *Sharq* newspaper[1] was among the emerging young, managerial conservatives who passionately believed in the rule of Supreme Jurist, and in the members of revolutionary corps and courts, with experience in sensitive posts in the Revolutionary Guard Intelligence unit or Ministry of Intelligence. Larijani had all of these credentials.[2] In the early days of the Revolution he was in charge of VVIR's world service, then for a short while he managed the organization news bureau, and after Ghotbzadeh had moved to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he became the caretaker of VVIR. He also served as deputy labour minister for a short time and was also deputy minister in the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. For nine years, between 1982 and 1991, he was deputy chief of the Revolutionary Guard and director of its intelligence unit. In the early 1990s he took over the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance after Khatami had resigned as minister in protest to pressure from conservative forces who were critical of his supposedly lax approach to cultural matters. Larijani was appointed as the head of IRIB in 1994. In all these years he clearly remained loyal to the

centre of power in the Islamic Republic. However, as Barraclough (2001) suggests, whatever the reasons for the dismissal of Hashemi, or the assumptions about Larijani being more conservative and less pragmatic than his predecessor, the fact is that his role as Director General of broadcasting in Iran has been that of a reformer. During his ten-year directorship from 1994 to 2004, more far reaching reforms were implemented. He restructured and expanded broadcasting, and lobbied all branches of the state in the face of international competition, making state broadcasting into a large, powerful, centralized, media/political institution.

The first important issue at the start of Larijani's directorship was the impact of satellite and the Islamic Republic's policy towards this new technology. Satellite arrived in 1993, as a decade-long, expensive, and unsuccessful fight to ban the extremely popular VCR had ended when the government finally legalized the device and allowed for limited legal video shops. Despite conceding defeat in their long battle to control private use of VCRs, similar debates took place as early as 1994 when satellite dishes began to appear on the rooftops of many households in Tehran and elsewhere. The arrival of satellite in Iran, once again, revived the debate about 'cultural invasion' and the safeguarding of 'Islamic culture'. As the title of Tabatabai's (1999) book, *Satellite Rises & Cultures Set: What is to be done?,* which was published some years later indicates, the coming of satellite has been equated with the decline of culture. The debate over the rise and the impact of satellite was by no means a settled and straightforward discussion, and at issue were factional politics, institutional interests, and different understandings of the role of technology and the strength of local culture.

The interesting point to note is that at a time of passionate debate about the possible harmful effects of satellite on Iranian culture, there was very little programming available in Farsi. Prior to this, communities living close to the borders of neighbouring countries could access television from Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, and the Gulf with ease and without the need for satellite dishes. Foreign radio stations too, broadcasting regular programs in Farsi including the BBC, Voice of Israel, and the Voice of America, had always been popular sources of news, analysis, and entertainment. Barraclough suggests that 'the fact that western style permissive programming might form the mainstay of people's viewing challenges the very *raison d'etre* of the revolution itself' (2001:25). The link between religion, state, and communication is apparent once again in the discussion about satellite in Iran. However, those who see the ban on satellite simply as evidence of a fundamentalist attempt to 'reclaim the language of devotion for the faithful and to reduce the reach of promotional culture' (Murdoch, 1997:99) neglect the wider institutional interests, and the diversity of the 'language of devotion'. It also ignores the very fact that such a battle over the hearts and minds of the faithful is mediated through a number of official bodies, Parliament, the Council of the Guardians, and the Expediency Council, and that it has to be followed, implemented, and safeguarded by still more institutions.

There were many in the Islamic Republic who simply rejected the ban on pragmatic grounds that it was unenforceable, especially if miniature dishes were to be introduced. The daily *Salam* objected to the idea of the ban by targeting the very idea that satellite had the power to corrupt: 'The interior minister says dishes must be banned because they have the 'physical' power to corrupt. If this is so, then one has to arrest and execute every man and woman for they too possess the physical power of prostitution' (cited in Haeri, 1994:51). As the debate progressed further even the interior minister began to recognize the need for 'persuasion' rather than force, and emphasized the need for proper legislation. In doing so, however, he did not only go beyond the issue of legal context, he followed clear institutional/bureaucratic logic by stressing that any legislation had to be implemented by his department (Barraclough, 2001:31). In total only around 20 MPs got together to introduce a bill to ban the 'importation, sale and use' of satellite dishes. The Minister of Posts, Telegraph and Telephone of the time, Mohammad Gharazi, whose department also had a keen institutional interest, successfully objected to an article in the bill that also banned the manufacture of devices for receiving satellite transmissions, since companies affiliated with the Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI) were manufacturing many components for dishes. He was clearly safeguarding his own department interests and investment. The contradiction between the hardware and the software aspects of satellite were rather obvious.[3]Another interesting point revealing that the ban was not just merely about reclaiming 'the language of devotion for the faithful', but was also to do with economics, was the rejection of two articles of the bill by the Council of the Guardians. The proposed legislation had entrusted implementation to the Ministry of the Interior, but failed to allocate a budget and corresponding expenses. The Council of the Guardians returned the bill to the Parliament to be modified, and approved the revised version on February 15, 1995.

IRIB as a whole participated actively in the debate about the Islamic Republic's policy on satellite. It was in favor of an outright ban, but ensured it was itself exempt (alongside government ministries and foreign embassies). The act also allowed IRIB to record useful and educational satellite programs and distribute them on video. This never happened as the enforcement of the law proved as difficult as many had predicted. While there were regular verbal attacks on satellite broadcasting and the occasional confiscation of dishes, the government remained hesitant about entering private middle-class households to establish whether they were receiving satellite programs or not. Nevertheless IRIB remained the main beneficiary of the ban. This policy provided IRIB with a breathing space to expand its operations and to begin preparing for intense outside competition for the Iranian audience. In exactly the same way that restrictions on foreign films paved the way for a flourishing of Iranian cinema, the ban on satellite allowed IRIB to improve its performance, expand its activities, and introduce more

entertainment and commercially oriented content. By the mid-1990s, as I have argued before, even Hamid Mowlana (1997) had begun to confess to the failures of broadcasting policy in Iran.

The most significant development of broadcasting in recent years undoubtedly is the expansion of television channels, all with their own themes.[4] *Shabakeh 1* (Network), which covers 90 per cent of urban and rural areas in Iran, is a 24-hour general channel focusing on general programming including politics, news, and drama. Channel 2, *Shabakeh Farhang* (Culture Network), covers 80 per cent and runs for 18 hours; it focuses mostly on cultural and educational issues. Channel 3's *Shabakeh Javan* (Youth Network) target audience is youth, and it covers 60 per cent of Iran's territory and runs for about 12 hours, providing music and sports programmes. Network 4 was launched in 1996, covers only 40 per cent of the country, and runs for about 6 hours, providing programming in which scholars and *ulema* discuss issues of theological and intellectual matter. Programmes for this channel are divided into 8 groups, and 8 groups of programme makers develop, produce, and present programmes in areas including economics, religious thought and culture, literature, and science. Channel 5 is a regional channel, with Tehran the first city to have its own channel (Tehran Network) in 1996, followed by other regions. By the end of 2002, 15 provincial networks had become operational.[5] Channel 6 (*Payam* Network) is a teletext channel. The most recent channel is the Education Channel (*Amouzesh* Network), not dissimilar to Open University programmes on BBC2; the aim of this channel is to cater to the increasing number of students entering higher education. The launch of this channel was the subject of Article 13 of Chapter 13 of the Third Economic Plan of the Islamic Republic. IRIB, as was argued in Chapter 2, has also expanded its activities in publishing and publishes 7 titles, including *Jame-Jam* daily.[6]

Concerned with the domination of U.S. programmes in Iran before the Revolution, IRIB has not only tried to build up its domestic production (with some success), it has also bought products from some seemingly unlikely sources in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Maintaining a strong and visible presence in the international broadcasting community has been one of the key activities of IRIB in recent years, and to that effect it also publishes the *IRIB Newsletter* (which introduces international broadcasters to the latest news, programmes, and developments) and another publication, the international *Payk* (Messenger), which provides Iranian broadcasting executives with information about the latest news and developments in international television markets. IRIB is an active member of ABU (Asian Broadcasting Union), an affiliate member of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), as well as a member of Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD). The main trading partners of IRIB since 1979 include Germany, Japan, China, Kuwait, Lebanon, Bosnia, Cuba, Brazil, Pakistan, India, Switzerland, Australia, North and South Korea, and above all Britain.

Some changes in policy towards the Iranian Diaspora and consensus amongst the ruling elite of the urgent need to invite some of them back (preferably the richer ones who are interested in investing in the private sector), the need to compete with rapidly expanding Iranian satellite channels, as well as the continuing desire to play a much more orchestrated and visible role in international politics, has precipitated greater international broadcasting by the Islamic Republic. In addition to domestic channels, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) has also launched a number of channels targeting Iranians living outside Iran, as well as international audiences. The flagship of IRIB international effort is *Jam-e Jam*, launched in 1997. [7] *Jame-Jam* broadcasts programming in Farsi (and some in English) on three channels. In addition to these three channels, there are also two *Sahar*[8] (Dawn) channels broadcasting programmes in English, French, Arabic, Kurdish, Urdu, Azari, and Bosnian. Since the invasion of Iraq, IRIB has also launched *Alalam*[9], which tries to influence policies and political actors in Iraq and the region as a whole. The number of radio channels has also increased to seven national channels, each with aims and themes similar to the domestic television channels. There is also IRIB World Service with 7 radio channels broadcasting in 25 languages including Chinese, Russian, Pashtu, Hebrew, Spanish, and Tajik.

In recent years analysis of the changing media environment in the region has been overwhelmingly media-centric and has rarely gone beyond celebrating the 'phenomenon' of Al-Jazeera and its 'Revolutionary' impact on media and journalism in the Arab world. While undoubtedly there are some elements of truth in such claims, they usually ignore the broader political/economic context of recent changes and fail to see the newly emerged media as a clear 'component of foreign policy' (Sakr, 2005) of various states. Al-Jazeera as we know is owned by the Qatari state (and the plan to expand and launch an English channel has little to do with Arab audiences); Saudis have Al-Arabia, and the Syrians control Arab News Network (ANN). These developments, as well as the BBC's plan to launch an Arabic channel, the U.S. Administration's increased media activities and initiatives (Wilkins, 2004), including the launch of Radio Farda, Radio Sawa, and the Arabic Channel Al-Hurra, and the awarding of lucrative contracts to the disgraced and bankrupt Worldcom to create a wireless telephone network in Iraq and Afghanistan, have to be understood in the context of the broader interests of international and local capitals and states. The expansion of the IRIB's international channels and operations is taking place within this new configuration of the role of states, regional conflicts, and above all the imperialist invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq by the United States.

Other organizations affiliated to IRIB include *Sima* Film which provides facilities to film and programme-makers and actively participates in international trade fairs; *Sima Chob* (Wood, Metal & Plastic Industrial Company) offers services such as the construction of acoustic studios, interior design, office and home furniture, as well as furnishings for conference

halls; *Takta* provides services in communication technologies and equipment; and finally *Saba*, which provides services and facilities for animated, computer-generated, and general audio-visual programmes. The expansion of IRIB as a whole and the significant increase in the number of channels and outlets has also meant an increase in production. To that effect outsourcing production has been an important IRIB strategy. Saba film and Sima film, both affiliated to IRIB, produce films, documentaries, serials, and animations for IRIB. Both companies have also managed to produce programmes for export. In particular, animations produced by Saba (some of them overtly political and 'on-message') have been sold to Turkey. However, and as BBC journalist Frances Harrison (2005) reports, despite the overtly Islamic content and message of some of the cartoons, Arab countries refuse to buy many of these productions because they show the faces of prophets, something which *Sunni* Muslims object to.

In the early 1990s the conservative dominated *Majlis*, recognizing the attraction of satellite channels and fearful of 'cultural invasion', relaxed all budgetary restrictions and allocated more than US$16 million to IRIB for original films and television programs (Mohammadi, 2003:33). Much of the budget allocated to IRIB has been given to private production companies to enable them to produce commercial films and television programs. According to Larijani, IRIB's policy in this respect has revolved around the idea that for 'the private sector to contribute to IRIB programs, IRIB needs to help the private sector' (cited in Barraclough, 2001:38). In broadcasting, as in other sectors, the state and state institutions are actively driving privatization policies. Even the idea of the privatization of news is not dismissed altogether, and certainly the introduction of advertising since 1996, as limited as it is, shifted the balance towards more commercialized programming. The contradiction between the imperatives of the market and privatization on the one hand and ideological needs on the other is addressed in singular fashion. Ironically, despite regular discussions about the impact of Western commercial programmes and the fear of contamination of the 'indigenous' culture by foreign cultural products, commercialization, and the expansion of broadcasting has been the main strategy of IRIB.

There has also been a clear shift towards recognizing the value of entertainment by IRIB. Fearful of losing Iranian audiences to rival Iranian channels broadcasting entertainment (mostly LA-produced Iranian pop music and pre-revolution popular serials and films) and other international broadcasters, IRIB now produces and shows more domestic and international films, game shows, and dramas. 'Respectable' popular dramas from Europe, including British television serials such as Inspector Morse, Miss Marple, and Poirot have become major hits among the Iranian audience. Undoubtedly the introduction of advertising has meant an increase in 'awareness of audience preference among broadcasters' (Barraclough, 2001:40). What adds to this reality in common with many developing countries is Iran's limited resources, which have a crippling effect on the

country's ability to compete with global media players, as well as the lure of cultural commodities offered by these companies. As Ali Mohammadi points out (2003), the evidence of these trends can be observed by a brief glance at the content of many publications in Iran. According to him more than 70 per cent of the content of Soroush magazine (published by IRIB) the only television guide in the country, is international in focus. A large number of cultural/social publications, including many that deal with cinema and literature, provide extensive coverage of the latest international blockbuster films, books, music, and television programmes. Many of Hollywood's latest releases find their way into Iranian shops long before they are released in Europe.

However, despite careful international trading and the import of 'safe' cultural television programs, IRIB still needs to devote time and effort to censor undesired elements of many foreign series and films. IRIB has taken the notion of 'free dubbing' to the extreme. As the Iranian researcher Majid Mohammadi argues, the policy of censoring such programs and changing the dialogue is based on the assumption that the Iranian public are not immune from cultural illnesses emanating from the West. According to him the name of a food (possibly crab or frog) served in one scene of the *Wilderness Family*, shown on Network 3, was deleted; any reference to alcoholic drinks in imported foreign programmes is avoided, and phrases such as 'I'll have a half pint of beer' is changed to 'half a glass of what they are having'. Women in foreign programmes are sometimes shown from the chin upwards, indicating that the dress is perhaps too revealing, while using the same technique for men indicates that they are wearing a tie. These are the scenes that IRIB decides to broadcast; others are either cut or blacked out (1998: 449–450).

The field of Iranian news broadcasting has also seen a similar expansion of production and collaboration with International broadcasters. IRIB has signed a ten-year contract with CNN according to which both parties can use each other's footage. Similar contacts for exchange programs have been signed with Reuters and the BBC World Service (Barraclough, 2001). Rupert Murdoch's visit to Iran in 1998, approved by the then Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi (previously the director of IRNA) was a further sign of a new policy of courting big players in international media markets. Such trends have not made the issue of 'news imperialism' redundant. In this case rejection of 'news imperialism' is equated with a rejection of news altogether (Mohammadi, 1998:390). The element of continuity in broadcasting in Iran before and after the Revolution is again obvious in this instance. Broadcasting in Iran has never been a credible source of news, domestic or otherwise. However, despite a rapid march towards commercialization and the welcoming of private capital into the communications industry, the Islamic Republic and the IRIB cannot simply renounce their anti-imperialist stance of the early years. This is where some of the similarities with the previous regime end. In domestic news IRIB continues, as NIRT did, to attack

'anti-state' elements in Iran. But in its international news IRIB continues to draw on the anti-imperialist legacies of the early days to glorify the 'Islamic Revolution' and 'Republic'. Denouncing U.S. imperialism has always been an important aspect of IRIB programming, and is part of programmes commemorating significant dates and figures such as the anniversary of the Revolution, or the anniversaries of the deaths or birth dates of various leading *Shi'a* Imams, and so on. As the Islamic Republic embraces the forces of capitalism even more, IRIB tries even harder to trumpet its anti-imperialist stance. A good example is the coverage of the invasion of Iraq that many commentators in Iran suggested clearly violated the state's adopted policy of neutrality (Samii, 2003).

The reform and expansion of broadcasting in Iran in the last decade or so has made IRIB the biggest media player and one of the major units of capital in Iran. IRIB owes its position in the media market in Iran to its funding structure. In 1997 about 13 per cent of IRIB revenues were generated through advertising; the rest came from direct government subsidy and a licence fee which is added to the household electricity bill (Barraclough, 2001:40). No other media organization in Iran receives the funding that the IRIB receives. There are no exact figures on how substantial the contribution of the licence fee is as a percentage of the IRIB budget. But it is safe to assume that it is only a fraction of its overall budget, with the state remaining the main contributor. The share of advertising, however, despite only being introduced in 1996, has grown compared to 1976–1977 when it stood at less than ten per cent (Tehranian, 1977:261). What adds to the power and position of broadcasting in Iran is the very fact that like the institution of the Supreme Leader it is supposed to be above all other institutions and express official state views and policies. Prior to the revision of the Constitution in 1989 Iranian broadcasting was under the supervision of the three powers. The war with Iraq and ideological needs of this period, the towering presence of Khomeini, who remained above all institutions in the Islamic Republic, as well as the lack of expertise and the early confusion over the role of broadcasting did not allow for any serious test, except a few angry comments by the leadership over some of the contents of the early structure of IRIB. The revision of the Constitution clearly brought broadcasting under the direct control of the new Supreme Leader who not only lacked Khomeini's qualifications and charisma but, unlike Khomeini, was directly involved in the factional conflicts. For that reason the IRIB, despite being regarded as 'public property' and the purveyor of Islamic values and culture, has been accountable only to the Supreme Leader.

The role of the IRIB as an organ of official propaganda for the ruling elite was recognized and more or less accepted by the various factions which made up the regime. Neither constant mobilization by the IRIB during the war nor its brutal participation in the Islamic Republic's campaign to humiliate and suppress oppositional forces or even ex-Khomeinists, as well as the televised 'confession' of political prisoners,

raised serious concerns inside the regime. It was with the intensification of factional conflicts in the 1990s, especially in the period up to the presidential election in 1997 and subsequent developments, that the issue of the 'neutrality' of the IRIB became the subject of a heated debate and dispute. The IRIB played a rather dubious role in the run-up to the presidential election, by favoring conservative candidate Ali-Akbar Nategh-Nouri, promoting conservative leaders' and policies, and in the 1999 parliamentary election by giving the silent treatment to the successes of reformist candidates. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, Ali Khamenai, has, not surprisingly, always supported the IRIB. Indeed in 1997, just ten days before the presidential election, he was quoted in the monthly *Payam-e Emrouz* (Today's Message) praising the management of the IRIB and their role in informing and encouraging people to participate in the election (March 1997:80). What stirred the conflict even further was the broadcasting of a documentary *Cheragh* (Light), in which supporters of Khatami were accused of being behind the wave of political assassinations of well-known political figures, journalists, and writers in 1998. The commission that was immediately set up to investigate this matter rejected the claims by the documentary and received an apology from the IRIB management. Before this incident there had been many calls for changes in both personnel and the editorial position of IRIB. In January 1999, 88 members of the *Majlis,* in a letter to Khamenei, openly objected to the biased coverage of political events by IRIB and warned that such an editorial policy would damage the reputation of the media in Iran and the Islamic regime as a whole. IRIB was further criticized by the independent press for its coverage of the Iranian presidential trip to Italy in March 1999 (Samii, 1999). Some newspapers went even further and called for the privatization of television.

Despite this, the IRIB continued as before, and the pro-Khatami camp received similar treatment and accusations after their participation in the 'Iran After the Elections' conference that was held April 7–9 in Berlin by the Heinrich Boll Institute. As Baghi (2002:385–387) has argued, the IRIB broadcast a programme made up of 30 minutes of selected and edited coverage of the Berlin conference, presenting a negative image of those reformists who attended. Such active participation by the IRIB in factional conflicts and disputes inside the Islamic Republic has prompted many reformists to compare it to a right-wing political party.

Here one can observe another element of continuity in the development of broadcasting in Iran: the failure of broadcasting to create political legitimacy for the new ruling elite. As Baghi suggests, the assumption in the early years of the Revolution was that the transfer of control of broadcasting to the clergy would put an end to all forms of social corruption. But a directly controlled IRIB has not only failed to tackle any of these targeted problems, and by forging such a close link between Islam and a repressive government it has seriously weakened and undermined religion in Iran.

Baghi suggests that the best service to religion in Iran that the IRIB could perform would be to leave it alone altogether (2002:362–363). The continuing popularity of satellite channels, and Mowlana's recognition of the dilemmas of the media in general and broadcasting in particular under the Islamic Republic, is the clearest indication of the failure of the Islamic Republic to create a viable alternative media system in Iran and the failure of broadcasting to create political legitimacy for the ruling elite.

In the past few years the IRIB has come under renewed attacks and criticism inside Iran. In 2001, reformist MPs in the Iranian Parliament rejected some of the IRIB's funding bids and began to organize a debate on the institution's financial affairs. The debate over financial irregularities and corruption escalated after the IRIB announced in early 2001 that it might have to sack 10,000 of its staff due to budget shortfalls.[10] Iranian MPs argued that since Parliament allocates the budget for the organization, it had the right to be informed how the funds are spent. The debate scheduled for June 17, 2001, was blocked by the Speaker of the House on the grounds that the organization was only accountable to the Supreme Leader and not the Parliament, a move which prompted many of the MPs to storm out in protest (Saba, 2001). While the Iranian second chamber (the Guardian Council) had rejected the parliamentary bill to reduce the budget of the IRIB, the Supreme Leader succumbed to the pressure and allowed the Parliament to set up a committee to investigate. The legislation approved by the Parliament on June 24, 2001, envisaged that three members of Parliament, three cabinet ministers, the first deputy head of the Judiciary, two lawyers, the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, a representative of the Supreme Leader (upon approval of the Leader), a representative of the managing editors of the press, a representative of the theological centre, a university lecturer in communications, and the IRIB chairman would constitute the high council for IRIB policy-making for a tenure of two years.[11]

One of the key concerns of reformist MPs and critics was that the organization had not been transparent about its revenue from advertising. The IRIB had argued that its advertising revenue is only about US$20 milllion per year, while some MPs believe the figure might be closer to US$50 million or even US$100 million a year. By the middle of 2003, the report of The Parliament Inspection Commission on IRIB's Revenues and Expenses confirmed the suspicions of the critics of the organization. According to the report the organization had committed gross financial offences totaling US$656 million in several cases. This finding, the report stressed, had only been based on very limited data, five accounts out of the 200 accounts of the organization. It also criticized the IRIB for failing to cooperate with the commission. The report also suggested that it had ignored a number of other offences to 'observe national expediency'.[12] Larijani left the organization after ten years to fight an election campaign as one of the candidates of the conservative faction for presidency. He was replaced by Zarghami, another member of a group of managers who have cooperated with the

institutions such as the Intelligence Ministry corps and the revolutionary courts, and who are extremely close to the centre of power in Iran and to the Supreme Leader. He has been the subject of similar accusations in Iran after the IRIB's highly biased coverage of Iran's presidential campaign in June 2005 in which Zarghami's closest friend and the mayor of Tehran, Mahmood Ahmadinejad, won a surprise victory.

While it has been common to refer to the 'new' Iranian press as surrogate parties, it is indeed the reality that Iranian broadcasting is an ultimate 'party organ', and its monopolistic nature and the lack of diversity in its content, policy, and control has forced those within the state with different views to resort to launching their own channel of communication. Broadcasting in Iran, despite being the only truly 'national' channel, has failed to reflect the religious, cultural, regional, and political diversity of modern Iran (M. Mohammadi, 2000:8–11). Under the banner of 'Islam' and preserving 'national interests' and 'security', broadcasting remains the most rigid, repressive, and unaccountable institution (after the Supreme Leader and the Guardian Council). It is this 'unholy trinity' which has been the subject of much criticism and dispute even within the rank and file of the Islamic state. What hope is there for 'Islamic communication' in Iran, when even the 'role model' of such a system has consistently failed to unify the 'community of faithful' while embracing the very forces that it came to challenge?

CONCLUSION

Institutions such as the IRIB are at the same time organs of official propaganda for a coercive state as well as units of capital accumulation. The dominant faction within the Iranian state is fearful of giving a free hand to private capital to invest in the media. This fear is twofold. Investment by private companies in broadcasting will undoubtedly challenge the dominant position of the state broadcaster and will undermine the unique position that the IRIB occupies in Iran. With its dubious reputation it might not be in a position to compete with private channels. Secondly, even if private networks might not pose an immediate challenge to the state they might undermine the dominant faction in the long term. Accepting the emergence of a powerful private broadcasting network is also against most things that the Islamic Republic has supposedly stood for in the past 25 years. So far such developments have been treated in exactly the same way as legal oppositional parties. To accept the formation of private networks is to allow them to operate outside the control of the Supreme Leader. Fearful of such a possibility, the state has actively embraced the state-sponsored partial privatization of communication in a way that, despite encouraging the private sector to invest in the lucrative and expanding communication industry, keeps ultimate political control in the hands of the state. But the intensification of factional conflicts and the emergence of private satellite

channels in Farsi, mostly based in California, as well as the rapidly growing private market in trading in the latest videotapes, CDs, and VCDs, have begun to push the state and state broadcasters even further.

The case of Iran clearly raises many serious doubts about the exaggerated claims of globalization theorists and the decline of the nation-state. Nevertheless it also demonstrates that the states are seldom abstract or singular. There exists within any state, quite clearly in the case of Iran, many contradictions in terms of policies and between different individual and institutional interests. The combination of these elements means that different institutions of the state can come up with contradictory policies. Furthermore, policies might be media specific and might be the result of the political consensus of the time (the differences between the regulation of broadcasting on the one hand, and the press and the Internet on the other is indicative of this trend). The Iranian case also demonstrates a peculiar feature of the Iranian communication industry where liberalization and privatization are the order of the day, but the state is still reluctant to give up its ideological control over the media. And this is another contradiction (or limit) of an overtly ideological state keen on development and modernization but which remains caught between pragmatism and the imperative of the market on one hand and the straightjacket of Islamism on the other.

8 Women's Press and the Gendered Nature of the Public Sphere

> The women's movement in Iran is like drizzle. You don't feel it, but by the time you reach your destination, you are totally soaked.'
>
> Shadi Sadr

INTRODUCTION

Two supposedly conflicting 'worldviews', Islamism and Orientalism, have coincided in seeing Islam as the driving force of history in the so-called 'Muslim society'. 'Islam' has been regarded as the determining factor in the role that women are 'allowed' to play in public life. 'The woman question' has been a central concern of the historical debate about the boundaries of the public sphere and the fault line between 'public' and 'private'. The issue over the extent or limits of 'visibility' of women in public life has been one of the main battlegrounds in modern societies and a contentious issue among varied social interests and political projects. For centuries women's emancipation has been central in 'modernisation' projects and is usually associated and equated with 'national progress' (Gole, 1997). This project is aimed at creating a 'modern society' built on the rubble of 'tradition'. Similarly, the project of 'Islamization' has focused its attention on the 'women's question', and the nature and role of women in public life has been one of the key components of its policy. If the Pahlavi dynasty tried to announce its arrival at 'modern times' by introducing and imposing 'de-veiling' (1936), the first act of the Islamic Republic, which replaced it, was to introduce and impose 're-veiling' (1980). The first act was celebrated as the 'passing of tradition', and the second as the 'passing of modernity'. The script could not have been written better!

In modern Iran in particular, two paradigms have been dominant and falsely regarded as two opposing forces. A specific brand of nationalism has tried to base itself on the European model of progress and to link it with the 'glorious' pre-Islamic Persian Empire. The other brand of nationalism aimed not to catch up with Europe but with Islam. Najmabadi suggests that there is this misconception that the Iranian political scene has been 'a battleground between modernity and tradition, with Islam always in the latter camp' (Najmabadi, 2000:34). In fact the clash has been between not about

'modern' versus 'tradition', but rather between two forms of nationalism trying to reconstruct 'Iranianess' based on two long existing 'traditions' (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994).

What both these approaches share, however, is not just the centrality of Islam (tradition) in societal transformation, but also ignoring the role of the state, as well as the crucial question of human agency and the intended/unintended consequences of the actions of human agency (in this context women). In both models women are perceived mostly as victims rather than influential political actors. This chapter attempts to move beyond severe dichotomic thinking which underlines some of the debate about the role of women in Iranian society and presents clear evidence of the active role of women and their media in the struggle for full citizenship and equal rights. It begins by a brief review of the women's press prior to the 1979 revolution. By locating the struggle for women's rights in the wider context of broader social transformation, it provides ample evidence of how the history of the women's press is intertwined with the history of Iran itself and the history of the Iranian press in particular. It examines different stages within the broader struggle, from the Constitutional Revolution in 1906 to the movement for the nationalization of oil in the 1950s and media activities prior to 1979. The chapter then moves on to assess the gender debate immediately after the revolution, the existence of clear contradictions between the ideology of the new state and the realities of modern Iran, and points out the diversity within the women's movement and their media. The final section of this chapter explores the role of Iran's new women's press in the country's growing gender awareness movement. Setting women's decisive role in the post-1997 reform movement in context, it considers the wider impact of the women's press and journalists, and their resilience in the face of successive clampdowns on the reformist media.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S PRESS BEFORE 1979

The history of debates about gender equality and the boundaries between public and private cannot be separated from the broader history of the struggle for democratic rights in Iran. Similarly, the history of the women's press cannot be separated from the broader history of the development of the press in Iran which, as we have seen already, has experienced periods of great expansion as well as of fierce control. The emergence of a women's press was an important outcome of political and social transformation at the beginning of the 20th century. Such transformation brought with it the birth of urban mass politics and women's activism (Keddi, 2000).

The first-ever woman's publication in Iran was launched over 90 years ago, some 60 years after the introduction of the press. Prior to that there were a number of educated, middle-class women who did contribute regularly to the 'general' press, in some cases under pseudonyms or usually no

names at all. The Constitutional Revolution (1906–1910) and the concern for law, rights, and equality all increased the visibility of women in public life and expanded the role that women played in public culture and especially print culture. Women's specialist publications emerged as a result of new openings during the Constitutional Revolution in parallel with the establishment of new schools, associations, and public spaces dealing, debating, and raising awareness among Iranian women (Bagherian, 1992; Kayhani, 1993; Massoudi, 1998). According to one study, between 1907 and 1913 more than 60 schools for girls and a number of women's organizations were created in Tehran (Kayhani, 2002:67).

During this period eight women's publications emerged. The first of these publications was an eight-page weekly titled *Danesh* (Knowledge) and edited by a woman activist, Dr Kahal. *Danesh* lasted for less than a year, and only 30 issues of it were published. A year after the closure of the first women's publication, a new fortnightly pictorial entitled *Shukofeh* (Blossom) was launched. Edited by Mozin Al-Saltaneh, the founder of the *Mazininah* School, the publication lasted for years and finally folded with the outbreak of the First World War and the beginning of a new political turmoil in Iran. The first-ever publication to use the word 'women' in its title was published in 1919. *Zaban-e Zanan* (Women's Tongue), under the editorship of Sedigheh Dolatabadi, was originally launched as a four-page fortnightly in the city of Isfahan. The paper later switched to weekly publication and after encountering a number of problems moved to Tehran and continued publication in a magazine format (Kayhani, 1993). In many ways, Dolatabadi is a representative of many female activists in this period. In the early years of the 20th century she was active in opening schools, publishing, and writing, was educated in Paris, and represented the Society of Patriotic Women at the 1926 congress of the International Alliance for Women's Suffrage in Paris (Najmabadi, 2000).

In 1920 two more publications joined the already blossoming and expanding titles. The licence for *Alam-e Nesvan* (Women's Universe) was held by Navabeh Khanum Safavi. It was printed in 38 pages once every two months and lasted for 13 years. In the same year another activist, Shanaz Azad, launched *Name-h Banovan* (Ladies' Letter), a fortnightly publication that carried the slogan 'Women are the first teachers of men.' A more controversial publication was the monthly *Jahan-e Zanan* (Women's World) which originally launched in the holy city of Mashhad under the editorship of Fakhr Afagh Parsa and only managed to print four issues; after a six-month delay the fifth and final edition reappeared in Tehran. Sadre-Hashemi (1985:181–185) has argued that the publication of the final edition of *Jahan-e Zanan* in Tehran created a storm. The publication that was designed to educate women and introduce them to their potential roles as well as to the history of the women's struggle and its heroes was denounced as anti-religious. The editor and her husband were duly regarded as dangerous and were exiled to the city of Arak. She thus became the first woman editor to be punished for her journalistic activity.

Two more publications emerged in the years after the Constitutional Revolution. A magazine entitled *Jameyat Nesvan-e Vatankhah-e Iran* (Society of Patriotic Women of Iran) was published monthly and lasted for three years. *Nesvan-e Shargh* (Women of the East) a fortnightly local publication was printed in the city of Bandar Pahlavi.

These publications played a major role in bringing previously 'private' matters into the public domain and spreading knowledge among Iranian women, since they covered topics in the literature, history, culture, and politics of Iran as well as about Europe and the rest of the world. Many of these titles were set up with the help and aid of male activists with female editors and contributors, usually the wives, daughters, or sisters of well-established and respected political figures of the time. In some respects these publications were more like a family business. The main issue to note is that from the early days women were not just mere 'observers' of events or 'victims' of the social transformation, but active interpreters of events and influential agents in the process. The women's press was a platform in which such interpretations and interventions were carried out. They were, not 'private' teachers, but effective 'public' intellectuals.

After the collapse of the Qajar dynasty and the establishment of the Pahlavi regime there was a downturn in the liveliness of print culture in general and the women's press in particular. For more than a decade only two women's titles were published, the already mentioned *Ladies' Letter*,

Table 8.1 Women's Press between the Constitutional Revolution and the Establishment of the Pahlavi Era.

Title	*Editor*	*Launched*	*Period of Publication*	*Place of Publication*
Knowledge	Kahal	1910	Weekly/ irregular	Tehran
Blossom	Al-Saltaneh	1913	Fortnightly	Tehran
Women's Tongue	Dolatabadi	1919	Fortnightly	Isfahan
Ladies' Letter	Azad	1920	Fortnightly	Tehran
Women's Universe	Safavi	1920	Every two months	Tehran
Women's World	Parsa	1921	Fortnightly	Mashhad-Tehran
Patriotic Women of Iran	Eskandari	1923	Irregular	Tehran
Women of the East	Zarabi	1925	Fortnightly	Bandar Pahlavi

Source: Massoudi, 1998:58.

and *Dokhtaran-e Iran* (Daughters of Iran). Bagherian (1992:21) also mentions a daily *Aftab-e Shargh* (Eastern Sun), edited by Narjes Amouzegar, among the few titles that were published in this period.

As Najmabadi (2000) suggests the main concerns of activists in this period were women's education and the reform of marriage and the divorce law. The women's movement was a diverse and a divided one on issues such as veiling. According to her, in the pages of *Shukofeh*

> . . . some writers, such as Shahnaz Azad and Shams Kasma'I, wrote in favor of veiling, while others, including the owner and editor of the journal, Muzayyan al-Saltanah, argued strongly against it. In other words, advocating or opposing veiling was not the straightforward marker of modernity versus antimodernity that it later became. Within the ranks of women's rights activists themselves there was a divergence on this issue that had not translated itself into antagonistic positions of one camp marking the other as antimodern, antireform, or traditionalist. (2000:36)

The 1940s brought a new wave of optimism and a renewed interest in journalism. The political crisis and conditions paved the way for a new generation and in some respects a more radical press. Three major forces in contemporary Iran (religious, nationalist, and socialist) all had a strong presence in publishing. What has been called 'the second wave of women's press' (Kayhani, 1994) lasted from 1941 through the popular movement for oil nationalization led by Dr Mosadegh that sent the British packing and led to the Shah's deposition, only to have him re-instated on the crest of a CIA-led coup in 1953. This was a golden age of the press: 373 publications, of which 70 were anti-Mosadegh, were published during the oil nationalization movement and included many women's titles. Among these was *Alam-e zanan* (Universe of Women), a monthly magazine published by the Office of Publishing and Publicity of the British embassy in Tehran. *Rastakhiz-e Iran* (Resurrection of Iran), a family-run daily published in Tehran, initially devoted 3 of its 12 pages to women's issues, although it later reduced its size and its coverage of women.

Left-wing organizations played a major role in this period. Their calls for justice, equality, and freedom in a society ravaged by centuries of despotic rule and poverty attracted massive support and sympathy. The Tudeh Party (official Communist party of Iran) published *Bidari-e Ma* (Our Awakening), edited by Zahra Eskandari, which hit the newsstands in the summer of 1945 with the slogan of 'We also have some rights in this house'. A monthly publication, it was affiliated to the Women's Organization of the *Tudeh Party* and lasted for only a few months. *Jahan-e Zanan* (World of Women), edited by the woman activist Najm el-Hajiah Hoshmand, developed into a weekly publication and was an official organ of the Women's Organization of the Tudeh Party. It was published until the coup and reappeared after the 1979

Revolution. Other titles included the weekly *Zan-e Emrouz* (Woman of Today); a monthly magazine entitled *Banu* (Lady); *Neday-e Zan* (Woman's Proclamation); *Nezhat*; *Hoghogh-e Zanan* (Women's Rights), and *Jahan-e Taban* (Shining World). It is important to note that in 1952 alone, prior to the CIA-led coup, the number of women involved in the press exceeded the number of women who were active in this field in the first eleven years of the Islamic Republic (Bagherian, 1992).

With the re-instatement of the Shah and the overthrow of the Mosadegh government all political and cultural organizations came under attack, and many political parties as well as their organs and numerous other publications were banned. It would take another revolution to bring back those glory days of a free press, in which the women's press also flourished. From the mid-1950s to 1979 only a handful of publications were allowed in the market. A number of women still continued to work as journalists, editors, managing directors, photographers, and so on. But most were either employed in specialist/scientific publications affiliated to different ministries, or by official women's groups linked to the ruling elite. Specialist publications had a low circulation and targeted a niche readership. The official organs of the ruling groups, despite carrying some useful material, were mouthpieces of the regime and had little respect.

Two big publishing firms in Iran slowly came to dominate the market during this period, with rival titles in fields such as youth, sports, children, and their women's magazines were important titles in their stable. *Etell'at-e Banovan* (Ladies' *Etell'at*) was first published by the press firm *Etell'at* in 1957. Its pages were filled with gossip, celebrity news, portraits of royal families, cookery, health and beauty, and housekeeping. This weekly magazine was published until 1979 and then ceased publication for almost two years. It was re-launched in 1981 under the editorship of Zahra Rahnavard, one of the most prominent Muslim women after 1979 and wife of Prime Minister Mousavi between 1981–1988 (Kayhani, 1993).

The other big firm, *Kayhan*, launched its women's title only in 1964 when *Zan-e Rouz* (Today's Woman) was published as a colour weekly. The licence holder was Moustafa Mesbah-Zadeh; his wife Fourough managed the magazine, but it had a male editor. It soon overtook its main rival and became the most popular magazine in Iran. More than half of its pages were covered with adverts and pictures; it avoided politics and devoted most of its pages to cooking, health and beauty, family, gossip, and beauty contests in Iran and around the world. Its news pages were devoted to the royal family, foreign visitors especially famous women to Iran, and occasionally ran some serious articles on changes in family law (Ardalan, 1999). Its politics matched the policies of the Pahlavi regime. During the increased guerrilla activities of left-wing groups in the early 1970s in Iran, the regime started to discredit Marxism and to neutralize religious groups by portraying itself as Islamic. The magazine pages therefore reported on the Shah and his family visiting holy cities, and produced articles on

changing Islamic fashions that could take the place of the *chadoor* (long veil) (Ardalan, 1999:51). By this time the polarization of Iran into haves and have-nots and the duality of Iranian culture, divided into a highly westernized elite with access to the public sphere and all that was regarded 'modern', and a dissatisfied working class, the rural poor, newly arrived into the big cities and marginalized in shantytowns, as well as bazaaries with traditional and strong links to the clergy, was very evident.

In the heat of the 1979 Revolution the magazine made a u-turn, became critical of the Pahlavi regime's policies, and denounced all role models that had been promoted in previous years as inauthentic, corrupt, and commercial. Only 23 issues of the new *Zan-e Rouz* were published immediately after the Revolution. It ceased publication in 1979, and a fully Islamicized version reappeared in the summer of 1980.

WOMEN, ISLAM, AND PUBLIC LIFE UNDER THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

Women were active in many ways during the revolutionary period, such as in demonstrations, in university debates, and in Islamic reading groups. The absence of rights for women in Islamic countries is usually taken as the most solid example of Islam's incompatibility with modernity. The conventional image of Muslim women needs no extensive introduction: veiled, faceless, and subordinate. The superiority of men to women in Islamic *Shari'a* is an indisputable fact. Patriarchy, however, is not particular to Islam or a reason to put forward the arguments for 'Islamic Exceptionalism'. Islam is no different from other major traditional religions that take for granted the superiority of men over women and protect the institutions of patriarchy; indeed, the similarities in the holy texts are far more than the differences.

The idea of gender equality (regarded as an inherent aspect of 'European values') is not a god-given truth divorced from space and time. The demand for equality can only be born with the social awakening of women themselves. It is precisely for this reason that Islam *per se* and other traditional religions cannot promote this idea. Yet, if in Western societies women (and men) have managed to crack the walls of patriarchy, why cannot they do it in Islamic societies? This is the question that many have been asking in Iran, and that has been the subject of an intense debate for a number of years, most recently within the women's press. Indeed, under pressure from the spreading women's movement, many dogmatic Islamists have argued that Islam, unlike other religions, accepts gender equality in matters of 'spirit and intellect'. The pressures are so intense that an arch-conservative such as Ayatollah Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Republic, was forced to say that Islam rejects any differences between men and women in the field of growth and development of the spirit and intellect, and also in the

field of social activity' (see Center for Cultural and International Studies, 2000, Chapter VII).

In the case of Iran the issues of women's rights and their roles in public life have for a number of years been debated in such a context. Interestingly enough, both secular and Muslim activists inside and outside Iran have put Islam at the centre of the debate, and Islam has been regarded as the main, if not the sole, reason for the condition of women's lives in Islamic countries. Arguments by secular feminists about the lack of women's rights, the cultural relativism of the apologists, and advocacy of the essential cultural differences between Iran and other countries with regard to the status of women have all been explained in terms of ideology (Poya, 1999; Moghissi, 1999). Such an approach, especially the focus on the exclusionary nature of the patriarchal policies of the Islamic Republic, overlooks the possibilities of resistance and, more importantly, it isolates ideology from social and economic developments. One of the important characteristics of any ideology is its elastic nature. Put simply, faced with the hard realities of lived experience, ideologies stretch to fit social conditions. The case of the programme for the Islamization of all aspects of public and private life in Iran is a good example. What specifically informs the debate about gender and Islam in Iran and elsewhere is the fear of contamination of feminism with religion.

> Perhaps more than any other socio-political and cultural issues of contention, women's rights issue—as the expressions clothes of modernity and clothes of civilization best narrate it—became markers of secularism of modernity. Feminism became a screen category (a veil) occluding a historical process by which one kind of modernity was fashioned through the expulsion of Islam onto the beyond of modernity, where backwardness and religion became conflated as secularism's abject other. (Najmabadi, 2000: 40–41)

It is important to point out, as Gole (1999) has done in her examination of Turkey, that there is a clear contrast between the emergence of the public sphere in Europe and the Middle East.

> Whereas in Western European history the public sphere emerged as a liberal bourgeois sphere, with women (and the working class) initially excluded and thus also excluded from the definition of the universal citizen, in the Turkish mode of modernization women's visibility and citizenship rights endorsed the existence of the public sphere (1997:63).

Such endorsement is not just limited to Kemalist Feminism, but visible in the history of the region in general and Iran in particular.

The Islamic Republic's Constitution does not recognize the equality of both sexes; indeed it denies women equal rights. The Constitution itself

was part of a wholehearted attack on women's rights and an important aspect of the overall policy of exclusion of women from public life. In the first few years of the Islamic Republic many of the rights that women had gained under the Pahlavis were taken back. The segregation of the sexes in public spaces; overt sexual discrimination; compulsory *hijab*; the exclusion of women from a number of professions and directing them to work mainly as teachers in girls' schools, nurses, and secretaries; barring them from work as judges; reinforcing patriarchal policies in terms of divorce, guardianship of children, and lowering the age of marriage for girls were among measures used to purify women and society and bring back the 'glorious' tradition of what was perceived to be the true Islam. Women were accorded high respect, but only as mothers, daughters, and wives. The future of the next generation as well as the future of the Islamic government was in their hands, and therefore women could not, under any circumstances, put a foot wrong. The overt violation of women rights, as in the case of other aspects of human rights, was done in the name of indigenous culture, self-reliance, individual emancipation, and an end to all forms of domination of one human being or a country over another. As one activist has argued, cultural invasion is seen from a patriarchal point of view; the talk of cultural invasion exists only where there are women (Ahmadi-Khorasani, 2001:166). Historically the 'woman question' has been a central concern for diverse contending social forces, and they 'are frequently taken as emblems of cultural integrity, so that defending beleaguered cultures becomes equated with preserving traditional forms of femininity, especially as these are manifest in traditional female dress and practices of marriage and sexuality' (Jagger, cited in Tohidi, 2002:854).

The contradiction at the heart of the Islamic Republic, and the difficulties in amalgamating '*Shari'a* with electricity' are hazardous. Implementing such policies has proved extremely difficult. The brave resistance and struggle of the women in Iran has provided another obstacle, an issue which is usually neglected at the expense of an attempt to highlight the ideological foundations of the repressive and patriarchal rules of the Islamic Republic. Schirazi (1998) has noted three problems. Firstly, the Islamists themselves had to encourage women to take up the professions thought to be suitable for females. Secondly, the measures have provoked the persistent opposition of modern women who, at great risk to themselves, refuse to conform to the moral conceptions of the conservative Islamists. The outward sign of this opposition is in the manner in which they attempt to evade the compulsory wearing of the veil so that while they do not dare to appear in public with no veil at all, they wear their scarf in such a way that their protest is obvious. But the third point is also the most problematic:

> Thirdly, it is important to note the contradictory effect that has come from the hierocracy's politicisation of women who otherwise held traditional attitudes. In contrast to the conservative quietist clergy who

> condemn the very appearance of women in public, the ruling Islamists quickly realized during the revolution that they could exploit for their own political ends the social importance of traditionalist women. But this presupposed that such women were snatched from their narrow social role and brought into the politically active social environment. Their inclusion in demonstrations, their active support in times of war, their mobilization as the guardians of morality, their votes in elections are regularly used by the regime to achieve its goals. (1998:141–143)

It was their mobilization and active participation that forced Khomeini to change his stance on women's role in public life. One of the major incidents that had led to confrontation between Khomeini and the Shah was the regime's decision to grant voting rights to Iranian women in 1963. Notwithstanding the fact that during dictatorships, the right to vote is almost meaningless, Khomeini objected in principle to a woman's right to be elected or to elect, and in a telegram to the Shah, Khomeini had accused him of total disregard for Islam and *Ulema*. Khomeini was exiled soon after, but after his triumphant return, and 16 years after condemning the Pahlavi dynasty for granting women's political rights, he stated that 'Women have the right to intervene in politics. It is their duty . . . Islam is a political religion. In Islam, everything, even prayer, is political' (cited in Kian, 1997:76).

Thus, in contrast to the conservative thinking of the *Ulema*, the revolutionary rhetoric and the Islamists need to expand their support base had actually paved the way for the participation of a large number of women in politics. The politicization of these women and their increased role in public life changed their horizons. Their access to education, political institutions, and public domains which had been generally closed to them influenced them immensely and made them aware of the contradictions and the existing legal and moral limits to the wider participation of women. Once on the street as members of the revolutionary *umma*, once instrumental in the war, it was hard for the regime to persuade them to go back to their traditional roles and lives. The politicization of women who were previously excluded from the public sphere raised their expectations of themselves, their families, and the republic which they helped to build and consolidate. So what was originally sought to help to crush the secular, middle-class women's movement in Iran became an important force in exposing the limits of *Shari'a* in modern Iran.

The specific mode of empowerment through the Islamism project has engendered the public sphere, but through this, women necessarily quit the traditional roles 'assigned' to them. Access to the public sphere and participation in public life makes pursuit of social and political engagement a matter of personal choice and as such brings about the conflict with the 'collective' interest of the *umma*. After the crushing defeat of the secular opposition in the immediate post-revolutionary period, the women's movement has remained the only visible alternative, and it has regained a new

momentum after the end of the war with Iraq. To illustrate the above paradox and to show that the conditions of women in Iran cannot be simply explained in terms of ideology, in particular Islam, it is important also to look at some of the major changes that facilitated the increased participation of Iranian women in the public sphere.

Education

Women's education in Iran is yet another manifestation of continuing modernization and the rapid march of modernity. The aforementioned conflict between Islamization and the gendered nature of the public sphere, between the 'ideal' model of womanhood (Islamic and modest) and a possible alternative, is clearly visible in female education. Mehran suggests that the educational experience of women since 1979 has been marked by contradiction.

> On the one hand, one witnesses a significant increase in female enrollment and completion rates at every educational level, a reduced gender gap in primary and secondary schooling, and an increase in the rate of university acceptance and enrollment among women. On the other hand, postrevolutionary educational policy is characterized by the banning of coeducation, the compulsory veiling of female students beginning at age 6, explicit gender stereotyping in school textbooks, and guiding female students toward feminine specializations deemed appropriate for women. (2003:270)

Between 1956 and 1996 female literacy grew from 7.3 per cent to 74.2 per cent, an important development which has made its deep mark on political and social life in Iran. A parallel pattern can be observed in higher education. In the 1995–1996 academic year over 38 per cent of the student population were women. The number of female graduates from Iranian universities has increased from 3,051 (1969–1970) to 47,323 (1995–1996).[1] During the 1999–2000 academic year, 53 per cent of the applicants accepted at state universities were women. If we add to these over 200,000 female students who graduate from high school it becomes clear that the government needs to create 250,000 new jobs for women every year (Barzegar, 1999). The growing demands for a free press and for a diverse range of cultural products is partly a result of a more general social transformation and growth in educational standards, especially for women.

Such transformation has happened despite an early, and in some respects still continuing, attempt to impose gender segregation in education. Just four months after the collapse of the Pahlavi dynasty in February 1979, the new ministry of education banned co-education, and many university courses were announced as unsuitable for women. In 1980, when the conflict between the student movements and secular opposition and the Islamic

Republic first reached boiling point, all higher education institutions were closed as a result of what was dubbed the 'Cultural Revolution'. The use of Tehran University as a place to stage Friday Prayers, and the attempt to Islamicize the universities, were important parts of a general plan to rid Iran of all modern, secular, and 'inauthentic' culture and to make all that was 'profane' into 'holy'. After the re-opening of universities in 1984, new measures were introduced, among them new criteria for female students. Not only did all students have to admit belief in one of the recognized religions in the Republic's Constitution and provide sound proof of having no prior affiliation with 'anti-government' and anti-Islamic parties, but women also had to accept further discrimination. Many were excluded from scientific courses. A year after the re-opening of universities, the Iranian Parliament passed a law which banned single women from studying abroad, justified by the claim that it would protect them from the corrupting influence of Western values; again, 'cultural invasion' and danger did not apply to men. Nevertheless, women took up all the possible opportunities, and always did well and often better than their male counterparts. The opening of the all-female Alzahra University as well as the establishment of the private Azad (Free) University paved the way for wider participation of women and opened up new opportunities. The ban on single women studying abroad was finally lifted after more than a decade of bitter struggle when the Iranian Parliament passed a law in September 2000 which allowed single women to apply for government grants to continue their studies outside Iran. It was third time lucky as two previous *Majlis* had rejected the bill. By the 2002–2003 academic year women made up 63 per cent of university entrants, although their subsequent employment rate was only 11 per cent.[2]

Employment

Employment has been another crucial site of struggle and change in Iran since 1979 and especially after the end of war with Iraq. In 1976, the entire employed female workforce was less than 14 per cent. This dropped to 8 per cent and dropped even further immediately after the Revolution when many women were forced to retire, were sacked, regarded as unsuitable for the job they were doing, or, in the case of traditionalist women, took voluntary retirement. Immediately after the revolution, the Islamic regime actively pursued the Islamization of society, and the segregation of the sexes in public life was an important part of this policy. Changes in family law, especially the reversal of the Family Law of 1967, deprived women of their hard-earned rights. The Islamic Republic Constitution clearly stated that the Revolution and the Islamic government would free women from 'multifaceted foreign exploitation' and that they 'shall regain their true identity and human rights' within the family as the fundamental unit of society. All female judges were sacked. Many nurseries in factories were closed down.

Men regained their 'right' to polygamy, to being able to prohibit their wives and daughters from paid employment, as well as unconditional rights to divorce and custody of children (Afshar, 2001; Poya, 1999). This situation got worse as the expensive war with Iraq began to take its toll on an economy already in crisis, swallowing the already limited resources.

However, the sexual apartheid policy of the regime met with resistance. Under Islamic rule, female doctors, teachers, and carers had to attend female students, children, and patients. As the crisis began to bite harder many households could simply not survive with only one income, and women needed to work. As more lives were lost in the war, many women became heads of households. For all these reasons, the government simply had to allow the continued presence of women in paid employment. Thus, despite the rhetoric of 'Islamic Economy' in the Constitution which aims at the 'fulfillment of the material needs of man', Iran continued to be part of world capitalism, and increasingly continued the modernization policies of the Shah. The early rhetoric was gradually shelved as the Islamic Republic was faced with the harsh realities of economic and social crisis.

The end of the war with Iraq and the phase of 'reconstruction' signaled further liberalization of policy. The 'structural adjustment' policy and privatization arrived together with World Bank loans in 1991 and 1994, and so too did new changes in family law. Contraception and abortion, previously denounced as un-Islamic, were now promoted to slow down one of the biggest population growth rates in the world. Such changes were made partly as the result of vigorous campaigns by women activists and women's media.

There is no consensus as to whether the actual number of women in paid employment has declined since 1979. Studies of comparative statistical data by Moghadam (1988, 1998) and Poya (1999) have argued that the policy of the state to abolish women's labour has not been successful and that the number of women workers employed by state ministries—especially health and education—and in private enterprise has not only not fallen, but actually shows a relative increase. While the number of active women decreased from over 10 per cent in 1976–1977 to 6 per cent in the 1980s, data shows that it increased again to over 8 per cent in 1991 and increased further to 18 per cent in 1993. Some of these findings have been disputed by Moghissi (1998) who suggests that there are clear methodological problems and omissions in such analysis. Afshar (1997) also argued that even in the public sector, traditionally the largest employer of women, the number of women workers has fallen in comparison to the pre-revolutionary period, based on 1986 census data. International figures provided by the World Development Indicator do not show any relative decline of female employment in the 1980s, and the percentage of female employment in such figures is higher than it is in the national census (Bahramitash, 2003).

As Keddi (2000) suggests, the census in Iran, as is the case in many developing countries, fails to take into account women's work even when it

produces income. Especially in rural areas women's contributions (including working on the land, attending to animals, and so on) to the rural economy and family income is immense. Iranian women in the north do produce what is usually regarded as the Iranian staple diet of rice; and the carpet industry relies heavily, if not entirely, upon female labour, including that of very young girls[3] (Poya, 1999). In addition to the contribution of a large number of working-class women to the economy, many middle-class women have made their mark in middle-class professions such as the art and culture industries, medicine, law, as well as running small businesses.

Much of the dispute among researchers in this respect is linked to the debate over the impact and influence of 'Islamic Feminists' which I will return to later. Essentially, the central issue is that powerful Islamic ideology was counter-balanced by the exigencies of war, economic growth, and the demand for skilled labour, and that women's mobilization and growing political participation is a central part of this complex process. In Iran as in many other countries of the global South, the percentage of female labour has increased as a result of the rapid liberalization and privatization of the economy, but the side effects of such policies, including income disparity, rising prices of basic goods, and serious cuts in public services, have hit female workers the hardest. In such a climate the increase in female employment is not equal to women's empowerment.

GENDER, POLITICS, AND MEDIA SINCE THE REVOLUTION

In terms of women's participation in politics, the post-revolutionary period can be divided into four distinct phases (Kian, 1996; Poya, 1999; Mir-Hosseini, 1999, 2002; Afshar, 2002).

- the revolutionary period of 1979 to 1981 in which the visible secular opposition played a major role but was finally repressed;
- the war period between 1981–1988 when the actual process of Islamization was carried out under the guidance of Khomeini;
- the period of construction marked by the end of the war, Khomeini's death, and intensification of factional conflicts within the regime and marginalization of the 'radical' wing;
- the rise of a new gender-conscious movement in Iran resulting in the victory of Khatami; and finally the post-1997 period.

During the revolutionary upheaval of 1979 a large number of women's organizations and groups appeared all over the country. Women who participated in demonstrations and played a major part in ending the Royal rule gathered in various organizations with Nationalist, Islamist, and Leftist tendencies. The biggest Islamic organization to emerge in this period

was the *Women's Society of the Islamic Revolution*, which gradually took over the previous official and legal organization, Women's Organization of Iran, which had been established in the 1960s and had been led by the Shah's sister. The new organization did not last long since the government refused to provide a budget, but many of its well-known members set up other organizations. Zahra Rahnavard, the wife of a future Prime Minister, took over the role of editing *Etell'at-e Banovan* (Ladies' *Etell'at)* and changed its title to *Rah-e Zaynab* (Zaynab's Path). She played a role in the Islamification of the *Etell'at* firm in this period (Tabari & Yeganeh, 1982). Azam Taleghani, a political prisoner under the Shah and the daughter of a key and respected cleric, Ayatollah Taleghani, set up the Islamic Institute of Women and launched the monthly *Payam-e Hajar* (Hagar's Message) (Poya, 1999; Mir-Hosseini, 1999, 2002). She was among the first Islamist women to call for a radical re-interpretation of Islamic law. One of the key and central concepts within Islamic movements has been *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning or/and interpretation). More prominent in *Shia* than *Sunni* Islam it has been used effectively by reformists in Iran to push forward arguments for the modern reading and interpretation of Islamic principles and texts in a way that is more appropriate for modern Muslim societies, in tune with the realities of modern issues and problems. The battle between different factions in Iran since 1979 and especially after 1997 has also revolved around this concept and its conflict with yet another concept, *Taqlid* (emulation).

Some of the biggest women's organizations, however, were part of the secular opposition. Wider access to education and public life had provided a platform for expression for many middle-class women in Iran and in general secular left-wing organizations were far more attractive to these women. Many of these had entered organized and clandestine politics before the revolution. According to Abrahamian (1982), of 341 fallen activists between 1971 and 1977, 39 were women. Women's involvement in leftist organizations continued on a much larger scale after 1979.

The first women's demonstration occurred on March 8, 1979, International Women's Day, triggered by Khomeini's revisions of family law and imposition of *hijab*. The National Union of Women was then established and produced its own journal, *Barabari* (Equality) a bi-weekly publication, replaced after just three weeks by a monthly magazine, *Zan dar Mobarezeh* (Women in Struggle). It was affiliated to the biggest left-wing organization of the time, Sazeman-e Fadayan-e Khalgh. Most of the existing left-wing organizations spawned their own women's sections and papers. *Sepideh Sorkh* (Red Dawn) was the organ of the women's section of the Maoist Communist Party of Workers and Peasants; *Bidari-e Zan* (Woman's Awakening) was the organ of another pro-China organization; *Rahaie-e Zan* (Emancipation of Woman) was the product of another communist organization, and the women's organization of the Union of Iranian Communists produced *Zanan-e Mobarez* (Militant Women). In

addition to these publications, experienced female members of left wing organizations were among the high-ranking activists. According to Shahidian (1997) important organs of Sazeman-e Fadayan-e Khalgh, such as Tehran Workers' Committee and *Kar* (Labour) newspaper were under women's supervision between 1981 and 1986. The veil offered women activists a disguise from the police.

The war period, unlike the first, was marked by the clear absence of any independent women's movement, and by the passage of major anti-women legislation. After the collapse of the early consensus of the broad anti-Shah alliances and the growing isolation of the Islamist-nationalist groups, the state came to rely more on grassroots support, including women. Their support, however, was not rewarded as a call for the full participation of women in public life was rejected and justified by reference to the circumstances and problems created by war. This period saw a massive campaign to raise the profile of women as mothers and wives, a campaign in which state-sponsored television and cinema played crucial roles (Kian, 1997). The few women parliamentarians shared the same view as their male counterparts; since all were associated with their well-known husbands or fathers, they were part of the established elite and the occasional cry for raising 'women's issues' was not met by enthusiasm. All except one had only elementary and religious education, and anyway, as Table 8.2 indicates, there was a sharp decrease in the number of women candidates.

The end of war with Iraq and Khomeini's death marked the beginning of a new phase, the Second Republic. The gender debate, which had resurfaced and contributed to the lifting of the some of restrictions with regard

Table 8.2 The Number of Candidates and Elected Parliamentarians in Iran.

	1st Majlis 1979–83	*2nd Majlis 1983–87*	*3rd Majlis 1987–91*	*4th Majlis 1991–96*	*5th Majlis 1996–00*	*6th Majlis 2000–04*
Total candidates	3,694	1,592	1,999	3,223	5,366	6,853
Men	3,628	1,564	1,962	3,152	5,046	6,340
Women	66	28	37	81	320	5,13
Women as % of total	1.79	1.76	1.85	2.51	5.96	7.49
Elected men	95	118	176	133	131	262
Elected women	4	4	3	9	14	12
Women as % of total	4.04	3.28	1.68	6.34	10.53	4.38

Source: Compiled from www.iranwomen.org/zanan/charts/politics/majlis.

to subjects that women were allowed to study at university became prominent. Family planning became official policy in 1988. The divorce law was amended and women judges were allowed back in court, if only in advisory capacities in 1992. In 1988 the state established the Social and Cultural Council of Women to encourage further participation of women in the social and economic sphere. The Council of Women soon began to produce its own quarterly publication *Faslnameh*. The Office of Women's Affairs, part of the new look presidential office, was created.

Segregation still remained an issue as did the compulsory *hijab*, which has come under attack more vigorously in recent years. A new wave of Islamic reformism as well as calls for a more radical re-thinking and re-reading of Islam arrived in newly established cultural and political journals.[4] Gender was to become one of the hotly contested areas. The new wave of optimism as well as the necessity of change after the war encouraged more participation in politics among certain groups. As a result more women stood as candidates for election, and more were elected. Of the 81 female candidates for 4th *Majlis*, 9 were elected. The figure increased to 320 candidates in the 1996 election of which 14 were elected. The 2000 election signaled a marginal decline on both counts, only 12 deputies out of 262 candidates, but this had more to do with the further polarization of the reformist movement of the late 1990s. In addition to the changes in the number of women deputies, there were other distinct changes. The average age was lower, there were for the first time in 1992 women representatives outside the capital city, and more had formal education and university degrees. The women representatives included a surgeon, a gynecologist, and women trained in French literature, planning, Islamic philosophy, health, and engineering (Kian, 1997; Afshar, 2002). As part of the increased pressure and wider political participation, more women also stood for local council elections in 1999, and 1,120 were elected. All respective parliaments have been a battleground and a site of conflict over the 'woman question' in the Islamic Republic. All together the government began to pay more attention to the issues raised by women activists, and in the 1990s adding women advisors to different state institutions became the norm. In the 1990s the President of the time created, as mentioned before, a new organization as part of the office of the President. After the landslide victory of Khatami in 1997, many ministries took on women advisors. Khatami himself chose Massoumeh Ebtekar, the editor of *Farzanh*, as the Vice-President in charge of environmental affairs; Azam Nouri was selected as deputy minister by the then-Culture Minister Mohajerani, and the interior Minister Abdollah Nouri, another well-known reformist and editor of the now-defunct *Khordad*, selected Zahra Shojai, a professor at Al-Zahra women's university, as Director-General of women's affairs (Moghadam, 2002). The women's press, or to be precise some of them, have played an important role in forcing gender to the top of the agenda.

WOMEN'S PRESS AND ISLAMIC FEMINISM

Nowhere is the exposure of religion to 'modernity' so evident and publicized as in the case of the press. Changes in the political processes under the Islamic Republic and debate about 'native' solutions to gender issues have often been linked to the women's press in Iran. They are part of a wider movement that surfaced immediately after the war and Khomeini's death, a movement for a modernist reading of Islam. A wide ranges of studies on gender issues in Iran in recent years have been more or less studies of the women's press (Kian, 1997; Afshar, 1996, 2002; Gheytanchi, 2001; Afray, 1997, Mir-Hosseini, 1999, 2002). The key debate which has created a great controversy and even a rift among Iranian secular feminists is whether Islam is compatible with feminism and if the gender consciousness movement and campaigns for changes in the law can be regarded as a feminist movement per se. Mir-Hosseini (1996) clearly thinks so, while Mojab (2001) and Moghissi (1998) find the whole term misleading and inaccurate and criticize those who do so of falling into the trap of cultural relativism and backing away from the ideal of feminism.

At the theoretical level the choice for feminists needs not be between the two supposedly contradictory approaches of either the demonization of Islam or approval of Islamism. They are not 'as contradictory as they appear. They are different faces of the same essentializing and dehistoricizing of Muslim culture' (Winter, 2001:11). Religions are not just about text, or a group of texts that can be read in different ways. They are also a specific set of economic, social, and cultural structures. Islam is no exception. If it cannot be regarded as responsible for all social ills, it cannot be regarded as the remedy either. Insofar as the call for the re-interpretation of the 'codes' and 'text' is concerned, the central issue in feminist debate in Iran is not about religion as a private and personal choice. The amalgamation of the state and Islam in Iran is one of the major obstacles for women's liberation. No amount of 'radical' interpretation (*tafsir*) will change that. In recent years most attention has been paid to emergent Islamic voices (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2000; Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006), which begs the question of why analysis of intellectual debate and activities should be narrowed to only Islamic intellectuals. Yet such a narrow framing of gender debate in Iran not only ignored and brushed aside the variations of feminist ideas and the strong contribution of secular movements and organizations, but equally significant, and as Dabashi reminds us, in assessing Soroush's writings and arguments, it 'actually intensified the further Islamization of Iranian political culture by presenting the principal theoretical challenge to the Islamic Republic in a deeply cultivated Islamic language' (2007:192).

Moghadam (2002), while critical of Islamic reformists who insist that changes will only arrive as a result of the 'modernization' of Islam and seek 'religious' solutions, takes issue with secular feminists, including Moghissi, for offering a narrow definition of feminism. She argues:

> Feminism is a theoretical perspective and a practice that criticizes social and gender inequalities, aims at women's empowerment, and seeks to transform knowledge-and in some interpretations, to transform socio-economic structures, political power, and international relations. Women and not religion should be at the centre of that theory and practice. It is not possible to defend as feminist the view that women can attain equal status only in the context of Islam. This is a fundamentalist view, not one compatible with feminism. And yet, around the world there will be different strategies that women will pursue towards empowerment and transformation. We are still grappling with understanding and theorizing those diverse political strategies. (Moghadam, 2002:1165)

Keddi (2000) suggests that the current disputes between Iranian feminists derive from severe ideological struggle on the one hand, and the possibility of cooperation among disparate groups on the other. In her view the issues of the possibility of a gender-egalitarian Islam are mixed with the possibility of collaboration of diverse groups/activists for legal and political reforms in favour of women. Undoubtedly there has been some potential common ground for secular feminists and Muslim women activists in Iran. These includes the urgent need for putting gender on top of the political agenda; reform of family law; provision of equal opportunities for female students at all levels of education; expanded occupational choices for women; improved working conditions of women workers; and even increasingly the taboo subject of *hijab*. There is no reason to believe, as Rostami Povey (2001) rightly suggests, that there should be no collaboration between diverse groups with varied interests. One of course needs not to accept the arguments of those who advocate a more gender sensitive Islam—or any other religion for that matter—in order to collaborate with them on issues such as providing assistance for working mothers or setting up refuges for runaway girls.

Most of those identified as 'Islamic feminists' are publishers, editors, journalists, university professors, and activists. The term interestingly enough, and as Moghadam (2002) suggests, was coined outside the country by those who have lived in exile or were unable to return until very recently. Many of the activists in Iran to whom the label attaches have hesitated and sometimes, as in the case of Shahla Sherkat, refused to call themselves feminist. Nevertheless, studies of 'Islamic Feminism' in Iran and women's struggles against patriarchy do focus and indeed chart the progress and provide articles and arguments within the pages of the women's press. Among the most celebrated examples of the new women's presses are *Zanan* (Women) and *Farzaneh* (Wise). Since *Zanan* has been by far the most influential of the new women presses in recent years, it is appropriate to start with it.

Zanan was first published in January–February 1992. It has been regarded as the twin sister of its more influential and now defunct brother

Kian (Farhadpour, 2000). There are solid reasons for this assumption. The main cadres of the two monthly publications embarked on their 'modernist Islamist' project in the 1980s. Those who became involved and published these two papers had previously worked for two magazines published by the *Kayhan* firm. Shalah Sherkat, editor of *Zanan*, was the editor of *Zan-e Rouz* in 1980s; while those who later published *Kian* used to run *Kayhan-e Farhangi* (Cultural Kayhan). Many of the early ideas and polemics of modernist Islamists were published first in these two papers, at the time when the current President Khatami was the managing director of the firm[5]. The early articles by the religious intellectual Soroush, who has been called the Luther of Islam, and articles by other influential thinkers as well as conservative responses were all printed there. If *Kayhan-e Farhanghi* could not publish these articles, *Zan-e Rouz* provided the space, and vice versa. These intellectuals, activists, and journalists were among the early circle of the reformist group in Iran (Ghouchani, 2000).

As Managing Director, Shahla Sherkat rapidly transformed *Zan-e Rouz*. Its cookery and knitting pages were replaced with hard-hitting analysis and commentary about physical punishment in schools, the problems of widows, workers, domestic violence, domestic and unpaid work, women's employment and participation in public life, and critical analysis of the portrayal of women in state-controlled television programmes. After a critical review of the renowned filmmaker Mohesen Makhmalbaf appeared in the daily *Kayhan,* written by its managing director, albeit under a pseudoname, Sherkat published a rebuttal by the Iranian filmmaker. In response to this act by Sherkat, the firm gave her three options: to accept regular control of the content of the magazine by the firm; to create an editorial board; or to abolish the role of managing director. Sherkat refused, correctly seeing this as a ploy to 'cleanse' (*paksazi*) the staff in the *Kayhan* firm (Ardalan, 1999). A large number of staff involved in the two publications as well as others were sacked or left. *Kayhan*-e *Farhangi* stopped publishing for a year and a half, and *Zan-e Rouz* continued under a new editor.

So *Zanan* was born in January–February 1992. The editorial of the first issue stated that the magazine had a clear mission of debating gender-related issues in four areas: religion, culture, law, and education. *Zanan* was to target a wider readership and therefore to create a sound financial footing, and by doing so was to provide financial backing and subsidy for the other and more intellectually oriented title, *Kian*. With a circulation of nearly 120,000 of mostly urban, educated readers (Gheytanchi, 2001:563), it became the most popular women's publication in Iran. The magazine tried to offer alternative readings of Qur'an and *Sharia* in the modern context. The contested areas have ranged from the issue of equality between men and women in Islam, family law, political participation, individual freedom, employment, and civil law. Men wrote many of the articles in the early stages, but what is most celebrated is the way in which *Zanan* paved the way and opened up a space for contributions by secular writers. Two

of its best-known contributors were Mehrangiz Kar, a legal attorney, and Shirin Ebadi, a jurist and 2003 Noble Peace Prize winner. In *Zanan* these writers managed to explain legal issues to a wider readership, and *inter alia* exposed the patriarchal and hypocritical nature of the existing law on education, marriage, divorce, custody of children, and employment. They thus paved the way for more informed challenges to the ruling conservatives.

The now-infamous Berlin conference in April 2000 created a massive controversy, especially when Mehrangiz Kar and publisher Shahla Lahiji were arrested on return to Tehran: in their speeches at the conference each had attacked the repressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It put in doubt the cooperation between the two sets of women activists—modernizing Islamic feminists and secularists—that had seemed so successful and creative. It provoked a conservative backlash, aired and supported by Iranian television and some conservative titles including *Kayhan*, and ended the collaboration between many secular and Muslim activists.

Sherkat, the editor of *Zanan,* was among the participants in Berlin but avoided arrest and made no efforts to support the cause of the two women and others.

In an interview with the Iranian feminist website, *badjense* (disreputable), Kar said:

> We always sensed there was a gap. It simply became very clear after Berlin that the reformists will never take any risks for us, pay any price for us, or defend us. They used us. Especially after our imprisonment, we felt this with our body and our soul. [6]

Publication of a book on women's experiences in Berlin, *Zanan-e Berlin* (Farhadpour, 2000) has been regarded as an important step towards renewing that partnership (Rostami Povey, 2001). The desire to remain on newsstands while a large number of publications have been banned proved to be the determining factor for Sherkat. In 2001, in an interview with a foreign website and in response to why the magazine has survived for ten years, she said:

> One reason is that *Zanan* is a women's magazine and is not a political magazine. The magazines and newspapers that were closed down may have had a strong political side, and in dealing with political issues of the day they ended up with problems. I prefer for *Zanan* magazine to remain a trade and women's magazine that can solve women's problems that are not necessarily political.[7]

Such an argument ignores the fact that almost no aspect of the 'woman question' in Iran is entirely out of the realm of 'politics'. This represents a major retreat from the original mission statements of *Zanan*, announced more than a decade ago. The magazine however played a significant role in

the reform movement and was closed down in January 2008 by the authorities for painting a 'dark picture' of Iran.

Another celebrated title is *Farzaneh*. It began publishing in the autumn of 1993 as a bi-annual journal. The licence holder was Massoumeh Ebtakar and its editor-in-chief Mahbobeh Abbas-Gholizadeh, both members of the Women Studies Centre in Tehran which was headed by another influential woman, Monir Gorji. Prior to the publication of *Farzaneh*, Abbas-Gholizadeh had been a member of the editorial board of *Zan-e Rouz*, and later of *Kayhan*. She was famous, at least among secular Iranian feminists outside Iran, for writing a series of five articles for *Zan-e Rouz* in which she examined the impact of feminism and the possibility of Islamic feminism. With an educational background in religious philosophy, she triggered some of the early debates about Islam and gender. As Ardalan (2000a) reports, in order to attract the attention of the traditional thinkers, the content and the tone of articles were openly critical of feminism although they were still far removed from the official stand that saw feminism as a disease and a corrupting western influence. *Farzaneh*'s editorial board was quickly invited by the President's advisor on women's affairs to help them with future planning. They clearly saw themselves, as revealed by Ardalan's analysis (ibid.) more as *karshenas* (experts) than as feminists or even activists. *Farzaneh* was never a campaigning journal, but a platform to engage in theoretical/theological debate and a bridge between policy-makers and experts/intellectuals, as well as traditional thinkers and modernists. Publishing in Farsi and English the journal clearly wanted to appeal to 'experts' both inside and outside Iran.

The first-ever daily paper devoted to women, *Zan* (Woman) was launched in August 1998 by Faezeh Hashemi, daughter of the former President Rafsanjani and a member of parliament in her own right. *Zan* managed in its short life to create considerable controversy by raising some key issues at the height of conflict between different factions of the ruling elite. Her high profile allowed the paper to challenge the conservatives on a number of fronts. It campaigned for women to stand as candidates for the Assembly of Experts (*Majlis Khebreghan*) that contributed to a decision by ten women to put forward their names as candidates; all of whom were rejected. From early on *Zan* attracted the wrath of the conservative faction. It was banned for two weeks in January 1999 for 'assaulting' the security forces and was fined 250,000 *tomans*. The actual charge, as Shadi Sadr (2000) has explained, was unlawful since the article of the Penal Code that was used by the judge to condemn *Zan* only applies to 'real persons' and not general categories such as 'security forces'. *Zan* was finally ordered to cease publication on April 3, 1999, for publishing an interview with the widow of the Shah, Farah Diba, although this had already been reprinted by conservative dailies and gone 'un-noticed', as well as for publishing a satirical cartoon criticizing the *Ghesas* (Retribution) law. According to the 'eye for an eye' policy of *ghesas* law, the blood money for a murdered woman is only half of a man's. The cartoon showed a gunman pointing at a couple and the man shouts 'Kill her, she is cheaper!'

The short-lived *Zan* had developed a 40,000 circulation. Hashemi also helped to create women's committees in a number of cities aiming for a better organization of women activists and to create sustained pressures on local governments. But in the 2000 parliamentary election, despite having had the second highest number of votes in Tehran in the previous election, she lost her seat. Her association with her father who had become, more than ever, a hate figure even among Islamists, cost her dearly.

The groups and publications labeled 'Islamic Feminist' are not exactly the same, do not share the same ideas and certainly do not have the same approach. The three different types that Ahmadi-Khorasani (2001:158–165) usefully analyzes are distinguished mainly by their involvement with the state apparatus. The first are those independent writers such as Shirin Ebadi who have no links with any factions of the ruling elite. The second groups are those who have close, tight-knitted links with the structure of the state and that part of the political elite who know only too well that repression of societal needs is impossible, and who certainly do not want to disregard international pressure. *Zan* clearly belonged to this group and focused primarily on issues of central concern to the international community, such as stoning, human rights abuses, and elections. The third type represented by *Zanan* is not independent, but no longer has the same level of access to the centre of power as the second type. Thus, *Zanan* focused more on the urgent needs of Iranian women and was instrumental in gathering support for the reformists among Iranian women and forcing some legislative reforms. Thus, despite some clear openings, establishing an independent publication is still extremely difficult, especially for women. A focus on these publications, while important, does not reflect the current diversity in the women's press.

The conservative's response to such publications also needs greater attention. Not only has the mainstream conservative press maintained attacks on the reformist press, they also established three women's publications to challenge the modernist interpretation of Islam. *Payam-e Zan* (Woman's Message), a monthly, is the attempt of the Qum religious seminary to engage more systematically with the gender-conscious movements of the recent years. Unlike other titles, it is run, managed, and edited by men, although occasionally the 'Sisters Section' of the Office of Islamic Propaganda is mentioned as helpers next to the editorial board (Ardalan, 2000b). The aims of this publication include increasing awareness of what they regard as 'Islamic knowledge' among Iranian women, and awareness of moral and socio-political issues; consolidating family relationships; introducing the true Islamic female role models, and so on. *Payam-e Zan* is strongly against any kind of feminism and regularly publishes articles on women's place in the Qur'an, in Islam, women from the point of view of religious thinkers (conservatives) and Imam (Khomeini), women in families, and the importance of *hijab* (veil).

Neda (Proclamation), first published in the spring of 1990, is a quarterly journal firmly in the conservative camp and the organ of the Women's Society of the Islamic Republic of Iran.[8] Its licence holder is Zahra Mustafavi,

the daughter of Khomeini, and its current editor is Fereshteh Arabi, his granddaughter (Ardalan, 1999b). Much of the early issues were devoted to the life of Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic Revolution. It is not a specifically women's journal, although since 1997 the number of articles that deal with women's issues have increased. It supported Khatami in the 1997 presidential election and certainly is in favour of debating gender issues, but it is broadly critical of the idea of the equality between men and women and has tried, perhaps because of its association with Khomeini, to remain uncontroversial and follow the letter of the Islamic Republic. *Neda* is an interesting example of trends among many Islamic regime supporters towards a more 'moderate' line. Having failed to realize some of their aims inside and outside Iran, including to establish Fatima's birthday (daughter of Prophet Mohammed) as woman's day in all Islamic countries, they shifted their tone and policies in order to be able to expand their agenda at global and national levels. According to Tohidi (2002:863), their activity during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 is a good example. There, they organized a workshop entitled 'The Life and Status of the Virgin Marry'. Tohidi argues the intention of the workshop was to propose the 'Virgin Mary' as the global symbolic model for women and men, and reflected a Catholic–Muslim alliance led by the Vatican against feminists. Interestingly enough, in 1994 *Farzaneh* had published an article entitled 'A Study of the Life and Status of the Virgin Mary (Maryam), the Mother of Christ, in *Holy Qur'an* the Chosen Woman'.[9]

Another publication that is not often recognized by commentators is *Faslnameh* (Quarterly) a quarterly journal published by the Women's Socio-Cultural Counci (WSCC)l. WSCC began its activities in June 1988 with two main objectives: to create a collection of information and statistics on women as well as to contribute to the study and assessment of women's socio-cultural status in Iran. The organ of the Council was launched in 1998, and its website[10] has a large collection of data. Managed by Mehri Sueezi and edited by Akram Hosseini, WSCC's journal is not distributed widely and not well recognized. This publication is anti-feminist and blames the 'translation movement' (the translation of western books into Farsi) for introducing and spreading feminism. It condemns even 'Islamic feminism' as foreign and a ploy to find a way to realize feminist ideas and goals in Iran. Identifying the enemies of Islam, criticizing their views and neutralizing their impact were listed among the major duties of this publication (Ardalan, 2001). In 2001, however, the journal changed its name to *Ketab-e Zanan* (Women's Book), jumped on the bandwagon, and turned its attention to women's demands in Iran and towards improving women's condition in society. Only 13 years after the formation of the centre, this organization that was originally developed to play a role in policy-making and planning for women in Iran finally began to turn its attention to women.

There exist a number of secular titles as well. The most famous and influential of such limited titles was *Jens-e Dovom* (Second Sex). By far the most

informed and radical of the women's press in Iran, it was launched in 1998 as a periodical anthology and edited by Noushin Ahmadi-Khorasani, the director of the publishing house *Nashr-e Towseh*. She managed to bring together a wide range of articles by Iranian feminists including from those who live in exile. It had carried special reports from the Beijing Women's Conference; extensive coverage of the infamous Berlin conference with a special focus on the two activists, Lahiji and Kar; regular reports and articles on women workers, female literature, the representation of women in Iranian literature and poetry, domestic violence as well as regional and international updates, and analysis of the experience of Iranian families outside Iran. Ahmadi-Khorasani's articles have also appeared in a number of intellectual journals. *Jens-e Dovom* ceased publication in 2001, since it only had the licence for 10 issues (applied generally to publications which appear in book format), but Ahmadi-Khorasani launched a new quarterly journal, *Fasl-e Zanan* (Women's Season) in May 2002. Ahmadi-Khorasani has also published Women's Calendar (*Salnameh-e Zanan*), the first issue of which was heavily criticized by conservative papers and vigilantes (Tohidi, 2002).

WOMEN, MEDIA, AND JOURNALISM: NUMBERS, ISSUES, AND PROBLEM

Noushin Ahmadi-Khorasani and Shahla Lahiji are among the most prolific and active women publishers in Iran. Lahiji founded *Roshangaran* (The Enlighteners) in 1984, which has since published over 200 books. According to Poya (1999) there are 47 women publishers in Iran, but in a recent interview with *Badjens,*[11] Lahiji estimates that there are over 400 women publishers, of whom over half are currently active and support themselves. These publishers have played a major role in introducing Iranian women to a range of ideas, issues, and analysis and have been massively influential in re-writing women into Iranian history.[12]

A glance at the number of women journalists also indicates an impressive improvement. In contrast to 50 women journalists in 1972, in 1997 there were 400 women journalists working for various publications, their proportion increasing from 2.5 per cent in 1972 to 14 per cent in 25 years. They are younger than their predecessors but have better educations. The average number of journalists with a university degree in the profession is 35 per cent, while this figure is 50 per cent among female journalists.

However, the gains made by Iranian women need to be put in perspective. Women publishers still face huge disadvantages and self-censorship, and going for the safe subject is a norm rather than an exception. The number of women filmmakers has certainly increased, but 10 directors compared with over 450 male directors are not significant. Similar problems can be seen in print journalism. Of 23 women's publications, which have been allowed to publish since 1979, only 9 have survived, and most belong to different factions of the ruling elite.

Table 8.3 Number of Women Proprietors and Editors in Iran in 2000.

Licence Holders		*Managing editors*		*Editors*	
Total	*Women*	*Total*	*Women*	*Total*	*Women*
1,512	65	1,512	97	1,517	50

Source: Ministry of Culture and Guidance, available from www.iranwomen.org

There are few female editors or sectional editors; most female reporters are assigned to cover 'private' issues and rarely get a chance to interview high-ranking state officials; most women journalists do their work at the base of the pyramid of the press. Many well-known reformist proprietors and editors in Iran have clearly stated that they do not wish to live with a female journalist, since the working conditions, odd hours of work, and so on prevents them from attending to their 'domestic duties' properly (Ardalan, 1999a; Shah-Rokni, 1998). Despite the fact that disciplines such as mass communications, humanities, and social sciences are more popular among female undergraduates, and the number of female students in subjects such as journalism and public relations is almost three times more than that of men, women still find it harder to secure a job. While the emergence of a number of exciting new titles in 1998 redressed the balanced slightly, after their closure, many women journalists lost their jobs.

In some respects the enforced *hijab* in Iran might have encouraged many 'traditional' women who felt alienated under the previous regime to participate in public life, and there might have been less harassment. Fascinatingly, sometimes the veil has proved an advantage for women journalists. Lily Farhadpour, recalling her experiences during the period of crackdown on the press in 2000, explains that when the police arrived to seal the publications office, the women journalists could take materials and documents from their offices by claiming that they were 'personal belongings'. 'In the end, the men had to leave everything there, but the women could take stuff with them. The official couldn't touch the women, they couldn't do anything about it.'[13]

CONCLUSION

One certainly cannot question the gains by women in Iran or the improvement in women's conditions in certain aspects of public life. Such changes, however, cannot be understood in terms of 'Islam'. Islam is certainly an aspect of Iranian culture. It has been for over 12 centuries. But it is only one aspect, and Islamists have by no means a monopoly on Iranian culture nor are they the only influential agents in societal development; indeed they themselves have been affected by social transformation. Contemporary

Iran, as this chapter has shown, is also strongly influenced by nationalist sentiment as well as by a strong secular culture. The fascination with all that is modern pre-dates the invention of satellite, television, or even radio. The noticeable achievements of Iranian women in the face of the Islamic Republic owes much more to this modern, secular tradition than to that of 'Islamic Feminism'.

There are clear obstacles in front of women's full participation in public life. According to the Islamic Republic's Constitution, being a man is among the conditions for the post of Supreme Leader (*Velayat Faghih*). In the case of the presidency, the label *'rojal'* has been tabled as one of the conditions, and there is an intense debate as to whether this means 'male' or merely indicates a 'political figure' and is gender neutral. So far there has been only one woman in the Assembly of Experts. There are no women in two of the most powerful state institutions: the Council of Guardian and the Expediency Discernment Council of the System. No woman has ever been elected as the speaker of Islamic Assembly (*Majlis*) or as the head of the judiciary. And so far the Council of Guardians has rejected all women candidates for presidency. There have been no female ministers, and women have only been appointed to different ministries as 'advisors', not as decision- or policy-makers.

There is nothing new about modernist re-interpretations of Islam, and certainly nothing new in the issue of gender being at the centre of disputes for more open readings of *Shari'a*. However, the debate over gender and the position of women in Iran is a reflection of major dissatisfaction with the Islamic Republic and opposition to its authoritarian rule. As such this satisfaction and its consequences might indicate the possibility of some reform under authoritarian rule (Kazemi, 2000), but the debates over the possibility of a merger between Islam (or any religion for that matter) and feminism, especially in Iran where religion is promoted as an armory of the state, distract attention from the economic, social, and cultural conditions that have mobilized wide sections of Iranian society against the Islamization of public and private life. Islamic feminism in its different varieties is an attempt to justify 'gender-sensitive' Islam as the solution. But the point is not whether Islam is less able to adopt and adjust its 'codes' than any other religion. In the case of Iran, we are not faced with a set of codes and rules on moral, ethical, or spiritual matters, but a political system which gives legitimacy to an oppressive set of social relations. This is a crucial point which seems to have been neglected in debates about gender relations in Iran, and indeed within feminist debates about the relevance of 'universal values' (Vuola, 2002).

This is not to take anything away from the gains and improvements which have been made in the past few years. Even the contribution of reformist women, who try to stretch the limits of *Shari'a*, and call for female Imams, should not be disregarded altogether. Exposure to the dynamics of modernity, the harsh realities of war, economic and political crisis, and increased

interaction and familiarity with global debates and issues have all made a major impact on Islamist women (Tohidi, 2002). As Gole suggests, the more Islamist women

> gain public visibility and realize educational and professional ambitions, the more they find themselves in conflict with the traditions or interpretations that prescribe maternal and material duties as their foremost moral obligations; this forces them to develop new definitions of self. (1997:75)

Clearly in the pages of the women's press, by questioning the 'old', Islamist women have contributed to something 'new'. But this 'new' cannot be born of the current structure. What the conditions of the press, and in particular the women's press and gender relations tell us, is that 'Islam' cannot be tabled as the sole signifier in gender relations or the nature of communication in the country which still remains the only one to have witnessed an 'Islamic' revolution.

Conclusion

> The social roots of cultural vitality are variable, and often enigmatic–though not, we must believe, ultimately undecipherable. But they have to be explored differentially in each case, conjuncture by conjuncture, country by country.
>
> Perry Anderson

I have set out to examine the realities of Iranian media by providing a critique of essentialist and reductionist thinking which identifies 'tradition' as the only determining factor in development (or lack of it) of the Iranian press. I have explored various concepts and agencies, the rapid march of modernity, and have examined various aspects of the Iranian press by raising questions about how wider economic and political factors have determined the fate of the Iranian press since 1979. Three interrelated and intertwined themes have been central to my book: the critique of 'Islamic exceptionalism' with its epistemological nativism, which offers an all encompassing, never-changing, and uniform 'Islam' as the basis for realities of communication in the region; the role of state; continuity and change in Iranian media.

ISLAMIC EXCEPTIONALISM

The idea of 'Islamic Exceptionalism', and 'uniqueness', and the 'centrality' of religion in Muslim society and history are the pillars of Islamism. Among the proponents of the incompatibility of 'Islam' with modernity is the advocate of Islamic communication 'theory', Hamid Mowlana (1993, 1996), who has suggested that modernity is alien to and diametrically opposed to the fundamental principles and teaching of Islam and 'Islamic' polity that is founded on the *Qur'an*, the *Sunnah* (tradition), and the *Shari'a* (Islamic law). In this system, as I outlined in Chapter 1, there is no separation between public and private, religion and politics, spiritual and temporal powers. Unlike the state-nation model, in the Islamic state, sovereignty belongs not to the people but rests in God. The Islamic community also differs from Western notions of community. Here the Islamic community, *Umma* (community of faithful), is formed on the basis of shared belief in the unity of god, universe, and nature.

Mowlana presents the Islamic Republic of Iran as the ideal model of such a system. The Iranian Revolutionof 1979, in his view, was the revenge of 'tradition' on 'modernity' (Mowlana & Wilson, 1990). I argued that, contrary to Mowlana's claim, there is nothing 'unique' about such a proposal. Cultural nationalism, as Ahmad has argued, usually resonates with 'tradition', and by inverting the tradition/modernity dichotomy of the modernization school in an indigenous direction, advocates of such views suggest that 'tradition' is for the 'Third World' and is 'always better than modernity'. The implication of such reasoning, Ahmad continues, is 'that each 'nation' of the 'Third World' has a 'culture' and 'tradition', and that to speak from within that culture and tradition is itself an act of anti-imperialist resistance' (1992:9). I argued that notions such as 'Islam' and 'Muslim society' are problematic and have very little analytical use in explaining a wide range and diverse set of complicated and concrete examples that are gathered under the umbrella of 'Islam'. I also pointed out that it becomes even more problematic when the term is used to define a position within the global economy.

Furthermore, I stressed that such arguments over a divide in values and principles are based on a false assumption of a unified, ahistorical, and singular 'West' and 'East'. 'Western' history in the past two centuries has only partly been a history of liberalism and reason. The extension of a single 'Islamic' umbrella over heterogeneous and complex collections of histories and practices is a highly political one indeed. What is offered in this account is the same sense of uninterrupted history, a unified history of Islamic culture and identity, and an undifferentiated 'Muslim' mass. Advocates of Islamic exceptionalism manage to reproduce the same binary structure that they seek to challenge and succumb to the same problem and shortcomings that can be identified in Eurocentrism. In this scenario Orientalism is turned on its head, and the 'West' is constructed as Islam's 'other'. Such analysis not only racializes politics even further, by asserting some cultural legacies in the *whole* 'Muslim' world, it also supports a form of epistemological nativism that overlooks the very real common global trends in the operation of global capital: the transformation of the state, increased privatization of public resources, and a growing divide between the haves and have-nots. There is of course good reason for the claim of the 'universality of western values'. Not because of the superiority of the 'western' gene, but because capitalism, which first developed in the West, has reshaped the world in its own image, and the values it has generated are globally diffused. In the current environment, a critique of a hegemonic Eurocentrism will simply not do.

Islamism, as I have already argued, is a form of 'Third World' nationalism of old, which sees Muslim societies as a homogenous entity. The implication of this form of nationalism is twofold:

> The result at best is a naive relativism, which glosses over global communalities in the functioning of political economy and power, and

> asserts against universal ideas parochial values that lend themselves, so it seems, to purposes of social order and control. It is immune to critique from the outside, as a thoroughgoing relativism by definition rules out the outside as a source of significant knowledge. At its worst, epistemological nativism serves as an excuse for suppressing difference, as well as serving as a cover for legacies of oppression and exploitation. . . . Judging by available evidence of its spread around the globe, such epistemological nativism is perfectly consistent with—and abets—the globalisation of capital. (Dirlik, 2004:145)

I demonstrated the shortcoming of this epistemological nativism by providing an alternative narrative of the Iranian Revolution. In my examination of a number of texts I suggested that it was not 'Islamic aspiration' or the quest for 'tradition' or any other single idea/ideology that caused the revolutionary situation in Iran, or caused the radicalization of the movement. Rather it was a broader material context and major dissatisfaction by many classes that brought the movement which ended more than 50 years of Pahlavi's rule in Iran. The central Iranian state, which began the process of modernization and succeeded in turning Iran into a capitalist society, was disabled by giving way to clientelism and by its authoritarian form, which excluded not only the masses but also a large section of Iranian bourgeoisie. The Shah quite simply failed to expand its power and hegemony over all societal levels. The new state has tried to address some of these issues with little success. The formation of a Bonapartist state in Iran with Khomeini as its central pole was a response to the situation in Iran, and in many developing countries, that the capitalist class cannot exercise class domination through economic and ideological hegemony. The state in such situations acts as a mediator. The Islamic Republic more or less can be defined in such terms and the history of its development especially since the end of war with Iraq illustrates this point. In the same chapter (1) I also pointed out the diversity within the *Shi'a* school as well as the clerical establishment and pointed out how the combination of class forces and various political/economic interests have shaped and reshaped the state and its constitutions in favour of private capital. I did demonstrate through a number of examples that in the cases of 'clash' between *Shari'a* and capital the state has actively, throughout its history, ruled in favour of capital.

I examined Islamic exceptionalism further in Chapter 2 in relation to its application to communication theory. I located my arguments in the context of 'De-Westernizing' media theory and the call for the internationalization of our field, and what place, if any, recent particular 'theories' of media have in this debate. My view is that we need to expand our field of inquiry, that we need to overcome parochialism of the field and certainly one significant aspect of this necessary expansion is to look beyond Anglo-American examples and situations. I also pointed at the poor record of cultural studies in engagement with religion. It is in this context that we

have to take seriously, as well as seriously challenge, the idea of Islamic communication theory as advocated by Mowlana, Sardar, and Ayish. In my discussion I explained in some detail what is meant by 'Islamic communication' (as distinct from religion and media or even Islam and media in general), and I showed that the purpose of the 'Islamic' in Islamic communication theory is to present the perceived sharp contrast between the dominant, technology-dependent and centralized model of the 'West' to that of indigenous, oral, and community-based networks of communication of the 'East'.

I suggested that in discussion about 'peculiar' aspects of media in the region, and Iran in particular, some writers resort to the old Orientalist notion, produce the same binaristic compartmentalization of Muslim subjectivity into two familiar formations of either/or, and rather than dismantling Orientalism (which they present as their aim) do indeed preserve the division between the East and the West. I closely examined Hamid Mowlana's assessment of the nature of Iranian media and pointed out the shortcomings as well as lack of clear, detailed empirical evidence in his studies. I suggested that such studies and conceptualizations are 'idealist', ignore other variables (except Islam), overlook diversities in Islam, media and their forms, and models of control. Essentialist thinking about the non-existent singular, homogenous 'Muslim society' cannot provide adequate explanation of the realities of media in Iran.

STATE OF IRANIAN MEDIA, MEDIA, AND THE IRANIAN STATE

In my introduction I suggested that various paradigms in international communication have failed to address the significance of state, and this neglect has weakened our understanding and analysis of the media in general and the media in the global South. I argued that we need to pay attention to the role of the state, its transformations and reconfiguration, for it is impossible to fully comprehend the expansion, changes, and transformation of the media environment without clear engagement with the role that the state plays: not only in censoring the media, but also in expanding, regulating, subsidizing, and owning of the media in the global South. I was particularly interested in examining and assessing arguments which oppose political economy analysis that the state, capital, and class are central forces (and remain so) of actions with a wide range of impacts on social and cultural life. One of my key concerns was to go beyond modernization/liberal's sole focus on the state as a coercive and repressive agent. I suggested that while the state everywhere, Iran included, can be defined in terms of their monopoly over legitimate violence, this control and monopoly is attached to the struggle over the control of capital and symbolic violence (media and culture).

State plays multiple roles, and I did address these in various chapters. In my assessment of 'Islamic communication paradigm', I engaged with the centrality of culture (Islam) in this model in Chapter 2. In particular I argued and showed that Mowlana adheres to the simplistic notion that Muslim societies (and Islamic states) are monolithic and homogenous entities with ideally disciplined sacred structures and clear and irreversible visions. But contrary to Mowlana's assumption, it is not Islam that gives meaning to the state, but rather it is the coercive force of the state that makes a particular 'Islam' what it is in a particular national context. It is the state that imposes unity and coherence on culture and creates forced unity out of a whole set of complex practices, diversities, and inconsistencies. Mowlana, like other proponents of cultural and civilization essences, assume the global 'fault line' to be horizontal and between civilizations, instead of vertical and between social groups in massively polarized societies. As Bourdieu has argued, while it is true that 'cultures' are unifying, the state contributes to 'the unification of the cultural market by unifying all codes, linguistic, and juridical, and by effecting a homogenization of all forms of communication' (1999: 61). I pointed out that 'cultures', quite simply, are meaningless without the state, and their elevation into 'dominant' has everything to do with the state. I stressed that the much-fashionable assumption about the decline of nation-states in globalization theories neglects the very significant role that is still played by the state. While undoubtedly it is true that the weaker states in the global South have come under increasing pressure, we need to remember that the neo-liberal re-ordering of economy, and even the task of 'downsizing' the state, are carried on by states in particular national contexts. The stronger states of course can easily dictate their policy; the United States, for example, can decide if it wants to invade a country or not, regardless of what other members of the 'global community' think is the more appropriate line of action.

In my view the realities of the media in Iran suggests that rather than seeing the relation between state and religion in terms of theological (ideological) consideration of the *ulema*, we need to acknowledge crucial institutional interests of divided *ulema* and the continuing struggle to claim the monopoly of economic capital and the means of symbolic violence. These issues were initially addressed in Chapter 2 where I examined 'Islamic Communication'. But in other chapters I elaborated on this argument. Chapter 3 reviewed the pattern of ownership in the press market and outlined the role of the central Iranian state as the biggest (and the only) press 'baron' in the country. Chapters 4 and 5 outlined in detail the impact of factionalism on the press and the struggle for control of the newspaper market. In Chapter 4 I examined the nature of political communication in Iran, the intrinsic link between social movements and the press and the role that the Iranian state has played in suppressing such movements by silencing their organs. After a brief review of the struggle for the freedom of the press in Iran before 1979,

I outlined different stages in the history of the Islamic Republic and how the history of the press correlates with the broader pattern of political development in Iran with their fates intertwined. I suggested that within the entire history of the press in Iran one can only point at some short and dispersed periods in which the press were allowed to express issues and anxieties of various movements freely. In Chapter 5 I continued with my assessment of the relationship between state and the press with particular reference to the 'civil society' movement. I suggested that contrary to widely held assumptions about the reform movement and their press, the new political space that emerged after 1997 was inextricably linked with the state, and as the continuing struggle over the press demonstrates, the arena of competition among various social, economic, and regional interests. I stressed that 'civil society' very much depended on the state and did not last long, as the two pillars of Khatami's reform (the rule of law and civil society) crumbled in the face of the realities of Iran. I tried to locate the 'civil society' debate in a wider context of declining living standards which was a result of the liberalization of the economy. Taking issues with commentators who viewed the movement as a challenge mounted against the state by religious reformist intellectuals, I argued that in fact 'civil society' was overwhelmingly a Trojan horse used by private capital that has become one of the main challengers to state monopoly of key major industries including communication. Looking at the reform movement and their press (as agents of civil society), I demonstrated that neither reformist intellectuals and politicians or their publications were located outside the realm of the state. I argued that the 'civil society' perspectives, by focusing on the media-state relationship, not only turn a blind eye on the connection between the two, but also see the role of the media as only providing checks and balances on government and therefore ignore other forms of power in society. It is, therefore, not surprising that none appeared to have offered a substantial critique of the operation of private capital and inequality in access to resources.

Chapter 6 was concerned with a more recognized form of state intervention: policy. In this chapter I examined the place of Iranian media in the Constitution, various press law, and regulatory documents. I also examined the development of the Internet in Iran in the context of the expansion of the communication industries, and the state attempt to regulate 'cyberspace'. I suggested that the Iranian state's overwhelming definition of itself in terms of 'culture' and 'Cultural Revolution', bent of fomenting a collective identity based on 'faith' and 'tradition', have not (cannot) conceal the real cultural/political diversity that it initially wanted to undermine in a bid for the creation of a unified and homogenous culture and media environment. I suggested that this difficulty arises out of the existing contradiction enshrined in the structure and the Constitution of Iran. What cultural policies have existed in Iran, have always been a response to power relations within state and state and society. I suggested that the Iranian example demonstrates that states are seldom abstract or singular. There exists within the Iranian state

many contradictory institutions and units, policies, and both individual and institutional differences and interests. The combination of these elements means that different institutions of the state do come up with contradictory policies. The same dilemma is also highlighted in my assessment of Iranian broadcasting (Chapter 7), where despite having been organized according to a different set of rules (i.e., direct control by the Supreme Leader), it demonstrates a similar pattern of struggle for control. In fact the state of broadcasting shows the difficulties that the Islamic Republic has encountered in its attempt to mobilize support and political legitimacy in the clearest sense. IRIB is a symbol of the Islamic state, and the history of organization is also the history of contradiction, evolutions, and shifts of policies and emphasis in the Republic itself.

Chapter 8 brings together all of the key concerns and issues under discussion by offering a detailed case study of women's press in Iran. In the current rush to 'understand' and 'explain' Islam gender remains an explosive issue. In this chapter I have engaged with the two positions (Orientalism and Islamism) that see culture (Islam) as a sole determining factor in the 'woman question'. In this chapter I traced the contribution of women in Iranian history and examined their media in different stages of the history of press in Iran. I stressed that the history of the women's press is intertwined with the history of Iran in general and the history of Iranian press in particular. I also mapped out gender debates and women's participation in public life and argued how the sexual apartheid policies of the Islamic state had been challenged by the continuous and diverse women's movement, which has maintained the most visible challenge to the authority of the state throughout the history of the Islamic Republic.

In my study of the Iranian media and state I also highlighted the interaction between state, economy, and media. The existence of a 'state' implies the existence of 'class' (Wood, 1995), and as I have pointed out in various chapters adding the prefix 'Islamic' to state will not change this fact. In Chapter 2 I outlined how the Islamic state, despite its early promises to redistribute resources, to create a just society, to address the needs of the 'dispossessed', and to foster self-reliance, has actively embraced private capital. The process of privatization, as I argued in Chapters 1, 3, 5, and 7, which began immediately after the end of the war with Iraq, accelerated in the late 1990s, and the debate over 'civil society' overwhelmingly argued the case for further privatization and a better share of 'representation' for national bourgeoisie. Chapter 3 also examined the disparity and divide in access to the means of communication in the press market and suggested that in Iran, as elsewhere, access to communication resources is regulated, above all, by disposable income. All such factors, in my view, does not make the issues of media ownership in Iran and the global South redundant. And it is precisely this issue that explains the contradictory nature of the Islamic state which has tried to embrace privatization and private capital without

losing political control. This is not unique to Iran, and neither are the lessons that we might learn from the Iranian experience.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

My analysis of the state of Iranian media under the Islamic Republic, rather consciously, did go beyond the historical framework of the last quarter of a century. There are visible changes, and in many ways the Iran of the 2000s looks very different indeed. In the last 30 years Iran has witnessed a revolution and changed into a republic with its own written constitutions. In this period the state was engaged in a bloody war with neighbouring Iraq, has faced many crises and challenges including that of secular opposition in the early 1980s and the loss of its charismatic leader in 1989. During this period Iran has played host to around 4 million refugees from Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, while the number of Iranians who have fled the country since 1979 matches, if not exceeds, the number of refugees living in Iran. Demographically the country has changed too. Its population has almost doubled since 1979, and even more significantly a large proportion of the population (70%) are under the age of 30. Similarly there has been a clear and visible increase in urbanization and literacy; and access to higher education, despite closure of universities during the period of 'cultural revolution', is more widespread than before. In terms of media there are clear signs of expansion in the number of daily titles and periodicals as well as television channels. Access to media has also increased, and in the case of television we do have almost universal access. Indeed if there ever was a time to apply 'modernization' school recommendations to use media as a 'magic multiplier', surely this is it; unlike in the 1950s, media are widely available, and industrialization, urbanization, and literacy are not just aspirations but reality.

In Chapter 1 I examined the disintegration of the Pahlavi state. I argued that while there has been a clear transfer of power much of the broader material condition that led to revolution remains intact. Iran remains a rentier state and heavily reliant on oil export. Petty commodity production not only remains intact, it has continued to grow. The standard of living for the majority has continued to decline, and the gap between rich and poor has increased. There are clear elements of continuity in the political life of the country too. Iran at the end of the 20th century had a far more centralized state than before. In Chapter 2 and in relation to 'Islamic communication' I examined the religious networks and their communication channels in Iran in the 1970s as a way of comparing the power of 'traditional' channels to the state propaganda machine which was NIRT. In Chapter 3 I examined the underdevelopment of the Iranian press in historical context and suggested that the dependent development and specific mode of 'modernization', which relegated 'participation' in the political process as

not necessary, played a major role in the gap between requirements set by UNESCO and the realities of Iran. Chapter 4 also provided a historical review of the struggle for the freedom of the press in Iran and demonstrated beyond doubt clear elements of continuity in political communication. I especially highlighted the repetitive pattern of the entanglement of the press and social movements from 1906 onward and the role of clerical establishments in this process. My discussion of media policy in Iran (Chapter 6) also showed that despite years of transformation, the concerns and emphasis in terms of the control of communication channels have rarely changed. The press policy in particular demonstrates a clear element of continuity, and what the conservative clerical establishment were proposing in the 1990s was hardly unrecognizable from that which was offered by their heroes in 1910. Employing legislation from previous regimes to ban newspapers run by marginalized factions was another example.

Chapter 7 also warned against any rash decision about 'transformation' of broadcasting beyond recognition. The state remains in charge more than before. Indeed the control of broadcasting was a key aspect of the revision of the Constitution just before Khomeini's death and illustrates the significance of this body in the hand of an even more centralized state. There is still no access to broadcasting for 'outsiders', and as before television is used to humiliate and ridicule opponents. The Islamic Republic after so many years was facing the same problem as its predecessor: an inability to create a sense of unity and political legitimacy through television. My discussion of women's media in Iran (Chapter 8) outlined the continued and accelerated participation of women in public life. Indeed many of the regressive and repressive changes imposed by the Islamic state in its early years were overturned in the face of sustained campaign by women's activists. Even the contested compulsory *hijab* is not observed, and the state is unwilling and unable to enforce it.

The Iranian Revolution turned out to be one of the biggest disappointments of the 20th century. Achcar has suggested that the Iranian Revolution could be seen as 'a *permanent revolution in reverse*. Starting with the national democratic revolution, it could under proletarian leadership have "grown over" into a socialist transformation', but the leadership pushed it 'in the direction of a *reactionary regression'* (2004:57). The vibrant cultural and political atmosphere of a short *Bahar-e Azadi* (Spring of Freedom) in the first few months of 1979 was only a short breathing time for the Iranian people as the *new nobility* climbed on their shoulders to be carried off. Yet the history of the past two decades is not only one of repression, but of resistance. The 'plan' for the total Islamization of public and private life in Iran, from the very beginning, met with massive obstacles and has been continuously resisted.

Ironically, in the case of Iran (and perhaps elsewhere) two supposedly conflicting views, despite pretending otherwise, have far more in common. If the 'statist' approach of modernization theory was too simplistic and

its famous announcement of the 'passing of traditional society' too premature, its 'opposite', the announcement of the 'passing of modernity' is absurd and came far too late when modernity in Iran had reached the point of no return. Central to the Orientalist view is the perception of a timeless 'Islamic essence' in which everything reflects the same structure. The 'essence' for one, however, is the major obstacle prohibiting modernization, while for another it is the 'salvation'. One sees no salvation (modernity) outside of the Western model and experience, and the 'other' regards modernity (western values) as the major obstacle prohibiting the true 'salvation'. Modernity as Berman argues is

> either embraced with a blind and uncritical enthusiasm, or else condemned with neo-Olympian remoteness and contempt; in either case, it is conceived as a closed monolith, incapable of being shaped or changed by modern men. Open visions of modern life have been supplanted by closed ones, Both/And by Either/Or. (1983:24)

Islamism, as a political alternative in many countries especially Iran, is a truly modern movement and the continuation of the political process and struggle by other means. Like 'socialism' and 'Arabism' before it, it is a form of nationalist expression. It is not Islam *per se*, and it is not against modernity either. 'Its rejection of European cultural form', writes Zubaida, 'does not necessarily represent a rejection of modernity *per se*, but can be seen as a reconstruction of modernity according to Islamic models and motifs' (1993: 157). It cannot be regarded as a cause in recent developments in Iran or anywhere in the region. But equally it is a mistake, as the case of Iran illustrates, to see it as a cure. In Iran, the Islamist voyage towards *perfect Medina*, much like Christopher Columbus's disastrous journey towards China and the *new world*, has only led to (re) discovery of America.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In my discussion I have insisted on the significance of the Iranian example not because of its never-changing *essence* and its *unique* features, but for what it adds to our understanding of the operation of capital and the entanglement between capital, class, and the state and its impact on media. This is, in my view, the key to understanding the broader context and particular role and formation of the press in Iran. Any critical study of the Iranian media has to incorporate the broader material conditions and inevitably the state (in its whole and not the 'government') and class formation. This, as I have insisted throughout my discussion, is not to neglect 'religion' and 'religious institutions' and variations of Islamic aspirations and ideologies or to abandon 'theological' questions. Perhaps this is among one of the key reasons why the Iranian example differs to some extent from that of other

non-Muslim countries in the global South that have been subject to similar transformation. The study of Iranian media has to consider 'Islam', but it has to move beyond the essentialist thinking that proposes Islam (whatever it might mean in a different context) as the sole signifier in the realm of culture and communication. Furthermore, it has to scrutinize the exaggerated claims and shallow assessments of the relationship between religion and media, and carefully examine the broader context which makes religion 'residual', 'emergent', or 'dominant' at specific moments in history.

My critique of 'Islamic exceptionalism' in particular and 'regional exceptionalism' as a whole (as in the case of Africa, Asia, and Latin America) offers an alternative way to move beyond the severe dichotomy which, in my view, has blurred our understanding of Iran and the global South in general and mediated culture in particular. Such critical examinations of media environment might serve as one entry point to examine and understand modern societies and modern life in the global South. As I have shown, the emergence and development of the media in Iran was a specific historical process that accompanied the rise of 'modern society'. It is for this very reason that I have argued for a more historically informed analysis of the media environment in Iran and tried to avoid a media-centric approach. In so doing I have tried to critique ahistorical and casual understanding of the current context of the media, locate the key developments in their historical context, and point out not only the changes and transformations, but also continuity. Such emphasis is crucial especially at the time in which every development/incident is presented as a gate to a new and distinct 'epoch' and an indication of a clear break from the 'past'.

One of the key aspects of my discussion of media in Iran has been its focus on the role of the state. I have suggested that the central Iranian state has remained the principle agent for the accumulation of capital, but this role in Iran has depended on the constellation of class forces. I pointed out that the capitalist classes in Iran have not managed (under both regimes) to reproduce themselves through the mechanism of generating surplus, and therefore depends on the state. This dependency, as I discussed in my assessments of the media in Iran and the debate over civil society, is being vigorously contested and the dilemmas of the state in accommodating the interests of private capital, on the one hand, and the long-term future of the ruling clergy, on the other, remains a significant paradox. It is this reality and contradiction that makes the state not only the key agent of 'modernization', but also necessarily the source of all 'evil' and a direct instrument of class struggle. In my discussion of the role of the state, I consciously tried to move beyond the narrow liberal focus on the coercive role of the state, and highlight the complex nature of the state in the field of cultural production and development as facilitator, owner, regulator, as well as oppressor. This point is crucial in all countries (with little doubt), but even more acute in Iran in which the Islamic state from the very beginning has been pregnant with contradictory interests, policies, and aspirations.

Undoubtedly this topic needs our attention more than before, and we need to examine the constant and ongoing restructuring of global capitalism and the reconfiguration of national states and their role. But in my view a better understanding of the structure, nature, and role of the state have to be understood not in terms of the liberal understanding of the state as a simple 'repressive force' in the global South (which they clearly are), but as articulators and agents of capitalist development. This means that the issues of ownership, stratification, and control rather than being redundant, have to come to the center stage of our discussion of the media.

Notes

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. See for example his critical examinations of MIT's research programme, and in particular a passage in which he takes issue with Riesman's patriarchal analysis of the position of women in communication research: 'Riesman's assumption undoubtedly was true for some women in the above social and economic grouping, but he failed to qualify his statement by identifying the problem as rooted in the organizational power structure rather than in some feminine failing' (Mowlana, 1996:23). Gender, for some reason, is an amazingly absent category in his discussion of Islamic Communication Theory and Iranian communication system.
2. For more detailed discussion and critique of this edition see Sreberny-Mohammadi (1993).
3. This is certainly the case in Iran where capitalism depended on the state. The state's direct intervention in economy made it the source of all evil and a natural target for a broad coalition that brought down the monarchy.
4. There is an interesting passage in Ariel Dorfman's memoir (1998). He, who is particularly famous in our discipline for his rich, fascinating, and yet often criticized work, *How to Read Donald Duck* (1975), recalls how in 1963, hoping to get in touch directly with poor Chileans, he conceived the idea of *Universidad Movil para el Trabajador* (Mobile University for the Worker). The intention was to organize a week of educational activities in one of the ever-growing shantytowns around Santiago, each day of the week covering topics such as, 'What is Literature?', 'What is Chile?', 'What is History?', and so on. The communal leader of the shantytown was sceptical, but was finally overcome by the enthusiasm of young Ariel and his friends, and suggested that the key to success were the children: 'If the children come, so will their parents'. The young socialists took the advice and started their 'university' with a screening of Ariel's silent cartoons of *Mighty Mouse* to the packed audience in the town elementary school. The next day Dorfman received a distressed call from Miguel, who is in charge of 'What is Chile?'. The kids were stoning the school and threatening to burn it down unless the teachers showed *Mighty Mouse* again. Showing *Raton Aerodinamico* became part of the week's curriculum. Mighty Mouse had saved the day, again. Dorfman confesses that in the week he learned more about 'What is Chile?' than they did (1998:163–166).
5. See George Monbiot's article in the *Guardian*: 'What do we really want?' (available from http://www.guardian.co.uk/Columnists/Column/0,5673,781126,00.html) Monbiot does not romanticize poverty but he claims that people in Ethiopia smile more, express their affection better, and in general are much happier.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. See for example references to Muslim writers in Mowlana's work, and a rather interesting passage in the introduction of *The Passing of Modernity*: 'The book approaches these tasks through a combination of conceptual analyses, systematic reviews, and critical reconstructions of theories by such thinkers as Marx, Weber, Habermas, Foucault, Lyotard, Baudrillard, in the West or Ibn Khaldun, Khomeini, and Muthahari in other Cultures' (1990:xiii). Of these three writers 'in other cultures' two are from Iran, and are very recent for that matter.
2. This was by no means unique to Iran, and Khomeini certainly was not the first one to use this slogan. This was unmistakably a form of nationalism evident in much of the 'third world'. All of such forms of nationalism, however, as Ahmad has shown in his detailed critique of the 'Three World Theory', share three things: '(a) the idea of a tripartite division of the world, in which a 'Third' World is pitched against the combined (and increasingly converging) resources of the First and the Second; (b) the tendency, in each variant, to see this 'Third World', whether defined as Islamic or non-white or as non-industrialized, as a homogenous entity; and (c) a conception of a certain kind of transnationalism—achieved on the basis of religion, or racial differences, or presumably shared national poverties—as the determinate answer to the momentous changes currently taking place' (1992:310).
3. Mowlana of course hardly engages with such issues. His main target, as should be clear by the title of one of his books, is Lerner. Lerner's views are well known, and there is not much fun left in poking at him. Furthermore, Mowlana is by no mean the first writer to take issue with him. Many, and usually those associated with Marxism, have addressed the central problems in Lerner's works. (See for example Peter Golding, 1974.) Lerner equally came under attack by Weberian sociologists critical of the modernization school, for vulgarizing Weber's thesis, proceeding in psychological reductionist fashion, and not placing their findings in proper historical context (Rhodes, 1968; cited in Preston, 1996). Mowlana, ironically, has more in common with Lerner and modernization theory in his essentialist approach and understanding of Middle Eastern 'culture' and reducing the whole range of complex economic, political, and historical development to a vulgar question of 'attitudes'.
4. As Senghaas has stated, 'secularization does not—as often assumed—necessarily have to be identified with the French experience of exaggerated laicism. Secularization in the Islamic region could take the German experience as an example, or rather the Scandinavian or the British one (in the latter cases even state churches exist!). If already existing secular states are taken as empirical points of reference, then the pernicious image of 'ungodly secular state' produced by Islamists disappears' (2002:43). I will return to this subject later.
5. It is neither astonishing, nor a surprise, that only one page of *The Passing of Modernity* is devoted to explaining the work of Ibn Khaldun.
6. See for example Gellner's analysis of 'Muslim Society' (1983, 1992, 1996). For illuminating critique of his view see Zubaida (1995).
7. Temporary marriage is a contract entered into for a definite period, and as Keddi argues is another *Shi'a* practice which 'goes back to pre-Islamic Arabia and seems to have been condoned by the Prophet, though it was outlawed for Sunnis by the Caliph Omar. As in all marriages there is a payment to the woman and children are legitimate. It flourishes especially in pilgrimage centers where men may come alone. It is wrong to consider it prostitution, and it has uses besides satisfying men's sexual desires' (1991:8)

8. For more detailed examination of histories and different practices in Muslim countries see Hourani (1991), Ayubi (1991), and Khuri (1998).
9. Full English text of the Constitution is available on http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution.html
10. It is important to remember that one of the favourite candidates in the first presidential election (Jalal-al Din Farsi, The Islamic Republican Party candidate) was excluded from the list of candidates for the fact that his father was an Afghan and not an Iranian. No one within the ruling elite had contested his Islamic credentials or commitments to the Islamic Republic.
11. See Bucha (2002) and Roy (1993) for detailed account of the failure of Pan-Islamic programme of the Islamic Republic.
12. See Safari (1993) for more detailed discussion of how the right of clergy to rule Iran was discussed and legitimized in the Islamic Republic's Constitution of 1979.
13. This issue will be explored in more detail in Chapter 8.
14. In his analysis of the Iranian policy under Rafsanjani, Ehteshami argues that 'the leaders of the republic were preparing the way to return the economy to the domestic bourgeoisie and 'friendly' international capital. To whet the appetite of the latter the government raised the limit on foreign ownership from 35 per cent (established by the Shah's regime) to 49 per cent or more, thus allowing a virtual controlling interest in a project to foreign investor' (1995:208–209).
15. http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/business/story/2005/03/050318_he-ka-ecodiary.shtml
16. *Iran International 28*, March 2004:139.
17. *Daily Donya-Eqtesad*, March, 8, 2005:7.
18. Ibid.
19. http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. *Ulama* are central in Mowlana's analysis and model of society and communication. This is only one view within *Shi'a* tradition. A number of commentators, including Shariati, were influenced by European experiences, as well as by writers such as Fanon. His starting point in advocating Islamic polity was not a rejection of modern ideas, but insistence that all the modern concepts and doctrines were contained in a superior form in the *Qur'an*. He was a different thinker than Khomeini and Muthahari and was opposed to the clergy (Zubaida, 1993). His view certainly had an impact, but his version of *Shi'a* certainly did not match those of Khomeini or Muthahari (the other two writers that are quoted frequently by Mowlana). Mowlana should be aware that the assassination of Muthahari in 1979 by a small Islamic group called *Forgan* was done because he had criticized Shariati. The centre that was originally set up to collect and publish Dr Shariati's work was dissolved, and some of his most important works including *Allavid vs. safavid Shi'ism* have been banned (Richard,1995). In Mowlana's work, of course, there are no references to these developments and certainly not to one of Shariati's most important books.
2. I am grateful to Professor Kevin Robins for providing me with a copy of this article.
3. See the opening paragraphs of Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. These issues will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5.
2. Since the publication of Kamalipour's article the number of satellite television broadcasting channels in Farsi has increased even further. In 2005 there were no less than 20 channels competing for audiences and increasingly lucrative advertising revenue from business inside and outside Iran.
3. See http://www.Kayhannews.ir/nashriat.htm for for list of publications and some background history.
4. http://www.Ettela'at.com/
5. http://www.soroushpress.ir/en/aboutsoroush
6. http://www.farhang.gov.ir/4.htm
7. http://www.irna.ir/en/content/view/menu-240/id-24/lm-1/ls-3/
8. http://www.aqrazavi.org/astan/english/A007.htm
9. *Kayhan*, *Ettela'at*, and *Hamshahri* each cost 200 rials (2US cents) while the price of many 'independent' publications is usually 500 rials (5US cents). The gap in price is even bigger in the magazine market. The price of reformist *Kian* (4,000 rials) was 180 per cent more than *Kayhan Farhangi* (1,500 rials), which is published by the *Kayhan* firm.
10. http://eamar.sci.or.ir
11. The 'average' annual income of course suppresses the harsh realities of Iran even further by inflating real wages and obscuring the fact that many Iranian families are on incomes of less than US$50 per month.
12. www.ksajadi.com/IranLinks2.html
13. http://www.genderit.org/upload/ad6d215b74e2a8613f0cf5416c9f3865/A_Report_on_Internet_Access_in_Iran_2_.pdf
14. PPP, which stands for purchasing power parity, is 'a rate of exchange that accounts for price differences across countries, allowing international comparison of real output and incomes . . . PPPUS$1 has the same purchasing power in the domestic economy as $1 has in the United States' (ibid.).
15. HDR's figures are usually provided by national agencies and usually 'doctored'. It is very likely that the gap is even higher than what is admitted and submitted to the UN.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. More than 98 per cent of Iranian electorates voted in a referendum to establish the Islamic Republic held on April 1, 1979, immediately after the 'end' of revolution was announced.
2. The full text of the new Press Law was published in two parts in *Akhbar* (News) May 22 and 24, 2000.
3. http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2001/Iran_nov01/Iran_nov01.html#return
4. http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2001/Iran_nov01/Iran_nov01.html#return
5. Iran, May 9, cited in Iran Report: RFE/RL, www.rferl.org/iran-report
6. 'The End of Our Age' in the monthly *Hamshahri* January 2002:5–7.
7. For a full list of banned publications see Association of Iranian Journalists (2003).
8. Daily *Norouz*, Saturday May 5, 2001:6.
9. http://www.farhang.gov.ir/iran-media/iri.htm
10. www.cpj.org/Briefings/2001/Iran_june01.html
11. www.rsf.org.article.php3?id_article=1438
12. http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2004/02/040214_jb_election-roundup.shtml

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. The choice of words and clear references to European experience is nothing new in Iran, yet still interesting. For Mowlana prematurely argued: 'The French Revolution gave rise to the political and philosophical characteristics of modern secularism when it replaced the regime controlled by Christian Church. In contrast, The Islamic Revolution in Iran was the end of the secular monarchy promoting Western models of development and the rise of an Islamic state based on the authority of revelation and the Qur'an. Whereas the execution of Louis XVI symbolized the death of the sacred monarchy and the rise of secular polity in France, the removal of the Shah marked the death of the secular *taghut*, or oppressor, and the reappearance of spiritual and temporal power in Iran' (1993:17). One cannot help but to remember the Chou En-lai's sage response to the question about his assessment of the impact of French Revolution: 'It's too early to say.'
2. Main *Bonyads* are *Mostazafan* (Oppressed), *Shahid* (Martyer), *Kumiteh Imdad* (Relief Committee), and *15th Khordad*. The last one, in defiance of official attempts to revise Islamic Republic foreign policy, increased the reward for assassination of Salman Rushdie.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. The full text of the new Press Law was published in two parts in *Akhbar* (News) May 22 & 24, 2000.
2. Newspapers closed based on the latter and pre-revolution law include *Salam, Fath, Bamdad-e No, Arya, Arzesh, Aftab-e Emrouz, Payam-e Hajar, Asr-e Azadegan, Aban, Azad, Payam-e Azadi, Gozaresh-e Rouz, Akhbar-e Eghtesadi, Mosharekat, Jebhe, Hammihan, Bahar, Kian, Iran-e farad,, Harim, Doran-e Emrouz, Payam-e Emrouz, Mobin, Jameh-e Madani, Amin-e Zanjan, Nosazi, Melat,* and *Akhbar*. See Association of Iranian Journalists (2003).
3. Clause 5 of Article 156 is about 'taking suitable measures to prevent the occurrence of crime and to reform criminals'. However, Chapter XI of the Constitution, which defines the realm of the judiciary, also contains Article 168: 'Political and press offences will be tried openly and in the presence of a jury, in courts of justice. The manner of the selection of the jury, its powers, and the definition of political offences, will be determined by law in accordance with the Islamic criteria.' Rarely have press 'offences' been examined by jury, yet despite clear contradictions in this as well as the whole Constitution, the crucial part of the Article 168 is not the first but the second paragraph.
4. *Asr'e Ma*, May 3, 2000:14–16
5. Mazrouie, 2002, in *Gozaresh 135*:46–47.
6. Daily *Norouz,* Saturday May 5, 2001:6.
7. http://news.gooya.com/technology/archives/2003/10/000045
8. Full text of the document (in Farsi) is available on: www.iranispassociation.com/etelaiye/mosavabeh1.htm
9. For a latest list of censored sites see http://www.govcom.org/maps/censorship/GCO_Maps_set_censorship_final.pdf
10. http://www.genderit.org/upload/ad6d215b74e2a8613f0cf5416c9f3865/A_Report_on_Internet_Access_in_Iran_2_.pdf
11. Opennet Initiative, 2005.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. Daily *Sharq*, May 12, 2004:13.
2. 'An Interview with Ali Larijani', daily *Jame-Jam*, October 17, 2002:6.
3. Cited in *Gozaresh Film 63* (Film Report), March 1, 1996:36–38.
4. http://www.irib.ir/tv/
5. Daily *Jame-Jam*, December, 14, 2002:5.
6. http://www.soroushpress.ir/
7. see http://www.jame-jam.ir/
8. http://www.sahar.tv/
9. http://www.alalam.ir
10. 'Iran's broadcasters face the sack', http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/media_reports/1132812.stm
11. 'Parliament decides to set up high council for IRIB policy-making'. http://www.payvand.com/news/01/jun/1098.html
12. http://www.payvand.com/news/03/may/1072.html

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. Statistic Center of Iran. http://eamar.sci.or.ir
2. 'Iran's disappointed women', http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3500565.stm
3. One of the key problems in writing women's history in multi-ethnic Iran is the lack of clear comparative research. Experience of one segment of Iranian women is usually generalized and analysis about tribal and nomadic women and various nationalities in Iran such as Kurds, Baluchis, Turkomans, Arabs, and Azaris are limited (Shahidian, 1995).
4. The 'woman question' was not a central issue for religious reformist intellectuals. For those who supported, promoted, and implemented the brutal discriminatory policies of the Islamic Republic, the issue was and is an embarrassing one. Asked to explain their position, they responded by claiming that there were far more serious and pressing matters for reformists, a position which they abandoned reluctantly under pressure from women activists and the press, especially *Zanan* (see Farhi, 2001; Mir-Hosseini, 1996, 2002).
5. The main firms in Iran are regarded as 'public property', and their managing directors are selected and appointed by the Supreme Leader.
6. www.badjens.com/fourthedition/kar.htm
7. www.pbs.org/adventuredivas/iran/divas
8. This organization previously existed as Women's Society of Islamic Revolution.
9. The article was written by the two leading figures in *Farzaneh*, Moneer Gorgi and Massoumeh Ebtekar. See *Farzaneh 1*(2–3), Winter & Spring 1994.
10. www.iranwomen.org
11. www.badjens.com/fourthedition/lahiji.htm
12. Cinema is of course another area in which Iranian women have made strong headway. In contrast to only two women directors in the pre-1979 period, there are at least eleven women directors in Iran now. Some are internationally known and well received in international film festivals and despite the limitations imposed by the Islamic Republic have managed to produce movies of astonishing quality dealing with the 'woman question' with spectacular effect (Nafisi, 1994). Some—for example, Tahmineh Millani—have even been imprisoned for their movies. According to one report (Tahami, 1994), in the years before revolution only three women made feature films in Iran,

one in 1956 and the other two in the late 1970s. Of eleven women film directors in post-revolution Iran, the majority have made more than one film and four have made at least four or five movies, and what makes them distinct is their focus on gender issues.

13. badjens.com/11_21_00/farhadpour.htm

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